

## Book Review: *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* by Mihret Debebe

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### Introduction

*Yeteqolefebet Qulf* (2005), authored by renowned Ethiopian psychiatrist Dr. Mihret Debebe, is a thought-provoking novel that delves into the complexities of human psychology. Set in both Ethiopia and the United States, this 439-page novel follows the intertwined lives of its main characters, Melaku and Salomé, as they navigate love, loss, and societal challenges. As reviewers, our aim is to provide a review of the novel's major themes, analyze the portrayal of major characters and the thematic significance of the dominant narrative techniques employed by the novelist.

### About the Author

The well-known practicing psychiatrist Dr. Mihret is also the author of two books, *Lela Sew (The Other Person)* published in 2008 E.C. and *Yeteqolefebet Qulf (The Locked Key)* published in 2005 E.C. He graduated from Tikur Anbesa Medical School at Addis Abeba University with a medical degree. After that, he went to the US to pursue psychiatry as his specialty. He currently works as a psychiatrist in both countries. His literary personas address Ethiopian consciousness, social and cultural difficulties, constraints, and potential answers. With his publications, he attempts to mainstream the concepts by utilizing his experience from the field of psychiatry (ETH Biography, 2024).

### Thematic Issues of the Novel

The novel *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* by Mihret Debebe delves into a rich tapestry of thematic issues, weaving together the lives of its characters against the backdrop of Ethiopia and the United States. Let's explore some of these themes:

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- **Mental Health:** The novel underscores the critical importance of mental health for both individuals and society. It portrays the challenges faced by characters dealing with grief, depression, and emotional struggles. Seeking help and support becomes a central theme as characters grapple with their inner demons.
- **Love and Romantic Relationships:** Love takes center stage as the novel explores various facets. From enduring love to the complexities of romantic relationships, the protagonists—Melaku and Salomé—navigate the intricate dance of emotions. Love and hate intertwine, leaving lasting impressions on their hearts.
- **Divorce and Family Dynamics:** The impact of divorce reverberates throughout the narrative. Characters grapple with the emotional toll of separation, adjusting to life after divorce, and the effects it has on both individuals and families. The novel sheds light on the complexities of family dynamics during such transitions.
- **Contrasts and Dichotomies:** The novel juxtaposes various dualities—kindness and evil, openness and treachery, wealth and poverty, hard work and laziness, knowledge and ignorance. These contrasts shape the characters' journeys and contribute to the emotional depth of the story.

In its exploration of these themes, *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* holds readers captive, inviting them to reflect on the human condition and the intricate threads that bind us all.

### **Characters and characterization in the Novel *Yeteqolefebet Qulf***

The novel boasts a diverse cast of characters who contribute to the richness of the story. Salomé and Melaku serve as the main protagonists, with their unique backgrounds and intertwined destinies. Other notable characters include Dr. Sara, who acts as a mentor figure, Dr. Sara's emotionally-driven husband, Markos, who embodies optimism and success through hard work, and Sanksar, a cunning woman driven by personal gain. The novel also introduces Salomé's knowledgeable and thoughtful parents, Solen, Salomé's brother with a mature outlook on life, and Sophia, a gifted artist with a painful past. Additionally, the complex character of Marta adds intrigue and suspense to the narrative, as she navigates love, deceit, and personal growth. The characterization of the

main characters in the novel stated in the above paragraph has been expanded in the paragraphs that follow.

- **Salomé:** One of the main protagonists. Salomé emerges as a resilient and determined young woman, shaped by her unique background. Throughout the novel, she grapples with personal challenges and societal expectations. Her journey involves navigating love, loss, and the intricate complexities of relationships. Salomé's character evolves as she learns to balance strength and vulnerability. Her relatability and compelling nature draw readers into her emotional world.
- **Melaku:** The other main protagonist, intricately linked to Salomé's story. Melaku is portrayed as passionate and driven, carrying his own burdens. His personal struggles and demons shape his character. As his path intertwines with Salomé's, they face obstacles together, ultimately shaping their destinies. Melaku's evolution involves confronting inner conflicts and striving for personal growth.
- **Dr. Sara:** A mentor figure in the novel. Dr. Sara, a compassionate and knowledgeable psychiatrist, provides guidance and support to both Salomé and Melaku. Her wisdom and empathy play a crucial role in their lives. Dr. Sara's character underscores the importance of seeking help and understanding mental health.
- **Markos:** Dr. Sara's emotionally-driven husband. Markos embodies optimism and success through hard work. His character adds depth to the narrative, reflecting the complexities of relationships.
- **Sophia:** A gifted artist with a painful past. Sophia's character adds layers to the novel. Her struggles and creativity resonate with readers.
- **Marta:** A complex character navigating love, deceit, and personal growth. Marta's actions keep readers guessing, contributing to the novel's suspense.

