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Author(s): Taye Assefa

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The Narrative Architecture of *The Thirteenth Sun*

Taye Assefa

Abstract: Among Ethiopian novels, *The Thirteenth Sun* occupies a unique position because of the manner in which it portrays social decadence. Its distinct quality is most apparent in the way it evokes the images of decay and conveys its themes through the proliferation of motifs and symbols. This paper attempts to identify the prominent types of motifs and symbols and to analyse their relations to the main themes of the novel.

The author has used plants (cabbages, koso tree), parasites (bed-bugs, fleas, worms), objects (pistol, the cross), the elements (thunderstorm, flood, wildfire), animals (jackals, dogs, mules, horses, vultures, hawks, marabouts), diseases (mental and physical), rot (decaying wood, mud, stagnant water, offal), hell scenes (devils and torments), and phrases ("beautiful Ethiopia", "sacrificial sheep", "begging manna") to create the main motifs. The symbols have been constructed using mostly human action (pilgrimage, rape of Woynitu, Fitawrary's bath in filth and blood, offer of the cross to Woynitu, offer of pocket watch to Goytom). Some characters (Woynitu, Fitawrary, Goytom, the peasant) have also been assigned a symbolic role. Some of the motifs (cabbages, parasites, the cross, hell scenes), too, have a symbolic function while others (pistol, jackal) also have a plot-centred anticipatory function. A few motifs such as the mules are multifunctional in that they serve as both foreshadowing and satirical devices. A number of the symbols (the cross, sacrificial sheep) are conventional while others (rape of Woynitu, Fitawrary's bath) are quite original and even subversive.

In spite of its innovative methods, *The Thirteenth Sun* has a didactic tendency to explicate the political meaning of the portrayal, especially through the narratorial commentaries and mental excursions of the two protagonists, Woynitu and Goytom. Such redundant discourse has the effect of undermining the subtlety of the motifs and symbols.

Introduction

Daniachew Worku's *The Thirteenth Sun* is a novel about the prevalence of social, political, and moral decadence in the pre-Revolution Ethiopian society, a theme highly popularised by *Fiqir Īskā Māqabir*. It is about the alienation of the

Westernised elite of a deeply traditional society, a theme first broached in *Haddis Alām*. And it is also about a society in which both the ruler and the ruled are desperately searching for salvation, a theme first introduced by *The Thirteenth Sun* itself. However, the portrayal in Daniachew's novel does not draw its distinction from this latter theme alone. In fact, its main innovation lies in its narrative architecture, i.e., in the style or design used to give thematic unity to the episodic structure of the novel, especially by the proliferation of *motifs* and *symbols*. It is the focus on this latter aspect of the novel that the title of this paper is meant to convey.

The Thirteenth Sun is set around the peak of Mount Zekwala, which houses a holy crater lake and the famous Abbo Church. It tells a simple story that revolves around the pilgrimage of an old feudal lord who, accompanied by his young son and daughter, comes to the holy shrine of Abbo in search of a cure for his chronic illness. The whole story spans just six days from the time the old Fitawrary arrives at the foot of Mount Zekwala, carried on a litter for the journey uphill, to the time his dead body is similarly carried downhill following the failure of all the sacrificial offerings, exorcisms and prayers to save his life. Though the story is thus limited in both its spatial and temporal setting, the portrayal succeeds in painting a vivid image of a nation gripped by lethargy and wallowing in the mire of spiritual and physical decay.

1. MOTIF

In *The Thirteenth Sun*, one of the major narrative devices that weave together the many episodes like a thread is the *motif*. Cuddon (1979) defines the motif as: "One of the dominant ideas in a work of literature; a part of the main theme. It may consist of a character, a recurrent image, or a verbal pattern" (p.405). Other critics go one step further and specify the role of the motif as both a structural and textural device:

Whether organic or imposed, form must be either *structural* or *textural*, the one being large-scale, a matter of arrangement, the other small-scale, a matter of impressionism. Structure at its most obvious (plot, story, argument) is the skeleton of a work, texture at its most obvious (metre, diction, syntax) is the skin. But certain elements are comparable to muscles. A *motif*, for instance, is structural in so far as the images making it up are seen as a chain, textural in so far as each is apprehended sensuously as it comes – and contentual, rather than formal, in so far as the chain carries meaning that one link, an unrepeatable image would not (Fowler 1973, 77).

In *The Thirteenth Sun*, the motif manifests itself through the recurrence of certain phrases, images, acts, objects, and creatures. Depending on its type and specific context, therefore, the motif here is used as both a structural and contentual device. This can easily be understood if we analyse the motifs in this novel by classifying them into two broad categories on the basis of their primary function: i) motifs with a

thematic function, i.e., their primary purpose is illustrative or symbolic by virtue of the kind of dominant image they generate and the theme they convey; ii) motifs with a plot function, i.e., their primary role is to give unity to the plot by linking various episodes through repetition, association, and foreshadowing. Still, a word of caution is in order. As will be evident from the following discussion, these categories are not absolutes since there is an overlapping of functions. Some motifs have both a thematic and plot function within a given context. Let us now consider some examples to see how these motifs are actually applied.

1.1 Plant Motifs

The Thirteenth Sun abounds with descriptions of natural scenery, comprising the flora and fauna on Mount Zekwala, which serve to provide local colour to the setting of the story. The descriptions of the vegetation in particular also serve to create relief by evoking images of bloom, colour and sweet smell that sharply contrast with the images of decay pervading the human environment. Up to half way through the novel, one is repeatedly reminded of the presence of “the groups of junipers and other conifers, and many large koso trees, with their red-gnarled stems, bright green leaves and pinkish and bluish-mauve masses of flowers”, and “the pink pea... hanging in festoons of bloom”. This elevating image of blossoming nature is eclipsed by the depressing picture of humanity painted in terms of “drawn haggard faces” looking “with their hollow eyes, and sunken corpse-like cheeks”, a picture of faces with “a sort of dusty, non-descript colour of old decaying wood”; a picture of “solitary half-rotten human shelters” with “leaning walls and dilapidated roofs” and inhabitants that remind one of “the dusty colour of decaying wood” (pp. 5-6).

Since I have dealt with the contrasting images of bloom and decay portrayed in *The Thirteenth Sun* elsewhere in greater detail (Taye 1994), I shall focus here on the function of two plants, the repeated reference to which serves to endow them with special meanings other than providing local colour and relief.

1.1.1 Koso Plant

This plant [*Hagenia Abyssinica*] is first referred to by Goytom when describing the terrain during the journey uphill. Right from the start the reader's attention is casually drawn to the purgative quality of the plant when the narrator remarks on its use as “an antidote for tapeworm” (p. 3). A while later, Woynitu makes reference to this same quality of the plant when she fantasises about the two old men's tying up their children in marriage: “and then the girl is expected to drink two or three glasses of bitter *koso* on the eve of the marriage. So the parasites in her stomach get washed out” (p. 14). Later on, this purgative function of the plant is repeatedly referred to when the Fitawrary describes to Goytom the contents of the potion that the conjure-woman has prescribed for his illness and the diarrhoeic effect of the *koso* and holy

water which bring out of his bowls “some black matter, a small worm, and some larvae” (p. 47). The purgative power of the koso plant or rather its flowers is again pointed out by Woynitu’s double who tells Goytom that she likes koso very much because it “cleans all kinds of worms from your stomach” (p. 89).

The Fitawrary is the only character in the novel to whom koso is administered as a medicine. The association of koso and worms with the Fitawrary is deliberate and thematically significant in view of his portrayal as a representative of the feudal class and the old establishment. The Fitawrary is portrayed as an extremely greedy man, a man who, despite his enormous wealth even by his own admission, would haggle with a peasant over having to pay more than fifty cents for the rent of a bed, a crook who swindles illiterate farmers by taking from them more grain than he pays for and rips them off their other possessions by inserting forfeit clauses in the contracts that they cannot read. He is opposed to any modernising influence that could undermine the old order unless it benefits him by making him richer. To Goytom, his father’s futile striving to regain his health through potions and sacrifices signifies the Fitawrary’s “hoping to live longer to fight against anything new” and “hoping to keep on forever without working with his hands” (p.41). The Fitawrary is hence a human parasite and that is why he is associated with worms and larvae.

The value of koso lies not only in its purgative quality but also in its sweet smell which drives away offensive smell. Thus Goytom says that everyone (except Woynitu) would have smelt like a skunk had it not been for the sweet smell of the *wanza* and *koso* flowers. The evil smell emanates not just from the rotting hut where he is lodging but also from the person of the Fitawrary. Even he himself admits that it is the bad smell coming out of his bowls that drives away his children from him at a time when his bodily system appears to be disintegrating. When he dies, his decomposing body gives off such a repellent smell that his servants initially refuse to carry him any further and his two children are seized by a spasm of vomit. Hence, the evil smell that hovers around the Fitawrary in life and in death serves to signify the decadence his class has been associated with. Within this context, therefore, the koso motif has a thematic function: it signifies the society’s need to purge itself of the unhealthy hegemony of such a decadent and parasitical class that the old ailing Fitawrary represents in the novel.

Since the Fitawrary is painted as a parasite as well as a morally and physically rotten being, he is inevitably associated with the society’s stagnation. This is so especially because he is averse to anything new and modern, any change that undermines the status quo, the old values and practices, the traditional way of life. He stands for the perpetuation of the old decadent order, in all its social, political and spiritual manifestations. Symbolically, therefore, he is the agent and carrier of the prevalent stagnation. The pervasive rot that is everywhere around him, whether in physical form (the excreta/vomit, the offal, the mud, the stench) or spiritual form (the superstition, the adultery, the hypocrisy, in short, the moral corruption within and

outside the religious establishment) is metaphorically his own extension and manifestation. It is within this context that the koso motif that is associated with bodily parasites and rot/stench in various parts of the novel attains its unifying effect through the person of the Fitawrary in particular, to whom the purgative is administered as a medicine.

1.1.2 Cabbages

Like the koso motif, the cabbage motif is introduced at the beginning of the story. While describing the human shelters nestling on the hills of Zekwala, Goytom mentions “their cabbage gardens – brown cabbage, white cabbage, red cabbage, savoy cabbage” (p. 6). The cabbage family here has a symbolic function: it represents the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia. This symbolic connotation becomes more apparent when Goytom again mentions the cabbage varieties within the context of describing Ethiopia’s predicament: “And beautiful Ethiopia full of her several representatives of the cabbage family – brown cabbage, white cabbage, red cabbage, savoy cabbage. And as always stretching her hands in penitence to win from God indulgences for *her children* in purgatory. To save them from blazing brimstone and eternal torture” (emphasis added, p. 41). Here, the different types of cabbage are none but Ethiopia’s children who, despite their differences in appearance or form, are sharing the same kind of “eternal torture”, and all of whom are waiting for deliverance from their common life in “Purgatory”. The cabbage is a feeble plant prone to easily wilting, withering, and rotting if unattended to, and too vulnerable to attacks by parasites and insects even when it appears to be blossoming and healthy. Hence, it has been used by the author in analogy with the religious-minded Ethiopian people who prefer to beg for manna from heaven and supernal intervention for their deliverance rather than taking their destiny into their own hands and doing away with the causes of their endless misery. This vulnerability of the Ethiopian people and what needs to be done for their deliverance are again symbolically signified through the cabbage motif when Goytom tells us about the conjure-woman’s preparation of the cabbage leaves for a meal: “The wife goes out and comes in again. With cabbage leaves in her hand. Takes the circular *sefed* made of grass. Puts the cabbage on it and starts picking the leaves – now and again beating it on her left hand. *To clean the dust and worms* from each leaf. *Beating it now and again*” (emphasis added, pp. 52-53).

1.2 Parasite Motifs

The motif of parasites manifests itself in the form of bed-bugs and fleas, worms and rats. The bed-bugs and fleas first appear when Goytom inspects the peasant’s hut to *rent a lodging for a couple of nights*. He says, “*Here and there, bed-bugs raced across the wall. And fleas capered up through my trousers*” (p.11). Then he reports that the Fitawrary, too, “... inspected every cranny of the hut – its mud walls and thatched roof with the battalion of bed-bugs, the sick woman, the bed-bugs, and everything else besides...” (p.12). Then the association between the Fitawrary and the bed-bugs is

created in the course of the former's haggling with the peasant over the rent of the bed. The Fitawrary offers to rent the peasant's bed for fifty cents for two days but the peasant says that even ordinary men paid fifty cents a day for the bed. When the Fitawrary tells him to rent it to them, the peasant says: "How could I when you have already occupied all the space in my house" (p. 13). At this point, Goytom observes: "In his anxiety to have the bed rented, he irritated the bed-bugs in the raw-hide. I longed for fresh air and went out" (p.13). In the evening, Goytom returns from his escapade and prepares to sleep in the soot-sodden hut "drowned with darkness" and observes about the rain outside, the crickets chirping, the rats scurrying about, the goats jumping on his clothes, "And the incompatible army of bugs and fleas mobilizing under your clothes... *And the Fitawrary*" (emphasis added, p. 22). To correctly interpret the signification of the fleas and bed-bugs, one must read these signals within the context of the repeated illustration of the Fitawrary's exploitative acts and miserliness as illustrated in his arguing with the priest for a lesser penance for his innumerable sins (rather than contribute some money for the repair of St. Mary's Church) and his marriage to Goytom's mother for her money.

Furthermore, since the only character who says worms are coming out of his body is the Fitawrary, this association also serves to signify his own parasitic character. It is not just worms, even rodents such as rats are also associated with the Fitawrary. On his first night at the peasant's hut, Goytom says "Rats began their furtive nibbling and scurrying in the wicker granaries" (p. 22), and the link is later made evident in the Fitawrary's confession of his cheating practices as a grain dealer during which he used to swindle the farmers by taking from them more grain than he paid for.

