

Spring 2015

Presentation on Maaza Mengiste's Beneath the Lion's Gaze Day 3

Andrew Strombeck

Wright State University - Main Campus, andrew.strombeck@wright.edu

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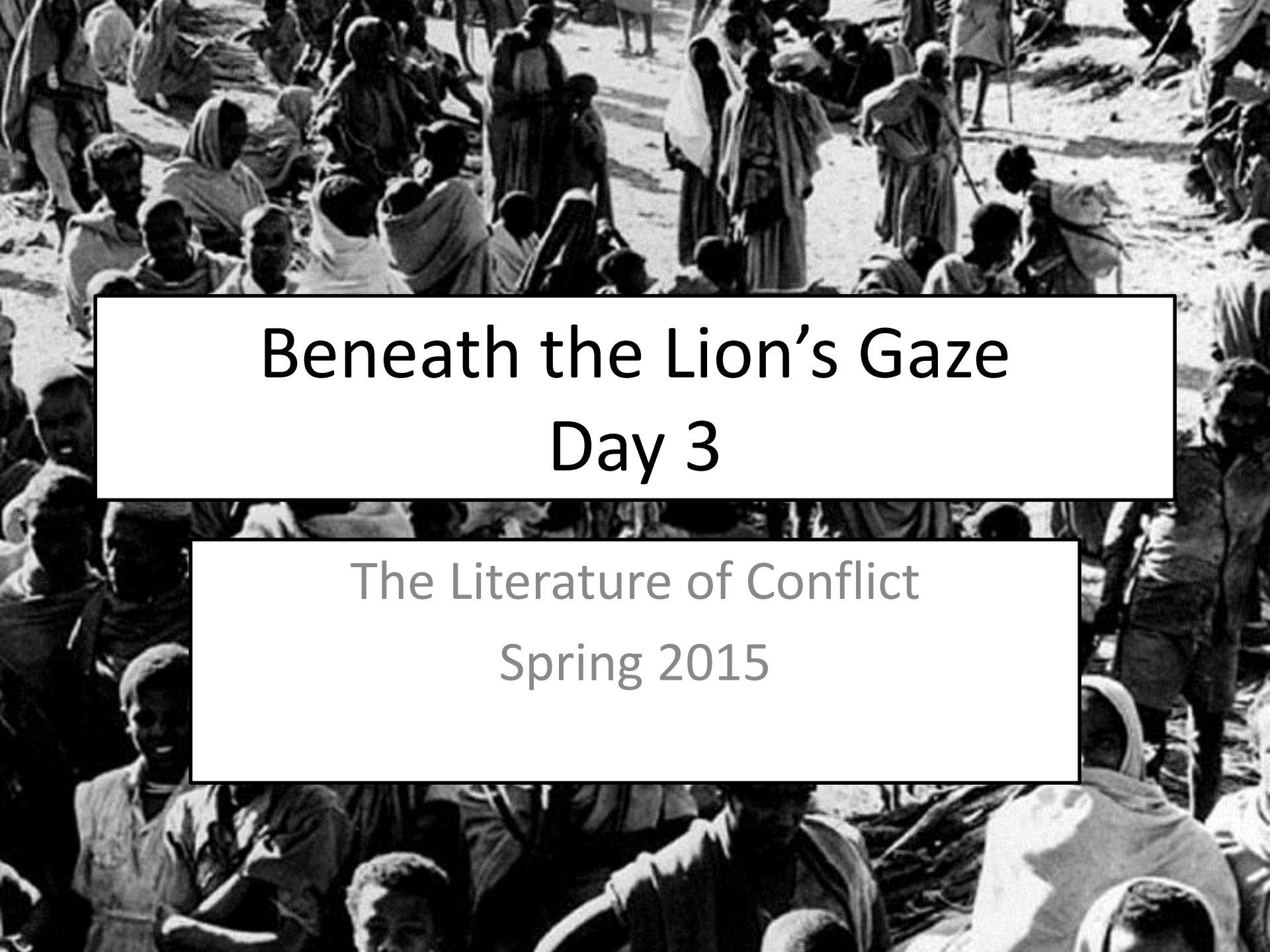


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Beneath the Lion's Gaze

Day 3

The Literature of Conflict
Spring 2015

Today

- Derg and part II
- Shift in tone Part II
- Actions characters take against Derg
- Hailu experience prison



Form of this novel

- Whereas *The Surrendered* moved between timeframes and characters, this novel stays in a single timeframe, but moves among different spaces in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Ethiopia.

History Part II

- Communist Derg (allied with Cuba and Soviet Union) ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991
- 100,000 people killed during transformation country into Soviet-style workers' state.
- Mengistu regime would dead bodies on streets as a warning.
- Most of characters we see are opposed to Derg, with the exceptions of Lily and Mickey

To what does this passage refer?