In this intricate web of characters, *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* weaves a tapestry of emotions, relationships, and human experiences. These main characters, with their unique personalities and journeys, contribute to the richness and depth of the novel *Yeteqolefebet Qulf*. Their interactions and developments explore various aspects of human nature, relationships, and personal growth.

## Narrative Techniques of the Novel

*Yeteqolefebet Qulf* by Mihret Debebe employs various narrative techniques that enhance the storytelling and engage the reader. Let's explore these techniques:

- **Multiple Perspectives:** The novel unfolds through the eyes of different characters. By providing varying viewpoints, readers gain insights into the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of each individual. This technique adds depth, allowing us to understand the interconnected lives and experiences of the characters. We see the world through their unique lenses.
- **Flashbacks and Non-linear Storytelling:** Mihret Debebe skillfully weaves in flashbacks and non-linear storytelling. These glimpses into the characters' pasts reveal crucial information. As readers piece together the puzzle of their lives, layers of complexity emerge. The narrative becomes a tapestry of memories and present circumstances.
- **Vivid Imagery and Sensory Details:** The author's descriptive prose paints vivid pictures of the novel's settings. Whether it's the vibrant streets of Ethiopia or the bustling urban landscapes of the United States, readers are immersed. Through evocative language, we feel the textures, hear the sounds, and see the sights. It's a sensory journey alongside the characters.
- **Interweaving Personal and Societal Issues:** The novel deftly blends personal struggles with broader societal issues. Themes like mental health, love, and social inequalities resonate deeply. By exploring these connections, the narrative reflects the complexities of being human. Readers are invited to reflect on their own lives and society.

Overall, Mihret Debebe's narrative techniques in *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* contribute to the novel's thought-provoking nature and engaging storytelling. Through multiple perspectives, non-linear storytelling, vivid imagery, and thematic exploration, the author creates a compelling narrative that captivates the reader and invites them to delve into the complexities of the human psyche and the intricacies of human relationships.

## Conclusion

*Yeteqolefebet Qulf* by Mihret Debebe is a captivating and thought-provoking novel that delves into the complexities of human psychology, love, and societal challenges. Through its diverse cast of characters and intricate storytelling techniques, the novel explores themes such as mental health, love and relationships, divorce and family dynamics, kindness and evil, openness and treachery, wealth and poverty, hard work and laziness, and knowledge and ignorance.

Debebe's narrative techniques, including multiple perspectives, flashbacks, and vivid imagery, enhance the storytelling and immerse the reader in the characters' lives and experiences. The weaving together of personal and societal issues adds depth and relevance to the narrative, inviting readers to reflect on universal themes and the intricacies of human nature.

The well-developed characters, such as Salomé, Melaku, Dr. Sara, and Marta, contribute to the richness of the story and offer different perspectives on life, relationships, and personal growth. Their journeys and interactions create tension and suspense, keeping readers engaged throughout the novel.

Overall, *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* is a compelling and beautifully written novel that explores the complexities of the human experience. It delves into the depths of human emotions, challenges societal norms, and offers a profound reflection on love, loss, and personal transformation. Mihret Debebe's masterful storytelling and insightful exploration of themes make *Yeteqolefebet Qulf* a highly recommended read for anyone seeking a thought-provoking and emotionally resonant literary experience.

### **About the authors**

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Ayenew Guadu (PhD) is an assistant professor of Literature at Bahir Dar University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature. He was an Editor in Chief of the **journal Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication (EJLCC)**. Currently, he is Graduate, Research, and Community Service Vice Dean of Faculty of Humanities. He has different publication peer-reviewed journals.

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Dawit Dibekulu is a PhD candidate at Bahir Dar University. He is a member of the Reviewer Board for some international journals (International Journal of Psychology and Counselling, International Journal of Learning, Teaching, and Educational Research, African

Educational Research Journal, Journal of Engineering Research and Reports, International Research Journals, International Journal of English and Literature and he is an Editorial Board Member of PIOS ONE. He has published articles on many peer-reviewed journals and presented some papers in various conference.

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