1.3 Decay Motifs

The story of *The Thirteenth Sun* opens with a cynical evocation of a glorified imagery of Ethiopia using the names of exotic animals ("Smoke *Nyala*", "Smoke *Gureza*", "Smoke *Walya*"); historical relic of a glorious empire ("Smoke *Axum*"); a well-known figure of royalty ("Smoke *Elleni*"); international athletic fame ("Smoke *Marathon*"); a popular national carrier ("Fly Ethiopian Airlines"), and a tourist-friendly climate ("*13 months* of sunshine") – all appearing on billboard adverts of cigarettes and the national carrier (p. 1). These enumerations of words with connotations of grandeur are presented in an undertone of irony that subverts the stereotype images. Just a few paragraphs later the reader realises that the official images of glory do not harmonise with the reality of rampant decay and social malaise that pervade the society.

1.3.1 Physiognomic Decay

The dehumanisation of the ordinary people is manifested through the metaphors of decay, mud, and swamp, in terms of which Goytom and Woynitu perceive the physiognomy of the representative local characters and pilgrims. Thus, Goytom tells

us that the inhabitants of the huts on the hills remind him of “the dusty colour of old decaying wood” (p.6). He also describes most of the pilgrims as being “dirty, grimy, and misshapen” (p. 16), with garments that are worn out into dirty shreds of rags. Woynitu thinks that the peasant’s wife “goes on living like a scavenger sifting debris” (p. 19). The peasant appears to her to be carrying with his person the mire and stink around his hut. Thus she thinks that his deep eyes are “black and dreadful like the ooze of a sucking swamp” and his body reeks “with the odour of smoke and mud” (p.19).

The Fitawrary, too, is associated with filth and decay. After taking the medicine prescribed for him by the conjure-woman, he had to be frequently rushed to the hole in the bush to defecate just in the vicinity of where the sermon is being delivered. And yet he bewails his children’s deserting him at such a time, driven as they are by the smell of “the black matter” coming out of his bowels. Later we see him being smeared and scrubbed naked with the mixture of the blood and contents of the entrails of the sacrificial sheep “to the accompaniment of a light beating with the tripe” (pp. 58-59). Seeing him debasing himself like this, his daughter comments: “I used to think of my mother as *a living corpse*. That her life isn’t worth living at all. And yet my father is *more dead* than she” (emphasis added, p. 58). Goytom, too, has a similar view of his father: he prays not to live as long as his father only to “vegetate” and turn into “a disgusting jelly”(p. 75). When the Fitawrary dies, his decomposing body gives off such a repugnant smell that his children are forced to vomit and his servants refuse to carry it. The Fitawrary, therefore, is depicted as decaying matter itself.

1.3.2 *Decaying Habitat*

The descriptions of the immediate human habitat, with the marked exception of nature, are also dominated by images of filth and decay. The imagery of decaying shelters is evoked right at the beginning of the story when Goytom describes the huts dotting the hills as “half-rotten hovels” (p.6). He describes the hut of the peasant as being “dilapidated beyond repair”, with its mud plasters ripped off and hanging in splinters in many places, its smoke-sodden roof sticking down, its compound giving off a smell of leather, mouldy grain, and dampness. The hut looks to an outsider more like a grave than a human shelter. The compound of the peasant’s hut has stinking mire which makes it difficult for Woynitu to cross the yard without dirtying herself. However, the conjure-woman doesn’t mind the dirt since “she darts out of the hut and walks away, sloshing the thin mire in the yard...” (p. 14). On the day of the memorial feast, the compound is filled with garbage and reeks of “the scent of damp grass, the stench of spilt blood, and incipient decay and manure” (p. 85). Likewise, at the home of the preacher where a supper had been prepared in the name of the poor but the priests and deacons were overstuffing themselves, one again comes across the same scene of filth. The authorial narrator ironically describes the scene as follows: “Some of the priests, it was true, had difficulty in retaining what they had eaten and drunk,

and had to bend down once or twice on the edge of a small stagnant pool – a pool which sounded from time to time as if it had come alive under a sudden downpour. In the dry season, *it was sometimes used for drinking water*” (emphasis added, p. 115).

This filth also invades even the holy grounds. For example, the banks of the lake where the pilgrims are bathing to cleanse themselves of their ailments is itself corrupted by the smell of rotten grass and mud. In the churchyard, too, the stench from the entrails, blood, and fragments of hides and meat of the many sacrificial animals slaughtered for the occasion contaminate the air soon after the *tabot* enters the church.

The filth is not limited to the holy places; it also desecrates even holy objects. For instance, when the Fitawrary is being smeared in filth and beaten by tripe, some of the filth gets stuck on to the gold cross hanging from his neck. And we see later Woynitu trying to remove the tiny dirt particles that got stuck on to the intricate patterns of the cross.

The implicit message signified by the multiplicity of such decay motifs is that every sphere of life, whether spiritual or otherwise, is contaminated by the prevalent corruption and decay.

1.3.3 Spiritual/Moral Decay

In general, the society depicted in *The Thirteenth Sun* is characterised not just by physical decay, but also by spiritual and moral decay. We hear of men killing for material gain and going scot-free because of their high connections while witnesses are jailed for telling the truth. We see bee-hives being deliberately disturbed to drive off beggars who have gathered to scrounge leftovers of a memorial feast prepared in their name; pilgrims and clergymen who profess to be devout Christians but who are seen indulging in superstitious practices; clergymen getting drunk and vomiting by overstuffing themselves with food and drinks prepared in the name of the destitute; chief priests pursuing material gain out of their spiritual duties of praying or facilitating sacrificial offerings for the absolution of the sinful; security men posing as preachers and desecrating the sanctified grounds of the Church by their political propaganda and sexually-oriented sermons; and pilgrims lying in their confessions.

However, the most pervasive form of moral decay in the novel is manifested through adultery. Three such manifestations with pivotal roles in the plot are Goytom’s incestuous love for his half-sister; Woynitu’s mother’s as well as her baker’s attempts to entrap Woynitu with extra-marital sexual relations, and the peasant’s rape of Woynitu. Other less prominent manifestations of immoral sexual relations include: Fitawrary Woldu’s begetting illegitimate children from his concubines; the peasant’s adulterous relations with the wife of the poor fitawrary in his village; the big

landlady's sexual relations with her murderous merchant lover; the piquant little lady's attempts to seduce the Captain-preacher during her confession; the preacher's sexually seductive sermon that is parodied by the mules; the bureaucrats that are imagined by both Goytom and Woynitu as seeking to sexually exploit Woynitu; the Ethiopian hospitality that is perceived as a sex industry designed to whet the lustful appetites of foreign dignitaries and tourists flocking to Ethiopia; the export of girls and the growth of the tavern industry; and the gossip about husbands/parents presenting their wives/children as sexual gifts to officials to secure some favours.

Such moral blemish appears to taint almost every member of the adult population of the novel and thus turns adultery into a metaphor for the nation's decay. That is why it is given a national significance in the form of the tavern industry, 'Ethiopian hospitality', and the export of girls. It is the decay of the soul that is hence given material expression through the use of the motifs of physical decay in the form of dilapidated human shelters, decaying wood, mud, swamp, stagnant pool, excreta, vomit, and decomposing bodies.

1.4 Disease

The dominant impression that one gets about the society portrayed in *The Thirteenth Sun* is that it is disease-ridden, and that it desperately needs a miraculous cure for the rampant physical, mental, and spiritual ailments afflicting it. There is almost no wholesome character in the population of the novel. During the Fitawrary's first trip uphill, we come across the first group of pilgrims that give us a glimpse into what awaits us in the novel. Through the eyes of Goytom, we see the beggars among the pilgrims: "some suffering from leprosy, some from consumption, some from crippling rheumatism, and some from venereal and skin diseases..." (p. 6). Inside and outside the churchyard and on the terraces of the hills, we again find pilgrims that "consisted of dreamers who lived constantly in expectation of some stroke of luck; of idle workmen who... have fallen passive victims to vagrancy; of beggars..." (16). The pilgrims who gather by the lakeside, too, are in no better condition, for the narrator tells us that they are:

A collection of lovers, gallants, profiteers, state embezzlers who had drunk away their consciences and forgotten the tradition of their fathers, of people of the basest scum, drunkards, thieves, prostitutes, hawkers of every kind of rotten provisions, and ragged, hungry and destitute peasants – these human beings on each of whose faces were written laziness, slovenliness, weariness, boredom, disenchantment, hate and crime, were here to be cured of their various ailments and to pray that God save them from the current famine, diseases and social problems (p. 34).

It is this general ailment of the whole society that is crystallised through the illness of the Fitawrary and it is their search for salvation that finds individual expression through his frantic attempts to find a cure for his disease. Of course, there is also the sick woman who has found temporary lodging, together with the Fitawrary, at the home of the peasant. But her role is subordinate to the plot, for she is used as a means of foreshadowing the fate of the Fitawrary. She is not seen talking to anybody or making any recovery. Every time she is referred to, she is found in a “morbid state”, like some permanent signpost to the Fitawrary’s chronic disease.

1.5 Bathing

Most of the pilgrims and the Fitawrary have come to Zekwala because of the holy water of Abbo, which is believed to have a miraculous healing power. So there is repeated reference to pilgrims washing their bodies in the lake. Sometimes the bath may take place elsewhere, as in the case of the little lady who takes her bath at the home of the Captain-preacher with holy water brought from the lake. At other times, the bath may be supplemented by drinking the holy water from the lake. Or a character such as Woynitu may prefer to wash her body in the stream rather than in the lake. But while the washing in all cases is done with water, often accompanied by the touch with the Cross, and is done with the aim of cleansing one’s body, or soul as the case may be, it is only the Fitawrary who is seen literally bathing in filth and blood. This deeply symbolic ritual act is the one thing that sharply sets him off from all the other pilgrims that have come seeking the miraculous healing power of the holy water of Abbo. I shall return to this act later in the section dealing with symbolism.

However, I should point out here that the thematic motif of cleansing also manifests itself through the supplications in the form of prayers and sacrificial offerings to secure redemption; the scavenging birds and animals that hunt for the decomposing bodies or offal; the elements of fire, flood and rain that are expected to remove the filth and decay repeatedly described by the narrators. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the following sections, none of these are seen attaining the full effect of cleansing, for the decay and corruption are all-pervading and almost unassailable both literally and metaphorically.

1.6 The Elements

There is repeated reference to dark clouds in the sky, heavy rain, thunderstorms, and flood, both on the surrounding hills and in distant places. These are not used just for creating local colour. In fact, their presence is closely associated with the decay pervading the whole social environment. A suggestion of their cleansing function

comes out more clearly when Goytom laments about the heavy rain that is preventing him from going outside the hut. Thus he says:

... and this sudden spate of rain outside, from the heavy thunderstorm miles away in the interior. I think it is God's blessing. It sometimes washes down the bodies of cows, sheep, and goats into the low countries. I wonder why it doesn't wash down all the crawling creatures from this mountain top. As when the flood comes at night and washes away the shepherd or the travelling merchant who has encamped by the bed of a stream. I wonder why it doesn't? Or why the mountains do not shut all vestiges of breeze from these superfluous creatures of dogs and two-footed animals? (p. 53)

Later again, this cleansing role of the elements is signified when, after describing the scene of fragments of hides, meat, blood and other refuse at the churchyard and the repulsive stench coming from them, Goytom reports: "And then, the usual thunderstorm from out of nowhere. Commencing with a violent hailstorm, with hailstones as large as *wanza* nuts. And then turning into sleet rain. And then stopping just as suddenly as it had begun – the blazing sun" (p. 156). Implicit in this description is that the offensive filth and its smell have been removed or reduced by the rain. At the time the Fitawrary's dead body is being carried down the hill, too, the motifs of the thunderstorm, rain shower, and "innumerable hailstones" again reappear. Then Goytom points to the same desirable effect of the elements: "Drumming our faces. Drumming on the body of my father. Drumming on Woynitu. Drumming on me. Making springboards of us... And then the stopping of the rain just as unexpectedly. *The momentary fading away of the bad smell*" (emphasis added, p.172).

1.7 Fire

The fire motif is also associated with the removal of decay, in both its literal and figurative senses. In her fantasy, for instance, Woynitu imagines the hut catching fire and turning her father into a glowing cinder of human flesh. The association between the fire and the Fitawrary is further reinforced when the Fitawrary himself says he thought for a moment that the hut was on fire when the peasant woke him up to ask him if he knew his landlady. The idea of the Fitawrary being burnt by scorching fire continues when Goytom reports to us the hell-scenes depicted by the pictures in Abbo's Church. In one of these, the soul of a fat man is shown being thrown into sulphuric fire and castigated by red-hot iron. What remains of him is then thrown into the more terrifying section of the fire where it is left to sizzle and shrivel. Then Goytom establishes the link between his father and the soul of the fat man by saying: "Poor old man! No wonder he wants to be taken to Debre Libanos" (p. 28). The

Fitawrary, too, reinforces this link when he comments on the priests' sermon: "Ignorant as they are, they don't seem to know the promise that was given to Tekle Haymanot, 'Whoever is buried at your place will go directly to Heaven.' ... and all that bit about sulphuric fire... it was meant to frighten me, I know – to make me squander my money on these good-for-nothings" (p.48).

Goytom would like to see a radical transformation of life where there would be no room for the stultifying decay. Such a radical change might be brought about by a social upheaval (expressed through such metaphors as "a storm" or "a conflagration") which covers the entire social spectrum and spreads to every cranny of the country. It is such an idea that is suggested by the motifs of fire. Hence, we hear Goytom saying: "Why doesn't the radiant heat that comes off the rocks burn them [the 'crawling creatures'] down? Or why doesn't the volcano erupt anew and flood the place north and south?" (p. 53)

Since this fire has a cleansing effect, it is directed against Fitawrary and what he stands for, but not against Woynitu, for instance, for she is assigned the role of symbolising Ethiopia, or against the peasant, since he appears to be the agent of the fire. Such a signification is apparent in Goytom's description of a scene in the hut of the peasant:

And then the sound of footsteps and the peasant enters the hut. He doesn't look at the Fitawrary. And he doesn't look at me. But he looks at Woynitu. And with that smile, too. Like the fire that smiles on her gold teeth. He smiles at her. And sitting by the fireside, he pinches at it with a stick. So hot as it is, the hut. He pinches at the fire – the peasant and the fire smiling at Woynitu. Fitawrary changes sides and sleeps with his face to the wall. He doesn't want the peasant and the fire to smile at him. And Woynitu smiling her disappointment away (p. 52).

