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## The Monitor - Addis Ababa

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### Bealu Girma And The Beginning Of The End

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*By Yosef B.*

Addis Ababa - In his lifetime, Bealu Girma, who is considered to be the most prolific modern Ethiopian novelist in Amharic has written only one short story, or one published short story. It is called Yefetsamew Mejemera (lietrally meaning) The Beginning Of The End).

This story is included in the anthology entitled Chigagena Tel we have been reviewing for the last few weeks.

Bealu is born in 1938 in Ethiopia's Oromo Region, Illubabor Zone, at a particular place called Supe. His father is an Indian and his mother a native Oromo. He completed his elementary education in Illubabor and his secondary schooling at the General Wingate here in Addis Ababa. He

received his Bachelor Degree in Political Science from the Addis Ababa University and his Masters degree in Journalism from Berkley in the United States.

Bealu was the editor of Menen, Addis Reporter magazines and editor of Addis Zemen and The Ethiopian Herald newspapers.

Bealu has written a number of popular novels among which Keadmas Bashager (Beyond The Horizon) Yehelina Dewel (Bell of Conscience) Yekey Kokeb Teri (Call of the Red Star) Haddis, Derasiw (The Writer) and Oromay. His last novel dealing with the war in Eritrea under the Derg regime was said to be the cause of his final disappearance. The Beginning of The End was written on the eve of the ill-fated publication of Oromay and many people subsequently maintained that in that story, Bealu had predicted his eventual disappearance and took it to be a kind of "chronicle of a death foretold".

Yefetsamew Majemeria or The Beginning of the End is a didactic story narrated in the first person. The narrator is a character called Hilina meaning Conscience. Hilina tells us about his relationship with his friend Sintayehu who is a writer who drinks a lot and fights to write

about the truth and beauty faithfully. Hilina tells us about the life of the writer, about his frustrations, his hopes and his struggles to live up to the demands of his craft. Hilina is telling about all this in a flashback since Sintayehu had disappeared at the beginning of the story only to reappear near the end of the narrative.

One day, Sintayehu knocks on the door of Hilina and returns after a long creative vigil. He announces to Hilina that he has overcome his writer's block and was full of impressions to write about. At the end of the story, the two characters go out to celebrate the occasion with a couple of drinks. Before that however, there is an interesting dialogue going on between the two protagonists: Hilina and Sentayehu.

Sentayehu (the writer) looked like a healthy and strong youth.

"Where have you been for so long?" Hilina asked him.

"I was on a long vigil." Sentayehu answered.

"I was very much worried about you"

"Do you too worry for people?" asked Sentayehu.

"Do you think my heart is made of stone?"

"I did not think you worried for people."

"Have you been thinking about me in these terms all the long years we have been together? I'm sorry" said Hilina.

"You have changed now." Hilina said.

"Tell me about it; in what way have I changed?"

"Now you have a feeling. Before, I thought you were looking at everything from a distance. You really do care now. I did not know that. I did not think that all readers care. Thank you anyway."

"What for?"

"The Muse has kissed me."

"Did you start a new book?"

"I will tell you about it later on. Now let us go out and celebrate it."

So, Hilina and Sentayehu go out together to have drinks. At the end of the story Sentayehu makes the following remark, "Yes, it is great to live and write. By the way, I am not a coward." This remark is apparently the key to understanding the whole point of the story, that is to say the return of the writer to Hilina, i.e. to Conscience which

might be interpreted as the return of the writer to his own conscience as a result of which he is inspired to write once again after a long period of suffering from a writer's block. At the didactic level, the story might be saying that one has to return to one's responsibility as a writer (or simply as a man) to live up to one's duties and attain peace with oneself. At the metaphorical level, it can be interpreted as man's truce with his own nagging conscience as a precondition to achieving real happiness-suffering as a prelude to true happiness. This has a Doestoviskian ring about it! (i.e. the Brothers Karamazov)

Bealu Girma was an author fond of writing about writers. He has devoted an entire book,

i.e. Derassiw (The Writer) for this theme although the book is considered by critics to be the caricature of a living author, namely Sebhat Gebregziabher. Some people might be led to be interpreting the last utterance of Sentayehu in the story, ("By the way I am not a coward.") as the last confession of Bealu Girma before his disappearance (paralleled with the disappearance of Sentayehu at the beginning of the story) following the publication of Oromay. Whatever the interpretations, it is very hard to believe that a writer would write his own obituary.

The Beginning of the End could be a prophetic piece of writing as some people might be led to think but it is not certainly the best short story ever written in Amharic. It is only an accidental piece of scribbling for Bealu was not a short story writer the way a one-book author can hardly be called a writer. The Beginning of the End was perhaps both the beginning and the end of Bealu as a short story writer. Had he lived longer, he might have written more stories.

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