

Adam Reta's Interconnected World: How the Writer Uses His Works to Comment on Society

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Despite a relatively uncommon career path, Adam's works still resonate with many, which have helped him to become popular among readers in a short period of time. This is especially true for Christian Tadelles, a 28 year-old public health specialist at the Federal Ministry of Health. "Adam's books are all about living. While reading his books, you will feel like you are experiencing the protagonist's] story, like the character is telling you the story and is sitting beside you. I myself feel the story of Mezigebe in 'Gracha Kachiloch' is my story and also a story of many kids who were raised in the rural or small towns of the country," he says.

Christian says his feelings emanate from Adam's writing style. His stories are usually narrated in the first person. Adam is noted for providing a rich, complex and nuanced environment for his characters, such that if someone doesn't identify with any particular character, he or she may identify with or recognize their surroundings or circumstances. Tewodros Atlaw, who has a master's degree in Ethiopian Language and Folklore, believes this is what makes Adam's works so alluring to some readers, noting that the "setting helps the reader to be in the place and situation that the character is in." Despite a growth in popularity over the past few years, Adam's works can still be difficult to read or understand, as Adam is noted for using complex language. The details, too, can be a challenge to keep track of, as he uses common tropes and story lines in many of his novels. Readers may sometimes feel that there are too many similarities, even repetition, in his works. A reader's confusion may also be as a result of another unusual feature in his novels: footnotes. In fact, his very detailed footnotes can extend up to two or three pages, which may be distracting to readers.

In one novel, Adam's references include opinions and other miscellaneous information. Other works are noted for having alternate endings – a phenomenon that's not common in Ethiopia's literary tradition. His use of footnotes have graduated into what are known as 'Weshmet' ('patches' in Amharic), which are separate stories within the main story of the novel. The unusual way of presenting stories make Adam a writer who created his own style of writing, which many readers admire. Adam says this style is done on purpose and he calls his writing style 'Hitsinawinet'. For Adam, 'Hitsinawinet' is about interconnection, which he feels is important in connecting the reader with the novel as well as connecting people to one another. "Though [people] look unique and separate [on the outside], intelligent analysis shows that people are related...genetically, linguistically and share a plethora of cultural content," says Adam, when expanding his philosophy of interconnection.

Adam said he uses footnotes and other forms of references to give a complete and whole picture of a story from different vantage points. This, he says, is the essence of 'Hitsinawinet'. Tewodros completed his master's thesis in textual analysis, especially intra- and inter-textuality, which are methods used for understanding or interpreting a text. He also presented analysis of Adam's work at the release of Adam's new book 'Mereq' at the Hager Fikir Theater in Addis

Ababa. He argues that Adam wants his readers use these analytical techniques to give a wide and deep explanation about his stories and that he inserts footnotes or what he call 'Weshmet' (patches), for readers to cross-reference for a complete picture of the story. Tewodros says this is called inter-textuality. The intra-textuality method of interpretation in Adam's work according to Tewodros, is the interconnection of independent short stories within a book

Adam has managed to publish eight books in the last decade, two long novels and six shorter works, namely collections of short stories and novellas. Adam refers to the traditional way of writing stories in Ethiopia as linear, a form in which stories are presented in chronological order. The reason why he feels the need to diverge from the traditional way of writing is because linear novels, in which stories are told from one vantage point, are not as realistic as they are usually perceived. He has been noted as saying that storytelling should be more complex than that.

The idea of inter-connectivity is manifested in his works, perhaps most notably among his characters, and not always in good ways. We see in his stories how situations affect the character's personality for better or worst, and personality of those characters to their environment and the people they meet in life. In Adam's works, such connectivity is presented in negative ways more often than not. Many of the characters get victimized by the outside world, which happens deliberately or unintentionally. These victimized characters are usually so passive that they retreat and surrender rather than taking immediate action against physical or psychological attack from their surroundings: family, friends, peers, classmates, community, and politicians. They consume the attack silently and the readers see the adverse effects of the attack after a while. But some scholars suggest that this passivity may be strategic. Tsedey Wondimu, a PhD candidate in Ethiopian Language and Folklore, is currently conducting research on Adam and his works. She told EBR that "the characters' passivity is [towards the] other characters in the novel, but they are active in their minds. We see their judgments, criticisms, hatred, love, and care," which she claims will affect their livelihoods after tragic events.

Sometimes, these characters are seen exhibiting this connectivity in their minds. One such example is seen in a story called 'Etemete Lomishita,' when a character named Tadesse ponders, "It is possible to destroy a country by creating many miserable people." Scholars suggest that this phrase reflects Adam's perspective that we're all connected to one another – in this instance, as countrymen – and may face a similar fate if some citizens are upset.

Adam likens his style of writing to injera, the staple food of Ethiopian cuisine. On his Facebook page, Adam states that "injera is round. It is three-dimensional yet flat. It has holes and yet [is] consistent. It is between solid and non-solid. At first the injera holes...seem to be nomads, and yet they are all interconnected through a maze of miniature tunnels. It has a contrasting structure signified by opposites and yet all contributing to its whole physical 'survival'."

Despite Adam's openness in discussing his artistic motivations and metaphors on social media, scholars agree that it's difficult to draw a specific message from his works. "There are ways we can [extract] possible meanings about each of his works since there is no fictional work without

certain purpose. But I can only guess, though I can't deny there are certain themes that recur in his works with different emphasis and intensity," says Tsedey. Tewodros echoed her thoughts: "I can only guess but can't say his exact intentions." Some disagree with this assessment. Roman Tewolde , 40, is a passionate poetry and literature lover who currently lives in London. Unlike Tsedey and Tewodros, she says Adam doesn't have a specific purpose in each of his works. "I think he wants to make his readers question their lives and the society and political system in which they live. I do not feel he has a specific message to readers but he wants them to question things through his writing and stories," says Roman. Roman says Adam's works are universal and timeless. She even tried to translate some of his works into English. "The content of the stories are not unique to Ethiopia. It is the story of me, you, and anybody else in the world. Just because it is written in Amharic it does not necessarily mean it is a uniquely Ethiopian story. For example, the childhood themes are universal, the love stories are also universal," she says. One could reasonably argue that because Adam's stories have universal themes of humanity, they are timeless. But it's also easy to imbue his stories with more than the text on the page. That is, of course, what he hopes readers do, especially given that he's so taken with the concept of interconnectedness. And if you peel back the layers of Adam's works, you find a writer who seems very concerned about his country. The cultural and legendary myth he presents, nuanced anthropological explanations and the rich vocabulary in his works are perhaps the best indicators of this. Maybe he is trying to save the cultural legacy of his generation in terms of language and humanity. Maybe.