The Fitawrary shuns the smile of the peasant, whom he declares later on as his enemy, and of the fire, whose torments he fears being condemned to suffer for eternity. And on the night of the eve of Abbo's Anniversary, the fire motif again appears as if to herald that the demise of the Fitawrary is fast approaching. On the night the conjure woman failed to call the devils for him, the Fitawrary says: "I'm having a sinking feeling that comes on when one has just had a near escape, and thunder strikes a nearby tree" (p.128). The narrator then says: "In the distant countryside was seen the glare of conflagration – at one place, the flames spread tranquilly over the sky and at another, having encountered some bush on fire, they burst in a whirlwind and hissed upwards to the very stars" (p. 129).

1.8 Hell Motifs

1.8.1 After-life Hell/Earthly Hell

The hell awaiting the damned sinners after death is one of the dominant thematic motifs in *The Thirteenth Sun*. On the one hand, the hell motif serves as a detail that gives verisimilitude to the portrayal of the religious occasion which brings together the pilgrims in the story. At this surface level, therefore, the motif is closely associated with the Christian belief and appears within the context of the scriptures, church paintings and sermons that are interspersed in the story. Accordingly, scenes of angels vanquishing devils and dragons, horned devils chasing the souls of the sinful and subjecting them to various forms of eternal torture, with scorching fire and red-hot iron rods, freezing and boiling water, flogging, and flaying of skins and tearing of flesh, etc., are recreated in the pictures inside Abbo's Church, or the pictures carried by the deacons, or in the sermons delivered at the church or in *The Revelation of Mary* read by a pilgrim. The depiction of such scenes of hell also serves to show the kind of power the clergy wield over the religious-minded population, and explains why the Fitwarary wants to be buried in Debre Libanos Monastery.

Over and above this plot function, however, the hell motif has a thematic rôle. It is used for drawing certain parallels with the earthly hell. Such a link is first suggested when a priest, seeing a man being drowned in the lake, comments: "A cursed fool! The devil in the water must have dragged him to the centre... the devil must have called him... Hell is always the easiest and nearest to hear summons from at such places..." (p. 17). Hearing this, Goytom comments, "I wonder if it is not just as easy to hear the summons from Hell in the towns." Then he draws a brief picture of the beggarly world in the towns. The distinction between the after-life and earthly hells is gradually blurred as episodes of earthly torment and misery unfold and strengthen the likeness between the two. When we come across the merciless flogging of the young man on the orders of the Fitawrary on suspicion of stealing his sheep and the flogging of the father of Woynitu's double allegedly for insulting the governor, we can't help recalling the flogging scenes we encountered in the scriptures, sermons and church paintings. After all, it is the brutality of the injustices he has perpetrated against others, as exemplified by his feeling of guilt particularly towards the flogged young man, that makes the Fitawrary think that he will not be redeemed without too much prayer and a burial at Debre Libanos. The Fitawrary's rôle is to individualise what is common practice among his class members. That his acts are the norm in the society and that they create an earthly hell for the people is evident in this short and ironic delineation of the master class:

Beautiful Ethiopia: with all men of title – *grazmach*, *fitawrary*, *dejazmach*, *ras*, generals, ministers, princes and princesses – doing their best to alleviate the suffering in the hamlets. Begging

man from Heaven. Sending DDT. Sending rat poison. Sending insecticides. Sending the police. To alleviate the pain and hardship in the hamlets. And hunger, ignorance, and disease bestowing their bounty all over the country. God's way of putting an end to things (p. 42).

As pointed out earlier in connection with the cabbage motif, the narrator equates the life of the Ethiopian people with "purgatory". That the prime function of this motif of after-life hell is to reinforce this theme of earthly hell is evident from the protagonist's ironic characterisation of "beautiful" Ethiopia: "And as always stretching her hands in penitence to win from God indulgences for her children in Purgatory. To save them from blazing brimstone and eternal torture" (p. 41).

1.8.2 Devils

The hell scenes depicted in *The Revelation of Mary*, the sermons of the preacher, and the church paintings abound with the devil motif. But, ironically, while the severity of the torments they inflict on the souls of sinners is as extreme as man could imagine, these are not portrayed as enticing the innocent or punishing the undeserving, or playing their usual evil roles. The devils are in fact depicted as being capable of playing even a benevolent role, such as healing the chronically ill. It is on the basis of this belief that the conjure-woman earns her income as an exorcist, and with the help of a priest for that matter. The devils are capable of fraternising with some men, such as the peasant, for instance, who eats the meat left for them and plays the role of a medium for their appearance. This association between the devils and the peasant is not only apparent in his own admissions about his role-play during the exorcism, but also in Goytom's observation on that night: "And we waited goggle-eyed, waiting for the appearance of the devils. *In the form of men perhaps*" (emphasis added, p. 162). Unlike the conjure-woman and, perhaps, the priest, neither the Fitawrary nor Goytom is deluded by the clergy's scare-mongering about the devils. So Goytom says: "I couldn't believe in the unnameables blinding me. Or crippling me. I saw that Fitawrary was working with his right hand under his pillow. He didn't believe that part of the story either" (p. 163). Since the Fitawrary shoots dead the peasant who was acting like the "unnameables", the devil motif, therefore, has a more significant role of propelling the plot to its climax. Still, despite the death of the peasant, one can't help wondering if the devil motif is also not a subversive device for suggesting a positive role for the devils that puts them on a par with the harbingers of the desired radical changes.

1.9 The Cross

At the surface level, the cross appears as part of the paraphernalia of the clergy and the Church and, hence, the cross motif may be taken as a detail of verisimilitude

especially in those situations where it is used by the clergy in their religious rituals. But some of the contexts in which the motif appears also suggest a symbolism with a socio-political meaning. For instance, at the time that the Fitawrary is bathing in blood and filth, Woynitu is grieved by the pitiable sight of her father and “the gold chain around his neck jumping on his chest and the gold cross on it” (p. 58). The jumping of the cross is suggestive of its objection to being smeared by the filth, or a dissociation from the Fitawrary’s corruption. Later, when the Fitawrary gives her the cross, she looks at it and says, “I try to clean it with my finger-tips. The intricate pattern in the cross holds little particles of dust in its holes” (p. 64). What does this smearing dust signify if not the torment and misery caused by the likes of the Fitawrary, as exemplified by the flogging of the young man, which guilt is now pricking his conscience?

The cross motif again appears when the Captain-preacher is about to use it for the absolution of the sins of the adulterous little lady who is preparing to bath in the holy water. The woman knows that her real aim in coming to the Captain-preacher is to seduce him, and her guilt makes her dread the power of the holy water and the cross. Thus she says: “Why should I want to wash in the holy water with all the readings and everything? Haven’t I paid enough for my sins with my spayed goat? And how am I to stand the cross touching my body?” (p.111); “I know I can’t stand cold water ... and the cross touching my body...” (111); “Waiting for the cold water and that silver cross. It will make me shrivel... the touch of it” (p. 112).

The cross is a symbol of sacrifice and of redemption. The Fitawrary’s offering it to Woynitu is a symbolic act signifying his attempt *to heal* the rift between him and her. And at this point he admits for the first time his failure to act as her true guardian. Thus he says, “... I know I haven’t been much of a father, have I?” and adds again, “I have not been a responsible father.” Then she prays that “he live longer in order to be his other self,” and starts fondling the cross tenderly. But it is too late for the Fitawrary to be his “other self,” and she has no one to protect her or console her at her moment of tribulation. After her brutal rape by the peasant, “A deep and holy sadness took possession of her. And she sat up holding her head between her hands. Then she saw the gold cross dangling from her neck – the present from her father” (p. 107). During the plane accident in her imaginary adventures as a hostess, she fantasises about Goytom parachuting to rescue her when she dives out and swims in the air “without thought of peril”. In the real world, however, Goytom, who is associated with the sacrificial sheep that would save Ethiopia, is not there to rescue her from the rapist. Therefore, the cross motif also symbolises the sacrifice that her true patriots have to make to save Ethiopia, which is symbolised in the novel by Woynitu.

1.10 Death Motif

1.10.1 Funeral

The death motif manifests itself in different forms. One of these is through the repeated references to funeral dances and lamentations. Thus, at the time that Goytom arranges to rent a lodge for his father, the peasant explicates to him how his wife is skilled in exorcising devils, in lamentations, and funeral dances: "Almost always, the relatives of the people who died in our hut selected her for the lamentations..." (p. 11). In the evening, the conjure-woman tells her husband: "And if the Fitawrary died, I might be forced to perform the lamentation and funeral dances free of charge" (p. 22). Thus, the death motif is subtly associated with the Fitawrary. This association is further reinforced by the Fitawrary's repeated references to his own dying, as when he tells Goytom not "to say no to the wish of a dying man" (p. 37), or when he tells Woynitu after his bath in filth and blood, "I may not have long to live" (p. 64) or when he tells the priest about his wishes to be buried in Debre Libanos, with all the funeral rituals: "If after all this, I die, I've arranged that everything be executed according to custom" (p. 55). So the references to funeral lamentations and dances have an anticipatory function.

1.10.2 Pistol

The motif of the pistol is one of the important foreshadowing devices in the novel. It first appears during the journey uphill, with Goytom carrying the Fitawrary's .38 pistol. Then there is a second reference to it during the same journey when an elderly gentleman unbuckles his pistol in order to recline in comfort under one of the shady trees. From that point on, there is constant reference to the Fitawrary's pistol only. The motif creates an anticipation in the reader that this pistol would be put to use. At the time that the Fitawrary is taken into the hut of the peasant for the first time, we are told that he placed his .38 calibre pistol under his pillow and began inspecting every cranny of the hut. Late in the evening, when the peasant tries to ask him about his landlady, the Fitawrary wakes up goggle-eyed with his pistol pointed at the peasant, thereby suggesting who might be targeted by that pistol. Lonely as the Fitawrary is, he acts as if the pistol is the only trustworthy friend he is left with, and so, when he rests after his ordeal from the effects of the conjure-woman's medicine, he resorts to fondling his pistol. On the Anniversary of Abbo, Woynitu feels like divulging to her father her secret about the peasant's violating her honour. When she starts by saying "that peasant," he grunts and angrily interrupts her by saying, "He thinks I'm a fool!" Then she changes her mind because she feels he "could become dangerous". However, her father had already suspected the meaning of the peasant's smiles to Woynitu, and he is the type of man who would not hesitate to destroy his enemy. We get more clues to reinforce our interpretation in this direction from Woynitu's premonition just hours before the exorcism: "The heat is suffocating us. I feel as tense as the deadly quiet before *an explosion*" (emphasis mine, p. 138). This reference to

explosion again alerts us to the Fitawrary's pistol. Finally we reach the point of climax and our expectation is fulfilled when the Fitawrary begins working with his right hand under his pillow at the time of waiting for the arrival of the devils. Goytom tells us his father's reaction at this moment: "He was also staring hard at the door. He didn't seem to believe that part of the story either. He stared and stared and stared. His eyes widened suddenly, as though they were popping out of his head. Again a glide. A shuffle. A deafening shot from my father's pistol. And a shriek of pain from outside" (p. 163). The pistol motif thus achieves its purpose of foreshadowing the fatal shot to be fired by the Fitawrary.

But at a higher thematic level, the pistols and guns repeatedly referred to by the narrators are symbols of power. One only needs to observe the effect on the peasant when he hears news of the Fitawrary's promise to give him a breech-loader to grasp how possession of such a weapon transforms one's social and political status. So it would not be extending the argument too far to say that the Fitawrary's affectionate fondling of his pistol is only an illustration of his deep love for power, which he would not willingly relinquish until his very death. Thus the peasant dies without ever getting that gun.

1.11 Animal Motifs

1.11.1 *The Jackal*

Various scavengers reappear in the story, on the one hand, to reinforce the image of human beings reduced to scavengers. Thus the peasant's wife is described as going on "like a scavenger sifting debris." By eating the meat of the sacrificial sheep abandoned on the crossroad, her husband acts like a scavenger. In fact, he himself admits this tie with the scavengers when he says: "And besides, I always enjoy the thrill in the woods. Even if it means passing the night here, I mean. You have always got company, and no ordinary company at that – the jackals, the hyenas – they all keep you company, hoping that you would throw them a bone or two. And what a noise they make. Sort of frightening. The jackals with their weird cry and the hyenas calling to each other until the dogs of the area assemble and drive them off with their yelping. A real thrill..." (p. 68). And the beggars that gather at each feast wait for leftovers and fight among themselves just like the four-footed and/or winged scavengers waiting patiently for their share of the leftovers.

On the other hand, scavengers such as the jackal are used as motifs that create the anticipation of someone dying soon. The jackal motif appearing right at the beginning of the story, for instance, has such a foreshadowing function: "A lean old jackal shedding her coat appeared from some bush, sniffing, perhaps, for a decomposing body" (p.7). Since the Fitawrary is the one seriously ailing person being carried on a litter, the reference to "decomposing body" immediately creates an association with

him. Hence, the jackal is heard howling nearby at the time the Fitawrary is waiting for the devils to appear. During the final journey downhill, too, the jackal pursues the Fitawrary, this time to snatch his decomposing body. Thus, Goytom tells us of “a hungry jackal sallying forth to attack us unawares” (p. 170).

1.11.2 Dogs

In this novel, dogs appear as another kind of scavengers since they are mainly seen while waiting to feed on leftovers. They are repeatedly used in analogous terms to describe human debasement. The dog motif first appears when reference is made to the peasant's shaggy dog with its “withered body and lowered tail”. In various contexts, an affinity based on debasement is deliberately engendered between this lowly animal and human kinds. For instance, Woynitu equates the peasant with his dog when she ironically remarks: “Just like his dog, he is suspicious looking. I am sure, if I rise and go and try to talk to him, *he will drop his tail between his legs* and run away” (emphasis added, p.15). The peasants sitting on the mounds of manure and waiting for “a maid to throw them the refuse of the meal” are also described in terms that liken them to the dogs: “Glancing about them in dull, despondent eyes, they looked like the homeless dogs of the neighbourhood collected outside” (p.73). Later, during the feast, a parallel is indirectly drawn between the beggars fighting over leftovers or swearing at the landlady and the pack of dogs that were “snapping and snarling as they fought over the scraps” (p. 85). The human degradation is such that a beggar even becomes envious of a dog for a piece of meat that shot out of the beggar's throat straight into the mouth of the “lucky dog” when another man hit him on the nape to free him from the suffocating meat. A further association between dogs and humans is created when the landlady decides that she couldn't feed the newly accumulating beggars and deliberately disturbs the beehive: “...and as the bees buzzed around their heads and necks and started to sting them, the people fled. Even the dogs, with tails tucked between their flanks, bolted whining in every direction” (p. 85). The dog motif, therefore, serves to create an analogous relation between dogs and humans and thereby accentuate the impression of dehumanisation.

1.11.3 Carrion-eating Birds

Like the quadrupled scavenging animals, birds of prey that feed on carrion, for example, the marabouts, vultures, crows, and hawks, are used as motifs for foreshadowing the death of someone or rather some people. First the goliath herons welcome the Fitawrary and his retinue with the flapping of their wings and their piercing wild cry during the journey uphill. When the Fitawrary is deposited in the peasant's hut, Woynitu creates the link between the Fitawrary and a scavenging bird by saying: “I am feeling unhealthy. With that hooded vulture perching on the earthenware crown of the hut. Perhaps, he is going to come down to the ground in search of some offal” (p. 15). It seems to be waiting for the Fitawrary to die. During the Fitawrary's bath in the blood and stomach-contents of the white sheep, she likens

him to a scavenger by calling him "a human marabou". The birds of prey are not far away from the scenes of refuse and offal: "In the sky, the hawks were manoeuvring. They didn't flutter about and squeak. They simply waited" (p. 73).

They may appear to be waiting for the leftovers from the landlady's memorial feast or the remains of the animals slaughtered on Abbo's Anniversary or some remains of the sacrificial sheep's meat being gormandised by the peasant. But they are also waiting for more than that – the decomposing body of those to die soon. Whose body would that be? The clue to this lies in the context where they are being referred to. Going to the bush where the peasant is eating the meat of the spayed sheep, Woynitu says: "The rolling note of the ibis is heard nearby. And suddenly I detect a movement in a bush in front of me. A big movement as if it were a marabou that is hiding there" (p. 86). She thus creates an association between the peasant and the marabou, both of which share the trait of scavenging. And while waiting on her dying father she says: "... I start to breath the fresh air through my nose and open my mouth listening to the ibis and expecting to see a marabou that might chance to fly over the mountains" (p. 139). She expects to see the marabou because she probably senses that her father is about to die.

The foreshadowing function of the birds becomes more apparent when the conjure-woman says to the Fitawrary, on hearing the deep rolling note of the ibis nearby, "A good omen again," and further assures him: "You will be well again. The ibis is always an indisputable sign of recovery" (p. 63). The anticipatory function of the birds is again spelt out by the peasant who says of his wife:

'No, you are not allowed to come into the hut', she says – my woman. Even without the meat of the spayed sheep. 'You will become a shadow to the sick man,' she says. A shadow! As if I am not all meat and blood. 'You throw your shadow on Fitawrary, and there is no chance of his recovery,' she says. And I tell her that I have heard a crow cawing – a sure sign that someone would soon die and be buried. And she tells me it cawed for the sick woman in our house. And I ask if she is dead. And she tells me her relatives have taken her to her home. They take her to her home instead of burying her. Fools! As if I didn't hear the crow cawing (p. 78).

Of course, none of the characters anticipated the death of the peasant himself nor did anyone associate the birds of prey with his death. As a result, this emphasis on the link between the birds and the Fitawrary has added an element of surprise to the final fate of the peasant. But given the ironic plane on which the portrayal operates, the antagonism between the Fitawrary and the peasant, as well as the foreshadowing role of the pistol motif, the subtle association between the peasant and the birds is a logical outcome. Even then, the stronger association is with the Fitawrary. So the

vulture that Woynitu saw perching on the crown of the hut waiting for some offal does not abandon the Fitawrary right up to his last parting. When his body is being carried downhill, Goytom laments: “The vultures flying over us. Trying to alight on my father’s body” (p. 170). And sure enough, when the servants refuse to carry any further the decomposing body of the Fitawrary and the repugnant odour from the body induces Woynitu and Goytom to vomit, the vultures take their chance to have a go at the Fitawrary: “And then the cry of the old woman – a passer-by. A vulture! A vulture was sitting on my father’s head, plucking at his face. She tried to chase him” (p. 171).

1.11.4 Mule

Another of the anticipatory signals using animals manifests itself in the form of the mule motif. The mule first appears in the story during the journey uphill, carrying the piquant little lady, and is later on used for illustrating various points. To the amorous little lady who is fooled by the appearance of the Captain-preacher, the mule’s “trick of going to the edge of the path and peering over the sloping sides ... and with the small avalanche of small stones giving way under her foot” (p. 160) illustrates the deceptive nature of the world. And the pilgrims’ mules that “were by turns currying with gentle teeth a beautiful black mare” and gradually resorting to squealing, swerving and jumping were used to parody the increasing sexual attraction between the Captain-preacher and the conjure-woman during the sermon on Abbo’s Anniversary. In other words, the mules’ actions here serve to accentuate the sexual orientation of the Captain-preacher’s deliberately ambiguous words.

The narrator tells us about the conjure-woman’s imagining a strong resemblance between the face of Jesus Christ in the picture carried by the deacon and that of the preacher. Then she begins to think that the preacher is addressing her more and more. Soon there is eye contact between the two and as if she needed some privacy at this moment of intimacy, she sends away her son. The preacher too acknowledges her gesture, and begins to deliberately entice her with his sexual word-plays: “ ‘Oh yes, we are God’s garden if only we would allow Christ to be woven into the fabric of our person...’ His words were meant to be mysterious and of multiple meanings” (p. 152). He looks at her again, this time his eyes staying on her without wavering, “You are the chosen delicate tree full of sap and green that God has planted. And as true as I am on this tree, true, it is the desire that suddenly rose in me to rest under your shadow. That may be why the Lord God has brought me to your view...” (p. 152). In an outburst of agitated feeling, she trots back to the preacher. “She felt something lifting her soul – her eyes opened – opened as if expecting something great – and she looked at the picture of Jesus Christ as for the first time. She couldn’t again believe her eyes – that unmistakable resemblance between the preacher and Christ” (p. 153). The Captain-preacher continues with his chorus, exploiting her fertile imagination: “I

say to you again and again – submit yourself. Give your heart to Christ before it's too late..." (p. 153). The effect of the words begins to get hold of her: "And then something joyous that almost brought tears to her eyes happened to her" and the Captain-preacher seems to nudge her on as if imploring her to submit to him: "...to Christ who will search you – who will inspect you how adequately or inadequately you are equipped" (p. 153). Gradually, in her mind, the thorn in her foot becomes transferred into the preacher's foot and she walks to the tree where he is perched and touches his foot as if to extract the thorn. Her touch seems to kindle a fire in his body and "myriads of undefined sensations quickened his heart" (p. 153). Ever more drawn to him, she touches his foot for the second time, and he continues to urge her to submit herself "to Christ who offers you" (meeting the fire in the eyes of the conjure-woman with the fire in his) 'the sacrament...' (p. 154). At last, as if he has reached a climax, he suddenly cries out with intense feeling and trots away from the woman.

The Captain-preacher's acts of verbal seduction entices not only the conjure-woman but also the amorous little lady (who is associated throughout the story with illicit love). After his sermon is over, she thought he was a hermit whom she could have to herself and says to her landlady friend: "if I ever get married, my husband is not going to be from the palace. I told her that he will be from a hermitage" (p. 158). But the landlady already knew of her friend's seduction by the Captain-preacher and says as much to her: "Why, I saw you breathe a long-drawn-out sigh when the sermon at the hill was concluded," and added, "Your face clearly bore traces of excitement. And I was seized for you with a little pang. As if beaten by a guilty conscience" (p. 158). The little lady, too, admits this by saying to herself: "And those myriads of undefined sensations that rose up in me. Strange and joyous sensations that brought tears to my eyes" (p. 159).

The interspersed scene of the mules' sexual overtures is designed to parody the seductive gestures and reactions of the preacher and the two women. The sores on the withers, backs, bellies, and sides of the animals which repulse even the conjure-woman are hence meant to illustrate the morally repugnant nature of the behaviour of these people. We are alerted to the profanity of the situation and the ironic slant of the portrayal by the conjure-woman's thoughts before her own indulgence unfolds itself: "And the action of the mules at such a solemn occasion! Why, after all, she never even drank water fetched on Sundays or coffee pounded on any of the Saint's days. And she fasted, besides the occasional ones ordered by her confessor as penance, at least two hundred of the two hundred sixty [sic] days" (p. 146).

The satirical function of the mules is also evident in the peasant's mule's parody of the Fitawrary's snoring. Following the treatment by the conjure-woman's potion, Woynitu fans her father with *besanna* leaves. Pained by the sight of those little hands getting tired, Goytom observes: "Fitawrary breathing evenly when I know well enough that he is snoring. In his heart of hearts, I know he is snoring. And I know he

is doing his best to snore. I know that is the way of the men of title" (p. 52). Then he creates an association between the Fitawrary and the peasant's mule by mentioning her being tied outside, in the rain. Then we get the parody through the medium of his thoughts: "And the way she is snorting. With all the sores on the withers, back, belly, and sides. And that wooden saddle at the corner. These two would have made her badly marked in the mouth and the back and she wouldn't have snorted as she is doing now. Trying to snore as if she is the Fitawrary..." (p. 54).

By creating an association between the Fitawrary and the mule, the narrator is not only trying to poke fun at the Fitawrary's pretensions to high social status while in his current state of degeneracy, but also preparing the ground for the mule's function as a foreshadowing motif. On their way to the peasant's hut after their sojourn to the sacrificial place, the conjure-woman confidently assures the Fitawrary by interpreting for him the women's crossing them with jars full of water as a sign of his recovery. Outside her home, a man with a broken leg and another one with a sick mule are waiting for the conjure-woman's return. After the man with the broken leg is treated, the sick mule is brought in. The narrator describes the mule's treatment as follows: "Some root was burnt and by holding it close to his nose, he was made to inhale the smoke; then, his feet were tied and he was thrown to the ground. And with a red-hot iron, three crosses were made to his skin – one on his back, another one on the ribs, and the third on the forehead. The animal, however, couldn't even rise from the ground at the end of it all. ...The conjure-woman told the owner that he hadn't brought him soon enough" (p. 62). The mule motif thus has the additional function of signalling the failure of the conjure-woman's prescription for the Fitawrary, too, and reinforces the anticipatory function of the other motifs.

As has been indicated above, several of these motifs serve as anticipatory signals. While the most common method of foreshadowing a future event in Ethiopian novels has been the use of dreams (for example, Säblä Wongél's dream in *Fèqer Eskä Mäqaber*, Gebreyye's dream in *Yä-Téwodros Enba*, and Aberra's mother's dream in *Kadmas Bašagär*), Daniachew has made a clear departure from this traditional method by avoiding dreams altogether and using object and animal motifs as anticipatory signals. However, apart from giving unity to the structure of the story by creating links between seemingly unrelated events, characters, creatures and objects, many of these motifs also serve to generate a unified image of a decadent society. This unity of image is also attained by the use of symbolism.

2. SYMBOLISM

Mäkonnen Endalkaäw's *Almote'hum Beyyé Alwašem* is a work of prose fiction that resorts to symbolisms to convey its meaning. Unfortunately, the meaning is often named by the hero's constant commentary after each symbol and there is very little left for the reader to interpret. In Daniachew's English novel, too, one occasionally

encounter's narratorial commentary that signifies the same thing as some of the symbols, but the symbols are not as such directly interpreted. *The Thirteenth Sun* is also different in that the magnitude of symbolism is higher and that a number of the symbols are original. Some of these symbolisms have already been discussed above in connection with the motifs. I shall deal here in greater detail with the more prominent symbolisms.

2.1 Symbolic Characters

Fitawrary Woldu, the peasant, Goytom, Woynitu, the preacher, and Woynitu's double are all symbolic characters in the sense that they have a representational role other than acting as individual characters. However, while four of these characters represent various sectors of the society, Woynitu is assigned the special role of symbolising Ethiopia. The other girl stands for Woynitu, but with little of the former's disgust for decay and corruption.

2.1.1 *Fitawrary Woldu*

He represents the old ruling class, the "fitawraries of Menelik" and "men of blood" as he would characterise himself. He is a conservative diehard who prefers traditional healers to modern medical doctors even when his health is in critical danger. He wants to live longer "to fight against anything new," as his son wants to portray him. A cleavage has been created between him and his children because of his conservative values and practices. And figuratively speaking, he is depicted as being in competition with his son and the peasant for the affection and loyalty of Woynitu. As illustrated by his reminiscences about his battle with the Italians and his persistent attempts to impose his will on Goytom, he is a man of decisive action and strong determination. Robert Wren (1976, 37-38) reports being told by Daniachew that the Fitawrary represents Emperor Haile Sellassie. However, the only significant and explicit association of Fitawrary Woldu with the Emperor is the pocket watch the former gives to Goytom.

Even at the very beginning of the story, we have been alerted to the Fitawrary's socio-political role as the agent, figuratively speaking, of all the misery and stagnation seen everywhere. Thus Goytom says of his sick father:

And then something began to rumble and gurgle in the sick man's chest. He began to twitch and roll convulsively. You began to think, listening to him, that he must be a wizard, and master of these remote cliffs, ranges of hills, buttresses, and the table mountain – that he it was who planted the church in this killing ruggedness, and wantonly dotted the hills with those rotten hovels – that it was he who had poisoned men's brains

with complacency – that it was he who devoured their hearts
with stagnancy and decadence – that it was he who was
responsible for this deadly existence (pp. 8-9).

This succinct characterisation of the Fitawrary as the root cause of the society's decay is later developed in such a way as to present him as a symbol of the very decay itself. It is such a signification that is relayed by the multiplicity of the motifs and symbols of decay with which he is associated. That is why that, of all the characters, he is the only one who is repeatedly presented as being in a state of rot – as when he is shown excreting “some black matter, a small worm, and some larvae” (p. 47); or when he is perceived by his son as being “a disgusting jelly” in a state of vegetation and disintegration; or when his daughter describes him as a living corpse; or when he is seen literally bathing in filth and blood; or when his body begins to decompose even before it is laid in its grave.

Right up to the point of his death, the Fitawrary is shown in entrapped a state of morbidity and immobility. He comes to Abbo's shrine carried on a litter and leaves it likewise. He is so chronically ill with some undefined disease that is disintegrating his system that he has become a “living dead”. That is why vultures and other scavenging animals pursue him right from the very first point of his appearance on the scene. He is the symbol of a dying order, but one that is desperate for revival. It is this desperation that is signified by his sacrificial offerings to both the holy (Abbo) and the Evil (devils).

2.1.2 *The Peasant*

He stands for the Ethiopian farmers who live by their toil. Like his class adversary the Fitawrary, he is very practical and lustful. He does not hesitate to grab whatever he wants, either by cheating, or by force, or by legitimate means. Taboo or not, he thinks it is foolhardy to throw away such juicy meat as that of the Fitawrary's sacrificial sheep. He sees nothing wrong with asking Abbo to collaborate with him in removing the landmark so as to illegally extend the boundary of his compound by pushing into his neighbour's land. He is a fearless man who gets the thrill from the company of hungry jackals and hyenas alone in the bush even during the night. And he has no compunction about playing the role of the devil during his wife's exorcist practices. His greed is as boundless as that of the Fitawrary, and that is why he even tries to cheat the pilgrim woman out of her gift of umbrella for Abbo. Unlike the idealised images of peasant heroes in such Amharic novels as *Feqer Eskä Mäqaber* and the trilogy *Ma'ebäl*, the peasant is here portrayed as an individualistic character, but one who has more rot in him than positive traits that can inspire confidence and respect in others. So, he is not presented as a hero with whom the reader could easily identify.

Still, in comparison with Goytom, his assertive temperament appears to give him a competitive edge for shouldering the burden of getting rid of the old social order.

This is evident in his advice to one of the unfortunate pilgrims: "You don't know, man, you don't know what to beg for – beg of God to strengthen in you the feelings of revenge, the feelings of hatred and disdain for these men. Pray to God to give you the courage to snatch ... these are what count as long as you live...Yes, pray that God give you strength to avenge on your enemies – to wipe out the insult heaped upon you with your blood" (p. 81). However, the peasant is totally oblivious of what is wrong with his society or what role his class can play in the deliverance of his society. In fact, judging by the kind of aspiration he manifests during his conversation with Woynitu, he is more inclined to replicate the oppressive and exploitative role of the Fitawrary Woldus than to do away with the old order. That may be what is signified by the motifs of "Beautiful Ethiopia", "Waiting for the sacrificial sheep".

2.1.3 *Goytom*

This character is made to represent the educated younger generation, "the intelligentsia" as his father calls his lot. As the Fitawrary rightly points out, Goytom is a weakling, one physically and spiritually paralysed by impotence. All he does is talk, talk, and talk about one or another ailment of the society. He lacks both the spiritual and physical stamina to assert his will, to bring about the changes he desires. And he enunciates this weakness of the educated elite by declaring:

Yes, I'm the greatest oddlings. Before filth I hold my nose with my fingers. Before injustice I hold my peace. What is it to me that these people live in hovels built with far less attention to needs than fences for animals. For animals are far more valuable than in this country than men... I believe in the tongue instead of the feast. And how I shout!... The old traditions must be smashed! New ones must be created! We must forge a whole new pattern for Ethiopia! Must have faith in the human soul. Must-must-must! Rot and contradictions! Fiddlesticks! (p. 114)

Unlike the peasant or his father, he lacks the courage even to speak out, let alone to act, for "fear of retribution," as he admits. As Debebe (1980, 1994) rightly points out, he is an intellectual who has lost his bearing. He desires radical change in the society, but he has no vision of how that could come about or what his role might be. He indulges too much in rationalisation. When he is confronted with a challenging situation, he does not have the courage or commitment to face it and overcome it. Rather, he tries to escape it through the mist of fantasies. For instance, when he sees the horrible-looking beggars on the way up the hill, he says, "You wished you could sink into the ground" (p. 6). When he is pestered by beggars in the city, he says, "You feel like running away from all this... You wish the earth would open up and swallow you" (p. 18). At church, seeing the peasant holding Woynitu's hand, he says, "I wish the earth would open up and swallow him, hands and legs. Or that I were a leopard to

tear him down in my turn...” (p. 25). He constantly tries to run away from reality into the sanctuary of undefiled nature. Amidst the bloom of nature his fertile imagination comes alive, his tormented soul gets peace and solace, for nature is his refuge from corruption, decay, and injustice. So we hear him monologise:

How beautiful it would be to pass your life observing the wild life of bees, birds, animals that live around you. Watching the rugged land, the wild flowers, the rock cliffs, the air and the skies. Plenty of time to live and think. How good a world it is to grow up in. Growing your corn, potatoes and cabbages. Growing all kinds of pumpkins.... It would be heaven, indeed to live here – hunting for wild bees in trees; hunting for wild animals; and growing your own garden with all kinds of cabbages. Living like a hermit. Living a life as free as the wind (pp. 112-113).

Being the dreamy type, he has no fighting spirit. His incestuous love for his half-sister depicts him as being morally depraved and prevents us from easily identifying with him. His sister says of him: “I know he loves me. And he doesn’t want other people to look at me. He loves watching me when I bath and dress. He loves watching me read the books he brings for me: *A Megaton of Love*, *The Rocket of Love*, *The Fountain of Love*, *Love in Secret*, all the books he borrows from the library are about love...” (p. 20).

2.1.4 Woy nitu

Unlike the other characters, Woy nitu is endowed with a nobility of heart as illustrated in her sympathy for the wife and child of the peasant. Unlike the peasant, she is not driven by blind hatred and vengeance against those who have wronged her. This is evident in her reluctance to bring the wrath of her father against the peasant who violated her chastity. Her forgiving character also demonstrates itself in the tenderness she finally shows to the father who initially rejected her but eventually made a gesture of reconciliation to her.

She is continuously shown making futile attempts to avoid being defiled by the prevalent corruption. She acknowledges that the Fitawrary is her father, but she thinks that he has lost his humanity and become more dead than her mother. Her striving not to share the decay epitomised by her father becomes apparent in her avoiding his company when he excretes the “black matter”, in her disgust with his bathing in filth and blood, and in her cleaning the dirt particles that got stuck in the patterns of the cross he gave her. Her desperate efforts to remain above the moral taints of adultery is evident in her discouraging her brother’s incestuous gestures of love, her outrage with the pimp’s attempt to persuade her to become a kept woman, her running away to her

father's home to avoid the depraved life of her mother. Even in her fantasy, she is seen trying to avoid such corruption as when she tries to run away from the boss who tries to make a pass at her. Unfortunately for her, she ends up being raped by a boorish peasant. Though Goytom, being morally perverse, can only conceive of her in terms of his unfulfilled incestuous love, her engaging in adulterous relations with lustful bureaucrats and foreign dignitaries, and her expanding the sex industry through the export of girls and expansion of taverns, she is far superior to him – unlike him, she *acts* to the best of her ability to avoid being contaminated by the rot. That she fails in this regard is only an indication of how deeply entrenched and overwhelming the decay around her is, and not a blemish on her wholesome character. Just as she has not chosen to be born as an illegitimate daughter, and from a woman who keeps a tavern at that, she does not consciously involve herself in any act of corruption. She detests and struggles in her own way against the rot that is entangling itself around her just like the gigantic serpent coiling itself around the helpless woman in the picture in Abbo's Church. Through the depiction of her fate, Daniachew seems to be saying that the Ethiopian society has become so rotten that it is almost impossible for one to emerge undefiled by the pervasive decay. It is this view that seems to be graphically illustrated by the piquant little lady who, in trying to save herself from the mud splattered on her leg by the passing rider, only manages to spread the mud all the more on to her white dress.

Woynitu's symbolism of Ethiopia becomes most apparent in the satirical passage dealing with the motif of Ethiopia as a potential tourist paradise. First, Goytom imagines "beautiful Woynitu" becoming an attraction for the lusty foreign dignitaries and tourists. Then, with the repetition of the phrase "beautiful Woynitu" and the gradual transformation of the character's role from the individual to the national level, he makes the motif assume a symbolic significance. Woynitu's individual hospitality transforms into Ethiopian traditional hospitality. Woynitu's private income becomes transformed into the national revenue. Woynitu's export of some beautiful girls would increase the national exports. And the amalgamation of Woynitu's taverns becomes a national industry. Through such imagined transformations, Goytom establishes the link between Woynitu and Ethiopia.

Our income will increase. Our country's revenue will increase. Beautiful Ethiopia. With her beautiful birds and animals. With 'Shooting is prohibited' signs all over the reserve areas. Only once in a while for special guests. No, she will drop the idea of being a hostess. She will simply fly to Europe once in a while. With her beautiful face and Ethiopian hospitality. She will attract many tourists (p. 31).

And all taverns will be amalgamated to form a company... And Woynitu would be rich. Ethiopia would be rich. Ethiopia would

be industrialised. She will be a name of international renown. Woynitu and Company or Apollo and Company or whatever it is. Oh, I don't know. I'm tired of these things. I don't happen to be one of those people who like such industries even on small scales. They will create smog. They will contaminate the water and the air. But then who am I to decide that. I'm not one of those people on the top. Short or long range-planning is not in my line (pp. 31-32).

In the next section dealing with the theme of sacrificial sheep, the motif of "beautiful Woynitu" is replaced by that of "Beautiful Ethiopia". In both cases, the word "beautiful" has an ironic application since there is no moral beauty in the activities being described.

2.1.5 *Woynitu's Double*

This character serves as Woynitu's double because of some significant associations and resemblances with her. Her youth and beauty, "her smile, with a gold tooth shining in her mouth" (p. 88) just like that of Woynitu, her loneliness and sadness, her gentleness and compassion, all these are traits that liken her to Woynitu. On top of these there are other signals that associate her with Woynitu: for example, the attitudes of Goytom, the peasant, and the Fitawrary towards her. Going to the lake, Goytom first mistakes her for the amorous little lady whom he had wanted to feast his eyes upon "to the full" during the journey uphill. With his "heart fluttering, and longing for some ventures" he follows her and lies flat on his stomach beside her. From his emotional state, we realise that he is getting drawn to her:

Then suddenly, without my knowing why, I sit up and put my arm around her shoulders. I wonder why she doesn't object to it. Breaking a little prune shoot to pieces, she simply goes on weeping, her chin on her breast and her eyes low. *I feel extremely attached to her.* And I think that she nudges my elbow with her own. The next thing I know is that she is seized with a burst of tears, and that I embrace her tenderly (emphasis added, p. 89).

The peasant, who has been sexually attracted to Woynitu and making Goytom all the more envious, quietly watches the young couple from a short distance. This angers Goytom as if he were being watched by a rather audacious peeping Tom: "And the peasant! He must have been sitting all the while and looking at us – with no decency at all to turn away his eyes. And the boldness he is showing – trying to signal to me her beauty in his own person, by distending his nose, screwing up his eyes, and twisting his mouth to one side, as though hunting for a civet" (p. 89). The nameless girl seems rather unaffected by the attention she is receiving from the two rivals. This may be because of her mental instability, probability due to the loss of her brother and

father. Apart from the lack of logic to the kind of unrelated things she likes, her confusion manifests itself in the irrational and childish things she does: constantly weeping, running away, standing by the edge of the lake, playing with mud, singing alone, embracing strangers, etc. Yet, Goytom's emotion towards her is warm and tenderly: "Looking at those tears flowing from motionless eyes, you thought her demented, feeling at the same time an irresistible desire to comfort her" (p. 120).

Though her father was a victim of a governor, just like the young man tortured by the Fitawrary, the girl is not hostile towards Goytom's father. Thus Goytom tells us:

Then I saw a figure bending over Fitawrary. And I walked towards her. Her shoulders had a soft curve and her breasts a finer upward tilt. And when she raised her head to see me, the first rays of the sun sifted through a crack in the leaves of the trees fell upon her face. She must have been struggling to control her tears. *I saw that Fitawrary was also looking at those eyes. His face had assumed a fatherly look...* No doubt, she has a big, big heart (emphasis added, p. 135).

The association between the girl and Woynitu is further reinforced by the latter's taking up her place and making gestures similar to the girl's: "And then Woynitu walked to his side and took the girl's place. Gazing down into his face as the girl did... And the next thing I saw was Fitawrary motioning Woynitu to him and embracing her" (p. 136). The girl's role as Woynitu's double is, therefore, apparent from the way those characters associated with Woynitu react towards her, too, thus creating an emotional parallel.

Still, her primary role in the plot appears to be to provide a more "legitimate" outlet for Goytom's incestuous love for Woynitu. That may be why we don't hear Goytom express his tender feelings for Woynitu after his encounter with this girl. But at the same time, this lack of depth and constancy in Goytom's devotion has a thematic significance that links it with Daniachew's first novel, *Adäfres*. In that novel, Goytom's prototype, Adäfres, too, abandons S'iwoné after he becomes attracted to Roman. In both cases, the protagonists' love is illustrated as being superficial, just like their commitments to the higher ideals they profess to espouse.

Debebe Seifu (1994, 621) says that Woynitu's double symbolises Ethiopia. His reason for saying this is that both girls have gold tooth and a similar temperament. However, as indicated above, the purpose of the physical similarities (they do not at all have a similar temperament) is to provide a morally legitimate outlet for Goytom's incestuous love for Woynitu. Moreover, the symbolism of Woynitu is not based on her gold tooth or temperament as such; it is the result of an association built by the variety of motifs and plot-centred character relations linking her with Ethiopia.

2.1.6 Preacher

The minister's wife, i.e., the peasant's landlady, tells the amorous little lady that the preacher was a waiting petitioner on her late husband. Before that he was a captain in his majesty's secret service and was discharged from his job dishonourably "for what he had said and done during the last *coup d'etat*. According to the Minister's wife, it was her late husband who found him this job as a preacher. Saying this, she cynically adds: "You might say to help him expiate his past crimes on these lonely hills. And I suppose the authorities have already pardoned him. He has been very useful here as you may have noticed. And at the end of this year, perhaps, he may again be returned to his job" (p. 159).

How has the Captain "been very useful here" to the political establishment? By using the sacred institution of the Church to preach meek submission to the secular authority, blind loyalty to the emperor and his oppressive rule. In the name of religion, therefore, he campaigns against any dissent by feeding political propaganda to the credulous pilgrims who listen to his sermons:

If someone robs you, insults you, hits you on the nose, he will only be swelling your account with the Holy Spirit. Rewarding you the right to Heaven for what you have gone through. But instead, my friends, if you struggle against what has been ordained of God what would your reward be? (p. 38-39)

Some of you give shelter to thieves and criminals instead of handing them over to the law. Some times, even those that betrayed their Emperor and country! Some of you listen with ready ears to vagabonds and vagrants who revile and defame your superiors, instead of reporting them immediately... (p. 147).

And now, you shout, 'Oh Amlak, Oh Christ!' How come you forgot the eighth millennium is on you. The time when servants shall rise against their masters. Children against their parents. The time when children bite the hand that feeds them. Rising against their Emperor. Against the Emperor who feeds them with milk and honey. Who educates them. Who picks them from the mire and makes them ministers and generals... (p. 148).

Yes my children, it's time for repentance. It's time to save ourselves from everlasting hell-fire. Yes, my children. And let those who have sinned against their Emperor confess their

crime and take their punishment – for it's written, it's better to lose the kingdom of this world than to lose the kingdom of heaven. Better it is to receive the punishment of an earthly king than that of God. And that it is better to suffer an earthly prison than the prison of hell where the devil's teeth are sharper than the sharpest cutter on earth..." (p. 150).

He conspires with the clergy to stop the movement of the *tabot* so that he could use it as a sign of the wrath of God at the "crimes" of the people against their heartless rulers. Side by side with his admonishment of the people, he uses his sermon for seducing the women. The Captain-preacher, therefore, serves as a satirical tool. His own disguise among the ranks of the clergymen serves to symbolise the hypocrisy prevalent within the institution of the Church. Previously being a captain in the imperial security service, and now working in disguise as a kind of political cadre, the Captain-preacher acts as a vehicle that carries the dead weight of the old establishment. That is why the authorial narrator uses the metaphor of a horse to symbolise his role. On the occasion of Abbo's Anniversary, for instance, the narrator endows to the preacher the attributes of a horse when describing his behaviour:

He never rode either a horse or a mule or a vehicle of any kind. Or if he did he was never seen. However, he himself was a horse. At least that was what he affected to be. On Abbo days especially, he trotted and cantered, sniffed and snorted. He even sometimes squealed. And sometimes, he acted like a horse affected with roaring. People said that he was under the influence of the horse in him. It was impossible either to talk to him or stop him, once the horse got control over him. And the few times he was free were perhaps the times when he was overcome by the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the body. When he was overcome by the Spirit of God, he preached; and when by the Spirit of the body, he sat at table and ate – bowing and submissive, as he called it, to the greatest king on earth, food.

And so when he saw that the *tabot* had stopped, he wasn't bewildered. He cantered and galloped to and fro in front of the procession, stopped unexpectedly, perched himself on a large and pretty *woiba* ... and started slowly and modestly to preach on what brought about the impending doom (pp. 142-143).

2.1.7 Pilgrims

Collectively, the pilgrims that gather for Abbo's Anniversary serve to symbolically represent the Ethiopian society. Here are gathered people from all walks of life – governors, peasants, the educated, the clergy, security force, merchants, men and

women, young and old, from the towns and rural areas – in short, all members of “the cabbage family”. And they are searching for salvation, either directly for themselves or for those close to them, but all of them dissatisfied with their present lives.

2.2 The Rape of Woynitu

This action is both plot-centred and thematically symbolic. As a pivotal action, it moves the plot forward by leading to the death of the peasant. So, because of its significance, a series of signals are used to foreshadow its occurrence. Let’s first consider how the peasant who perpetrates that action is associated with the anticipatory signals.

As pointed out earlier, the peasant has been associated with the devil motif, which has an important plot function. Likewise, he is also associated with wild animals through various characters’ derogatory references to him as “boor”, “beast” and “brute”. But first, let us see how the peasant’s gestures towards her are being interpreted by herself and those around her. While sitting in the hut, Woynitu sees the peasant looking at her and she seems to have a premonition of what is to come when she says: “And then I see the father smiling at me – a big broad smile. But his eyes are bleary and his smile is hideous and I don’t like it at all. I don’t know why. It may have reminded me of other smiles” (p. 20). Those “other smiles” are nothing but those of the adulterous customers of her mother’s tavern which she has run away from. Goytom quickly realises the implications of the peasant’s gestures towards Woynitu and says in a tone tinged with jealousy:

And strange, the boor held Woynitu’s hand in his. To imagine that she allowed him to do that! ... I wouldn’t have minded it if I had heard him say something like, ‘You will fall on the slippery mud if I don’t hold your hand.’ Then, I would have said to myself that Woynitu, not knowing what the gesture was intended for, had rejected his holding her at first. But I heard nothing. And she just simply smiled to him with her gold tooth and allowed him to hold her hand in his. I suppose she is sixteen and thinks that she is on her way (p. 24).

Just like Woynitu, Goytom interprets the peasant’s holding her hand as an expression of sexual desire: “And now the boor is holding her hand – looking at her from the corners of his eyes and looking as though he wanted to carry her across on his arms, to swallow her whole, to eat her up like his soup of cabbage and *injera*” (p. 25). When they reach the church, he observes with relief: “Thanks to God, Woynitu had also already rescued her hand from the boor’s clutch” (p.25).

Talking in the context of the man beating his mule, both the Fitawrary and Goytom refer to the peasant as the “beast”. Furthermore, the Fitawrary, too, notices the peasant’s friendly gestures towards Woynitu and says “I saw him smiling to her and wanting to start a conversation with her” (p. 35). Then he expresses his disdain by calling him “The brute!” – an epithet which is repeated when Goytom says, “How about the wife of the brute, did you like her?” (p. 36.) The significance of these words becomes apparent when Goytom describes one of the pictures in the church:

Woynitu is looking at a picture near that of St. Michael: a woman is encircled in the coils of a gigantic serpent – the *devil* or the *boor* or whatever it is – and is vainly striving to free herself from its fatal embrace. You can see long currents of horrible poison coming forth from the serpent’s mouth – crawling, encircling and pressing the woman down, as if it were crushing her limbs and pouring itself into her whole body. Dreadfully pale, with hollow cheeks and deeply sunken, burning eyes, she seems to be in the process of transforming into a she-devil (emphasis added, pp. 27-28).

This scene symbolically foreshadows the rape of Woynitu by the peasant. Apart from the repetition of the word “boor” in describing the serpent, the association with the peasant is made through the word “devil”, which is repeatedly used in connection with the peasant. The content of the picture, which both Woynitu and the peasant, too, are looking at, is itself interpreted by Goytom in terms of love, and even most importantly in the context of a competition between the peasant and himself for Woynitu’s affection. Thus he says: “Woynitu must be thinking about her mother – about the type of torture awaiting her in hell. She may even be thinking about herself – in case she loves me the way I love her. And the peasant oh-ing and ah-ing and standing between her and me... Standing between you and your God... The devils’ part is certainly what I most dislike in hell. The scalding fire and the rest of it, I wouldn’t have minded. ...Standing between you and your God...” (p. 28).

The peasant, too, has been regarding Woynitu in sexual terms and says: “As if I didn’t want to carry away that beautiful woman of the Fitawrary’s! Wow! I might. I mean when I see beautiful things I get the appetite. She is so beautiful, you feel like swallowing her whole. I feel a gnawing something in my stomach” (p. 67). He also divulges to Woynitu his feelings for her: “This morning when I was holding your hand I felt like wanting to swallow you too.” (p. 98) In addition, he reinforces the association between him and the devil in the picture by boasting to her about his “little connections” with the devils: “Beast or no beast, those who have eaten the meat [of the sacrificial sheep left for them] must have the devils in them.... The devils live mostly in the air, water, and in dung heaps. And some live in animals and human beings” (p. 94). When Woynitu taunts him by telling him that he is “not manly”, he

warns her against calling “the devil in him” (p. 96) while she in turn replies: “You are the devil himself – in the process of changing perhaps – you are not a human being at all” (p.97). With all these signals pointing to and confirming the foreshadowing function of the picture of the serpent and the woman, it becomes obvious that Woynitu is going to meet in the bush the very fate she has been strenuously trying to avoid at her mother’s tavern. Having gormandised the juicy meat of the spayed sheep, he needed something to complete his happiness. And to her terror, he grabs her roughly and rapes her. The manner in which he coils his body, his stranglehold, her helplessness in the face of the violent assault are reminiscent of the serpent’s fatal embrace around the woman in the church picture. She, too, creates an analogy with the church picture by saying: “If Satan were here, such would be the acrid stench of his armpits” (p. 100). She laments by saying “I wish I could vomit all the *filth* he has put into me...” (emphasis added, p. 100) and “Why not call Goytom and make this *boor* suffer the consequences?” (emphasis added, p.101) Through his act of rape, the peasant also paves the way for his own doom by calling on himself the Fitawrary’s fatal revenge. This is the plot significance of the rape.

To discern the thematic significance of the rape, we have to read it within the context of the symbolic representation of the characters. Both Goytom and the peasant want to win over Woynitu, each in his own way. This competition between them figuratively signifies each social sector’s bid for asserting its will on Ethiopia, in other words, its aspiration to become master of Ethiopia’s destiny. An indication of this is suggested by the kind of feeling and attitude the peasant and Woynitu develop after the rape. Describing to Woynitu the kind of happiness he gets after eating meat and satisfying his sexual urge, the peasant says “You feel ten times bigger than you are,” like having “killed a lot of people,” “like becoming a fitawrary all at once – with land and medallions,” like being “a governor of a big province – with lots of people bowing and bringing spayed sheep and goat and calf and *teff* and ...” (p.98). This sense of feeling like a master is observed in him once he has done with Woynitu, and she thus thinks looking at him: “And how puffed-up he looks, as if he has conquered the whole world” (p. 100). His world is Ethiopia and he has demonstrated his capability to conquer it by force, though he still has to win her over. So he feels elated.

Ironically, however, despite what he has done to her, Woynitu herself does not hate him. In fact, she is even somewhat conciliatory towards him and complimentary of some of his positive attributes. She does not want to avenge herself, thus signifying the symbolic function of the rape: Ethiopia is *not totally* hostile to the peasantry’s aspirations. Trying to determine what attitude she should bear towards him, she thinks: “What a man! He still has a bit of heart in him. Vomiting with me as he did and wanting to help me... I can’t say what I feel about him... Why not call Goytom and make this *boor* suffer the consequences? I don’t know why really. I simply can’t do it. And what do I feel then? *I feel nothing. I feel empty*” (emphases added, p. 101).

When she begins to feel tenderly towards her father, Woynitu tries to tell him about the peasant's violation of her chastity:

'That peasant ...'

'Um!' he says.

'That peasant...' I say again.

'He thinks I'm a fool,' he says.

In the condition he is in I should think it would be difficult to put the matter before him, I tell myself. He could be dangerous if he wanted to... I restrain myself.

'He thinks I'm a fool!' he says again.' And I don't say anything more. I look at him ... I look at him (p.139).

In view of the fact that the main reason for her running away from her mother's home was to avoid such debasement, why is Woynitu reluctant to avenge herself against the peasant? It is because of her own symbolic role as well as the symbolic significance of the rape. A very hostile reaction would imply total rejection of the peasant's class aspirations. Woynitu does sympathise with the peasantry's lot; still, she does not manifest this in the form of a reciprocal affection for the man. For the Fitawrary, however, the peasant is his class adversary. That is why he declares after shooting the peasant: "I've got my enemy!... At last!" (p.163) Though his ambiguous action could also logically be interpreted from the narrow angle of the plot as an act of pure revenge for dishonouring his daughter, the overall symbolic context of the portrayal strongly suggests its interpretation as an attempt to vanquish his enemy in the life-and-death struggle to maintain the hegemony of his class over Ethiopia. The exclamatory phrase "At last!" has just such an import, for otherwise the Fitawrary could have killed the peasant soon after he noticed the latter's friendly gestures towards Woynitu.

2.3 Sacrificial Sheep

The theme of sacrifice is conveyed not only through the cross, but also through all kinds of animals: bullocks, cows, chicken, goats, white sheep and black sheep, some slaughtered by the pilgrims on the Anniversary of Abbo, some by the peasant or his son, some by the Captain-preacher, some to appease Abbo and others to appease the devils. The most prominent sacrificial animal, however, is the white sheep, for its motif is loaded with multidimensional symbolisms (religious and secular). At the plot level, though the motivation for the sacrificial sheep is the Fitawrary's desperate need to recover from his chronic illness, the major events are wound around it. So it is a pivotal action in that it paves the way, on the one hand, for the important act of the Fitawrary's bathing in blood and filth, the peasant's eating the sheep's meat as well as Woynitu's rape, and, on the other hand, for the exorcising of the devils and the death of both the Fitawrary and the peasant.

The offer of sacrificial animals also serves to illustrate, on the one hand, the blend of superstition and religion in the everyday life of the people and, on the other hand, the stagnating influence of these beliefs which makes people too impotent to face headlong their adversities and instead rely on supernal intervention to get them out of their tragic predicament. That is what is signified by the motif of “Begging manna from heaven”. At the same time, the peasant’s slaughter of the white sheep and Goytom’s shunning this task have a politically significant meaning which emanates from the symbolism of the sacrificial sheep. At this thematic level, however, the sacrificial sheep symbolises those ‘patriots’ who have to sacrifice themselves for the deliverance of the Ethiopian people from the “blazing brimstone and eternal torture” rampant in their country.

The political symbolism of the sacrificial white sheep can be discerned from the contiguous appearance of the motifs of “Beautiful Ethiopia” (9 times), “God’s way of putting an end to things” (5 times) and “Waiting for the sacrificial sheep” (6 times) within a space of less than three pages (pp. 41-44). The context in which these motifs appear is one which paints a panoramic picture of Ethiopia – its people, its flora and fauna, and its landscape – a picture in which social classes rather than individuals predominate. And it is a disharmonious picture of rugged terrain, exotic animals, and blooming vegetation put in juxtaposition with the people’s immense suffering that finds its parallel in “Purgatory”, “blazing brimstone”, “eternal torture” which their rulers – the bureaucrats, the landed gentry, and the aristocracy – have bestowed upon them. The reference to the Fitawrary at the beginning of this description provides an important transition which gives a special meaning to his waiting to “kill the white sheep”. In this transition, the Fitawrary is transformed from an ordinary character to a symbolic character, from an individual to a social class. So his bid to regain his health becomes an attempt to perpetuate the old social order, the stagnation, and the dehumanisation. His aim in this context is characterised by Goytom as: “Hoping to live longer to fight against anything new.... And hoping to keep on forever without working with his hands,” i.e., by living on others like a parasite (p. 41). When he asks Goytom to slaughter the sacrificial sheep for him, he means exactly what Goytom tells the deranged girl about his father: “He simply wants me to serve him like a slave. And I don’t want to do that. I want to serve myself. I want him off my back” (p. 91). So Goytom declares, “O no! I am not going to kill the sheep at the sacrificial place” (p. 44), and thus purposely avoids this role by disappearing from the scene at the time the white sheep is to be slaughtered.

Although Goytom is not willing to serve the Fitawrary’s cause, is he ready to and capable of serving Ethiopia’s cause? What the passage dominated by the three major motifs cited above suggests is that just as the Fitawrary seeks to have his sacrificial sheep, so does Ethiopia if she is to be delivered from this earthly “Purgatory”. That is why we are told by the narrator that “Beautiful Ethiopia” too is “waiting for the sacrificial sheep”. At the symbolic level, therefore, the sacrificial sheep is Ethiopia’s deliverer, he who is ready to shed blood if necessary and die for her cause. Goytom,

however, is too weak to be that kind of saviour. He tells Woynitu's double that he neither likes watching blood being spilt nor wants to spill blood. His own self-analysis confirms to us his being incapable of playing the role of Ethiopia's sacrificial sheep:

And me a young man. An educated young man... Oh, yes, at least I have learnt to spit into a gaudy handkerchief. To use fork and knife. To knot my ties and put on my shoes. An educated man – an oddling by any standard...and I'm supposed to save Ethiopia...Save her from whom? From myself, I guess? By prayers of mourning; by indolence and strong drink; by the pleasure of the body; by submission and ignorance...Yes, I'm going to save Ethiopia. No, not by work; not by pride in what I have; not by dignity as a human being; not by becoming hard and strong; not by building strength for our real true purpose of building a nation. No these are not for me. They are for those wandering out into darkness beyond tomorrow (p. 113).

Though he desires the complete removal of the old order, Goytom is not made of the kind of "stern stuff" that is needed to bring about this change. Consequently, the symbolic significance of his act of carrying the Fitawary's dead body just for a little distance and then abandoning the effort appears to suggest his incapacity to shoulder the burden of carrying the old order to its grave.

Speaking after the Revolution, Daniachew makes an interesting comment on the main protagonist of his first novel *Adäfres* that throws some light on his attitude towards the educated younger generation. He says Adäfres "is progressive – but he should be progressive with other people. He rationalises too much. He is not a practical person. Instead of acting he rationalises. Rationalisation is good but with limitations" (Molvaer 1997, 298). Since Adäfres is the prototype of Goytom, Daniachew's assessment of the first protagonist applies to the second one, too. He says that there was no other way out for Adäfres except death because he was "too superficial". As I pointed out in my analysis of the characterisation of Adäfres elsewhere (Taye 1986), Daniachew did not consider that talkative university student as worthy of becoming Ethiopia's sacrificial sheep. Nor did he change his mind when he created Goytom, or, much later, after the replacement of the feudal fitawraries with the uniformed fitawraries.

Still, what Goytom lacks, the peasant has it in abundance in many respects: energy, determination, a fighting spirit, the strength "to wipe out the insult heaped upon you with your blood," as he advises one man what to beg of God (p. 81). And he has demonstrated for us how he would do it by slapping the white man who humiliated him in front of the pilgrims. But then, the peasant, too, has been delineated with a

rather heavy dosage of negative attributes: a propensity for adultery, greed, violence, lies, faithlessness, disloyalty, hatred, and vulgarity. Hence, his symbolic role vis-à-vis the sacrificial sheep is somewhat problematic. Does his readiness to kill the sacrificial sheep for the Fitawrary signify the peasantry's subservience to the hegemony of the ruling class? Such an interpretation would appear to defy the logic of his adversarial class role in the novel. But if one is to consider the peasant's aspirations as illustrated in what he would feel after satisfying his animal urge, i.e., "like becoming a Fitawrary," or "like being the high priest of Abbo," or like being "a governor of a big province – *with lots of people bowing* and bringing spayed sheep and goat and calf and *teff* and ..." (emphasis added, p.98), one realises that the peasant, too, is not meant to be the messiah. After all, the kind of ideals he cherishes are not likely to inspire our hope for a bright future since they only mean the perpetuation of the same master-servant relationship with only a change of those in the saddle. It is also important to keep in mind the one motive that drives the peasant to slaughter the sheep: greed, perhaps resulting from destitution. He admits that he rarely got the opportunity to eat such juicy meat: "Fat, good meat of a spayed sheep doesn't often come my way. And so, I don't let such a chance slip by" (p. 67). The underlying implication of this is that the peasant is susceptible to serving the causes of those very people who perpetuate his dehumanisation if he thinks he could secure some benefit out of it. Given such detrimental foibles, therefore, the author may be telling us that the peasant's ascendance to power would not be the most desirable option for Ethiopia. His rape of Woynitu may, in addition, be an indication of his natural inclination to brutality. Despite the thematic ambiguity created by the death of the Fitawrary soon after killing the peasant, as if the act of shooting the latter sapped away his last remaining energy and transformed the peasant into a sacrificial sheep, by disposing of the peasant just as he did with Adäfres, Daniachew appears to be telling us that both the peasant and Adäfres are no deliverers of Ethiopia. What the limitations in the character dispositions of Goytom and the peasant strongly suggest is the conclusion that Ethiopia is left without a saviour and is still looking for one. To me, that is the most logical interpretation of the motif of beautiful Ethiopia's "waiting for the sacrificial sheep".

2.4 Fitawrary's Bathing in Filth and Blood

Fitawrary's being stripped naked in preparation for his ritual bath is a symbolic exposure of his past life of wallowing in corruption and tormenting others. He himself admits his sinful life when he explains to the priest why half his wealth has to go to the clergymen who have to pray for him: "They may have to do a lot of praying to save my soul" (p. 56). In this context, the young man whom he, as a governor, got punished with thirty lashes and who died a month later is an illustration of the kind of torment he and, by extension, his class members meted out to others in a manner reminiscent of the torment inflicted on the sinners' souls by the devils in the hell-scenes of the church pictures. While being flogged, the young victim wails, "*All ye who see me thus, profit by my example*" (p. 57). At the time of his being smeared with the blood and stomach-contents of the sacrificial sheep, the guilt-ridden Fitawrary,

too, couldn't help recalling the young man. To Woynitu, the Fitawrary seems to be echoing to the world the very words of the young victim's cry as if he were proclaiming to others to profit by his example, too. His act of bathing in blood and filth is, therefore, a symbolic reflection of his past sinful life, a life which is not specific to the individual Fitawrary Woldu, but rather a norm for the rulers, as is evident from the parallelism between the flogging of the young man and the flogging of the father of Woynitu's double. So it is the revolting nature of that decadent rule that is being symbolically laid bare through the Fitawrary's bath. That is why his daughter says in disgust:

I used to think of my mother as a living corpse. That her life isn't worth living at all. And yet my father is more dead than she...what is he trying to prove by being beaten with tripe? What is he trying to prove by bathing in blood and filth? And by smearing the gold cross on his chest? And what is the point of his living in this condition? Stripped of his belief, cleanliness, pride and everything else besides? (p. 58)

2.5 Journey/Paths

The Thirteenth Sun uses the motifs of the journey and path to symbolise life and the modes of progress, respectively. The pilgrims' journey uphill, for instance, is characterised as a kind of struggle in the hope of finding a cure for the society's ailments, a struggle for salvation, for a better life. Thus, describing the pace and ease with which various members of the pilgrims climbed uphill, Goytom suggests the symbolism of the journey motif by remarking: "Some of the pilgrims walked faster than you, sweating and drawing their thumbs across their faces and flicking the sweat away. Some, like Woynitu, lagged behind. Beautiful Woynitu! Struggling to put one foot after another. Struggling! And the heat stifling us all like three thousand years" (p. 7). Since we realise later that Woynitu symbolises Ethiopia, her struggle in climbing uphill signifies the country's difficulty in making fast progress, or rather her stagnation. The reference to "three thousand years" serves to make the reader recall the stereotype image of Ethiopia as a country with three thousand years of independence and civilisation, and interpret Woynitu's struggle as Ethiopia's struggle. However, the metaphor subverts the stereotype image of a glorious past by portraying it as centuries of stagnation, for the negative statement "And the heat stifling us all like three thousand years" implies a state of lethargy and stagnation. It is the theme of the protest poems of Daniachew's university days that has found its way into his novel. Thus he tells Molvaer in his interview: "Students at the University also protested against the common boast of '3000 years of history' among Ethiopian officials because 'no progress was made' during all this period" (1997, 295).

The Thirteenth Sun is full of movements up and down the hill: pilgrims going up to the church, pilgrims going down to the lake and then uphill for the Anniversary; Woynitu going downhill with her father to the sacrificial place and then climbing up to the peasant's hut, and again downhill with the dead Fitawrary's body; some pilgrims such as Woynitu and Goytom walking to their destinations on foot; others riding horses or mules. And the theme of stagnation associated with their journeys is reinforced by the motifs of the train and aeroplanes that appear towards the beginning and end of the story to accentuate the painfully slow pace of the pilgrims' movements and the traditional modes of their transportation.

The symbolism of the journey also manifests itself in the type of path one takes to climb uphill. For example, hearing the priest and the conjure-woman arguing about which path to take to return to the hut, Woynitu tells us about the various alternatives to their destination:

There are so many goat-paths leading up to the top of the mountain – the longest and easiest one (for older people) goes round and round and round the mountain and comes up a little farther every time it makes a circle. Not much of a distance covered, though. (Eight times we had gone around the several hills yesterday when we came up to the top.) And then there are shorter and shorter ones, down to a distance of fifty to a hundred metres, for the adults, the youth, and the children – going steeper and steeper according to age and strength. And all of them going to the same place. And yet, in this the blazing sun, they waste their time arguing about which path to take. Why they wouldn't take anyone of the many paths is strange – I hope to God they wouldn't choose the longest or the steepest of the paths, though. I just don't think I can climb them today (p. 59).

Woynitu's choice of the medium path, the one which is neither the longest and takes too much time nor the shortest and steepest, seems to suggest a path of moderation for the deliverance of Ethiopia, a mode of social change that is neither too evolutionary nor too revolutionary.

2.6 Offer of the Cross to Woynitu

After he realises that the sacrificial sheep would not cure him and that his days are coming to an end, the Fitawrary offers Woynitu a cross that he says will protect her "against the evil eye" (p. 63). This gesture on the part of the Fitawrary is a sign of reconciliation, though it comes too late. The cross's symbolism of sacrifice and deliverance seems to suggest the Fitawrary's wish that, unlike him, others would

sacrifice themselves to end Ethiopia's tribulation – a last-minute gesture which reinforces the thematic import of the motif of Beautiful Ethiopia's waiting for the sacrificial sheep.

2.7 Offer of Pocket Watch to Goytom

Just like his offer of the Cross to Woynitu, the Fitawrary's offer of his pocket watch to Goytom is a symbolic gesture that reinforces the theme of Ethiopia's waiting for its sacrificial sheep. When Goytom asks him what he was supposed to do with it, the Fitawrary tells him to use it. He underscores the thematic significance of the watch by saying that Goytom's wristwatch is "for show, and this is for work!" (p. 161) Then he adds as if taking leave of him, "And I want you to remember me with my good deeds as well" (p.161). Goytom then realises that his father is on the verge of death and says: "I have never heard him talk that way before. And I feel as if I am losing him" (p. 161). In his last moments, the Fitawrary not only becomes conciliatory towards his children, but also patronising as far as Ethiopia's future destiny is concerned. By offering the young intellectual his pocket watch and advising him to use it, the Fitawrary seems to be saying that as his days are over, it is time for the younger generation to takeover his place and use it for the good of the nation.

2.8 Mock Battle

Goytom doesn't appreciate the patriotism of his father. He resents being lectured about the endurance of the Ethiopian patriots who fought against the Italian invaders at the battles of Maichew and Korem. He scoffs at the patriotism and medallions of his father saying:

And he tells me he has this and that medallion, as if I care a dot about it. Medallions given to people for telling the greatest of lies or for being the greatest of cowards. He expects me to take him as a hero! Why should I tell him that heroes are dead and buried? Why should I tell him that bravado is the wrong word for fear? And that he sometimes succeeded by sheer accident. Why should I tell him that medallions most of the time disguise a cowardly heart? No let him wallow in the memory of his cowardice and hypocrisy. Let him go on blaming the young generation (p. 76).

It is not only Goytom who makes sarcastic remarks about medallions. The peasant, too, repeatedly sneers at medallions. Thus when the Fitawrary tells him that he belonged to Menelik's gentry and that the present fitawraries don't deserve the title, the peasant retorts: "We've two of them in our village; both of them left with title and medallions only" (p. 12). Again, when telling Woynitu the value high he attaches

even to five-cents, the peasant says: "...and my woman cognizant of each and every species of proverbs, anathema, and every species of proverb... if I allow her to do it all free of charge, what will become of me? Medallions and title only" (p. 96). The motif of the medallions thus becomes a subversive device for denigrating sham glories of triumph and honour, for the medals were not earned fighting "for humanity", for standing for "some universal truth in life" (p.77).

The denigration of the wars fought and the medals earned hitherto again finds expression through the mock battle that is fought by the ragged children who have come to scrounge the leftovers of the landlady's memorial feast. Following this feast, the children decide to play soldiers. They group themselves into opposing sides, and armed with sham swords made of wood, reed guns and lances, shields of wickerwork and hand grenades of *amboi* fruit and mud, go after each other, by recreating the battle scenes with all the shouts, skirmishes, charges, retreats, wounds and deaths, the burials of the dead, the patriotism, the clemency for the prisoners of war, and the triumph for the victors. At the end of the scene, Goytom points out the beating awaiting the kids for dirtying themselves and then sarcastically sums up the mock battle's signification by remarking "Medallions and titles!" (p. 106) The symbolic function of the mock battle is, therefore, to parody the battle scenes that Goytom saw depicted on the painting hung on the wall above his father's bed – a picture which, for him represents false patriotism.

3. NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE

From the foregoing discussion, one can observe that *The Thirteenth Sun* has a very simple plot, based on a series of loosely knotted episodes. The series of rather mundane episodes, static situations, and mental excursions are streamlined in such a way as to generate a unified image of a stagnant society in dire need of revitalization. The motifs and symbols effecting such an image are intertwined through a binary opposition of two major kinds of signification: negative and positive. The motifs and symbols with negative quality generate impressions/images of misery, exploitation, dehumanisation, lethargy, stagnation, immorality, decay, decline, and disintegration. Such motifs and symbols include:

Motifs

- Decay (moral, bodily, habitat)
- Cabbages
- Parasites
- Dogs
- Diseases
- Deaths
- Hell
- Beggars

Symbols

- Mock battle
- Rape of Woynitu
- Bath in blood and filth

The motifs and symbols with positive quality generate impressions/images of cleansing, sacrifice, redemption, harmony, growth, progress, and grandeur. Such motifs and symbols include:

Motifs

- Koso
- Bathing (in holy water)
- The elements
- Scavenging animals
- The Cross
- Journey/paths
- Airplane/train
- Blooming flora

Symbols

- Sacrificial sheep
- Offer of the cross to Wynyitu
- Offer of pocket watch to Goytom
- The glorious and exotic (Axum, marathon, Walya)

The structural design that emerges from the interplay of these motifs and symbols is the 'circularity' of the episodic plot. I use the word 'circularity' here in a more figurative sense, to emphasise the repetitive essence of the episodes. Of course, time-wise, the plot has a predominantly linear progression. Still, without denying the fact that the rape of Wynyitu and the deaths of the peasant as well as the Fitawrary are the culminating points in this linear development of the plot, I mean to underline the point that, in the final analysis, even these major incidents only serve to amplify what is evident right from the very first part of the novel: the depth of social decadence and the desperate need for revival. Characters are shown going up and down the hill in their pilgrimage – going back and forth to the hut or to the church or to the lake – either begging along the street or near the *das* of the memorial feast or at the lake or in the church, or praying/exorcising or bathing or making sacrificial offerings (which are all different forms of "begging for manna"/deliverance). Yet, despite its repetitive manifestation, all the pilgrimage, begging, bathing and sacrificial offering remain futile: it is not shown attaining the healing of the sick, the cleansing of the rampant decay, the deliverance of the society, which at the end of the story is still left in a state of morbidity – waiting for the true sacrificial sheep, to put "an end to things". It is in this thematic sense that I perceive the structural unfolding of the plot in a circular motion.

The key element in this motion, i.e., repetition through association, forms the basis for the unifying effect of the motifs and symbols. For instance, one may recall here how the motifs of the koso plant, the cabbages, and parasites (bed-bugs, fleas, worms and rats), despite their manifestation in different contexts, thematically unify the episodes in which they appear through their association with the Fitawrary, who is portrayed as a social parasite that must be expunged. Likewise, we can also recall how the motifs of moral and physical decay, repeatedly manifested in the form of adultery, dilapidated shelters, church and hut compounds contaminated by stagnant

water, mire, offal, blood and stench, achieve their unified meaning through the symbolism of the excreta, filth-laden bath and bodily decomposition of the Fitawrary. As is illustrated in connection with the repetitive activities of the Fitawrary, whenever motifs and symbols of stagnation and rot appear, they are paralleled by motifs and symbols of sacrifice and cleansing, either contiguously or subsequently, to illustrate that the society is wholly rotten and that it is in desperate need of deliverance. In this novel, no single motif or symbol is assigned the role of individually signifying either rot or cleansing, stagnation or revival. In each case, more than one motif and/or symbol is assigned such a function. That is why we find here a proliferation of motifs and symbols signifying the same essence. What is being portrayed is the society, but with focus on different shades and manifestations of its essence. That is how the novel attains its depth and unity of image – the image of decay.

4. SYNTHESIS

From the foregoing discussion, it can be gathered that *The Thirteenth Sun* is rich in motifs and symbolisms. The various motifs and symbols are the building-blocks that give structural unity to the themes and images of the novel. To date, no other Ethiopian novelist has used motifs with such intensity for both creating anticipatory effects on the reader and generating a unified image of a decadent society. Humans, animals, parasites, supernatural beings, plants, inanimate objects, and phrases have all been exploited for the creation of the motifs. Some of these motifs are metaphoric and symbolic, as in the case of the cabbage motif; the thunderstorm, flood, conflagration motifs; sacrificial sheep motif; bed-bug motif; and hell motif. Some are used for a satirical purpose, as in the case of the mule for parodying the Fitawrary's empty pride, or the seductive sermon of the Captain-preacher. Many of the symbolisms are action-based, non-conventional, and subversive since they reverse the old values and stereotype images, as in the case of Fitawrary's bathing in filth and blood, the rape of Woynitu, and the children's mock battle. Some of the other symbols are conventional, as in the symbolisms of the journey, the offer of a pocket watch to Goytom, or of a cross to Woynitu. The conventional signification of time by the watch, or tribulation, sacrifice, and redemption by the cross is not as such subverted in the portrayal.

The signification of some of the actions is so much imbued with ambiguity that such major events as the peasant's act of slaughtering of sacrificial sheep, the rape of Woynitu, the shooting of the peasant, the death of the Fitawrary, and Goytom's carrying the decomposing body of the Fitawrary are open to diverse interpretations. For instance, it is difficult to conclude **with certainty** that the rape of Woynitu signifies the peasantry's eventual assertion of its hegemony over Ethiopia, for if that is the desired message why is the peasant made to die at the hand of the Fitawrary? Is the peasant to be regarded as the symbolic harbinger of the downfall of the feudal aristocracy, here represented by Fitawrary Woldu's death? If so, why is Ethiopia

portrayed as being still waiting for the sacrificial sheep, and why is Goytom shown carrying the decomposing body of the Fitawrary?

I have found the few attempts hitherto made to offer a plausible interpretation that would explicate the ambiguities surrounding these symbolic events a bit one-sided and incongruous with either the delineation and role of the major characters or with the overall thematic import of the motifs and symbolisms. For instance, Timothy Wilt tends to ignore the fact that the peasant is shot dead by the Fitawrary and that, rather than the peasant, it is Goytom, the young intellectual, who is assigned the symbolic role of carrying the representative of the old system to his grave when he suggests that the peasantry is more disposed to take Ethiopia's destiny into its hands. In the context of describing the competition between Goytom and the peasant for winning over Woynitu, he mentions her rape by the peasant and then says: "Too much reflection, too much attention to his internal state renders Goytom impotent; the peasant, however, knows what he wants and acts to get it" (1988, 43). From this narrow premise he arrives at the following conclusion:

There are two beings Goytom calls "beautiful": ... [Woynitu and Ethiopia]. Goytom and those he represents – the educated sons of the old power system's supporters – may be enraptured by the beauty of the woman, the country; however, their ties to the old system encourage them to rationalize away the need for radical change. The tension between the continuity and the temporariness of the decaying system is not likely to be resolved through the action of the intellectuals. The taking of the woman, the country, is for the more powerful. The more powerful may be more base, but they are also more capable of acting (p. 43).

As I pointed out in my analysis of the symbolisms of the main characters, Goytom represents the educated younger generation in general, not a sector of this social stratum attached to the ruling class as suggested by Wilt. Goytom does not try to "rationalize away the need for radical change"! On the contrary, we hear him repeatedly harping on the need for radical change, a change that is often conveyed through the metaphorical motifs of the flood, the thunderstorm and the wildfire. What Goytom lacks is the will to act, the courage and commitment to make himself the sacrificial sheep. True, the peasant is portrayed as a man of action and his rape of Woynitu seems to suggest the aspiration of his class to establish its hegemony over Ethiopia, but the implied author presents this outcome as a very remote prospect. The rather negative light in which the peasant is delineated – propensity to violence, insatiable greed, moral degeneracy, gross vulgarity, despotic aspirations – and, above all the symbolic connotation of his demise at the hand of the dying Fitawrary, strongly suggest his being incapable of bringing about the salvation of Ethiopia. The implied author regards him as part of the prevalent rot, not a cleansing agent.

The thematic import of the rape of Woynitu, the death of the peasant, and Goytom's carrying the Fitawrary's dead body downhill have also been commented on by Debebe Seifu. However, Debebe's anachronistic interpretation sheds little light that would explain their ambiguity when he makes the following comment:

In all such heading [*sic*] of the symbolic plot and symbolic characters what does the writer want to signify? Does he mean that the class of the peasantry will hold power for a while only to be squashed again by the feudal class? Does he mean that the intelligentsia – the petty bourgeois – will succeed the feudal class in taking over the political power? Does he mean that all the offensive legacy of the feudal class will go to the petty-bourgeois class? In giving us the picture of the rough return journey, does he mean that a very bleak, hard life yet await [*sic*] the peoples of Ethiopia? And more, making the setting of the novel the same (at least, concerning the place factor) at the beginning and in the end, does he mean that all those turmoils in the society will come to nothing; that a bright future is not to be expected from such hellish society; that all the theoretical bombasts of the intelligentsia are much ado about nothing and that the sacrificial sheep has yet to come?

I think Daniachew means all these and something else.

The “something else” is an attempt to give Marxian overtones to his theme of revolution. Through a red colour symbolism and an allusion to the necessity of power to efface out the degenerate social system, Daniachew, in a way, attempts to show the trend the Ethiopian revolution will take. I say “in a way” because I don't think he, like Goytom (no doubt they share the same point of view) has a clear understanding and grasp of it (1994, 620-621).

Though Debebe seems to recognise the ambiguity of the above-mentioned events, he tries to read into the novel by suggesting that Daniachew regarded the solution to the society's ills as lying in a radical revolution in the *Marxian* sense of the word. True, the idea of a social upheaval as a radical means of cleansing the ills of the society is implicit in such motifs as “conflagration”, “thunderstorm”, “volcanic eruption” and “flood”, but there is nothing to suggest that this is conceived as a Marxist revolution. Debebe's only textual evidence to substantiate his claim about the theme of such a revolution is the motif of red colour, which manifests itself in the peasant's fascination with the blood with which Woynitu's *netela* is smeared after her rape and the half-sane girl's obsession with the red colour, as well as the peasant's vindictive temperament as reflected in his advice to the beggar. However, these isolated instances are not reinforced by other aspects of the portrayal in such a way as to clearly develop the theme of revolution. Despite his gravitating towards brutality and

his hatred for his adversaries, the peasant does not kill the Fitawrary; rather it is the other way round. Despite the slight suggestion of a cause and effect relationship between the two events, through their chronological contiguity, there is little tangible evidence to prove that the Fitawrary's death is a direct outcome of any of the peasant's conscious acts. In fact, the peasant is heard monologising that he does not want the death of the Fitawrary as he wants to exploit him. Besides, nowhere is the peasant shown as being aware of his society in terms of class differentiation and class struggle. His aspiration is not to do away with exploitation and oppression as such, but to ascend to the level of exploiters and oppressors and to perpetuate such evils in the society. He is an individualist, and even an egotist. Being apolitical, he has no vision of the socio-political role of his class. As far as the half-sane girl's obsession with the red colour goes, it does not even remotely suggest the theme of revolution because of the illogical things she says and does, as well as her inexplicable show of sudden sympathy for the Fitawrary. Besides, the symbolism of the red colour is not a monopoly of the Marxist revolutionaries – even traditional societies such as the Abyssinians have used it to signify the notion of sacrifice in their flags.

Also, Debebe's criticism that "Daniachew's attempt to bring out the theme of revolution in a somewhat Marxian way appears to be a bit unconvincing" (p. 622) seems to be grossly misplaced. Rather than Daniachew, it is Debebe, writing during the post-revolution period, who is trying to put the Marxist element into the novel. The portrayal does not bear such an ideological mould. That is why Debebe's expectation to see Goytom delineated as a Marxist is untenable.

In contrast to the above two commentators, Robert Wren tries to shun an interpretation that dovetails these symbolic episodes to infer a simplistic and allegorical meaning. Wren thus points out, "Daniachew has shown the suspicion, the danger, the complexity, but he has not drawn conclusions" (p.38). For him, the open-ended nature of the portrayal and the ambiguities surrounding the above-mentioned events are proof of this.

To sum up, *The Thirteenth Sun* is quite innovative in the manner of its portrayal, especially in the way its form and content are organically moulded through association. Despite the above-mentioned ambiguity with which some of the events are rendered, however, it is difficult to conclude that the portrayal has been conducted with economy and subtlety throughout the novel. The commentaries of the reliable narrators such as Woynitu and Goytom, both through their interior monologues and utterances, on the Fitawrary, the peasant and his family or the pilgrims, or the society in general, occasionally tend to name the meaning of some of the motifs and symbols thereby limiting the reader's interpretive involvement in such instances.

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