- In 1-2 sentences, tell me what “breaking into two” means in terms of part II of the novel.
- “Through the curtains, trees shook shadows onto the hospital lawn. There was the sound of leaves rustling in the wind, the blaring horns of traffic, and the shouts of farmers and vendors. Life outside these walls went on as always. Inside, it seemed the world had shifted off its axis and was breaking into two” (122).
- Sara: “This revolution [...] is turning everything upside down” (213)

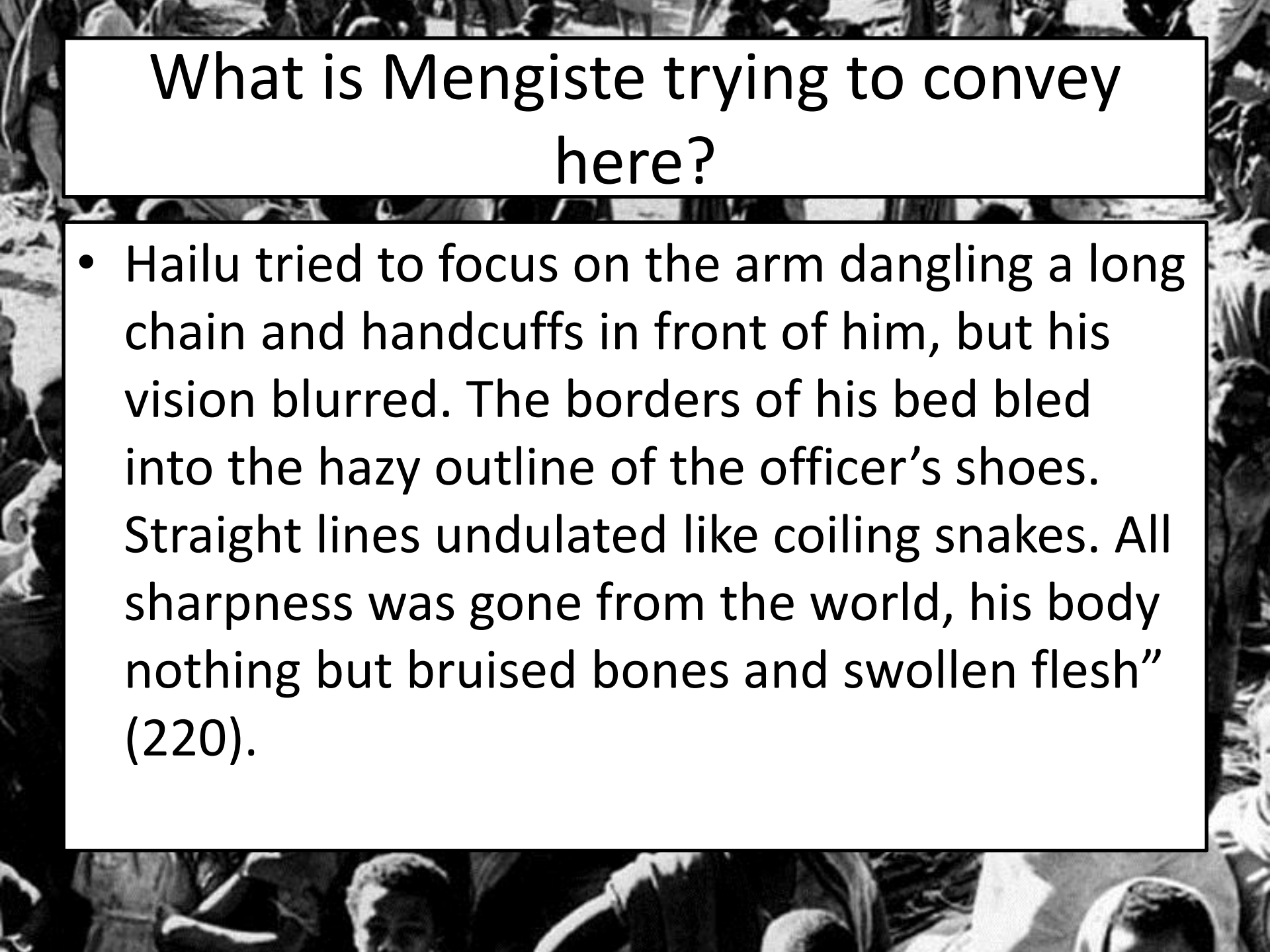


Part II

- What adjectives would you use to describe the dominant feeling in this part of the novel?
- What scenes does Mengiste use to convey this feeling?

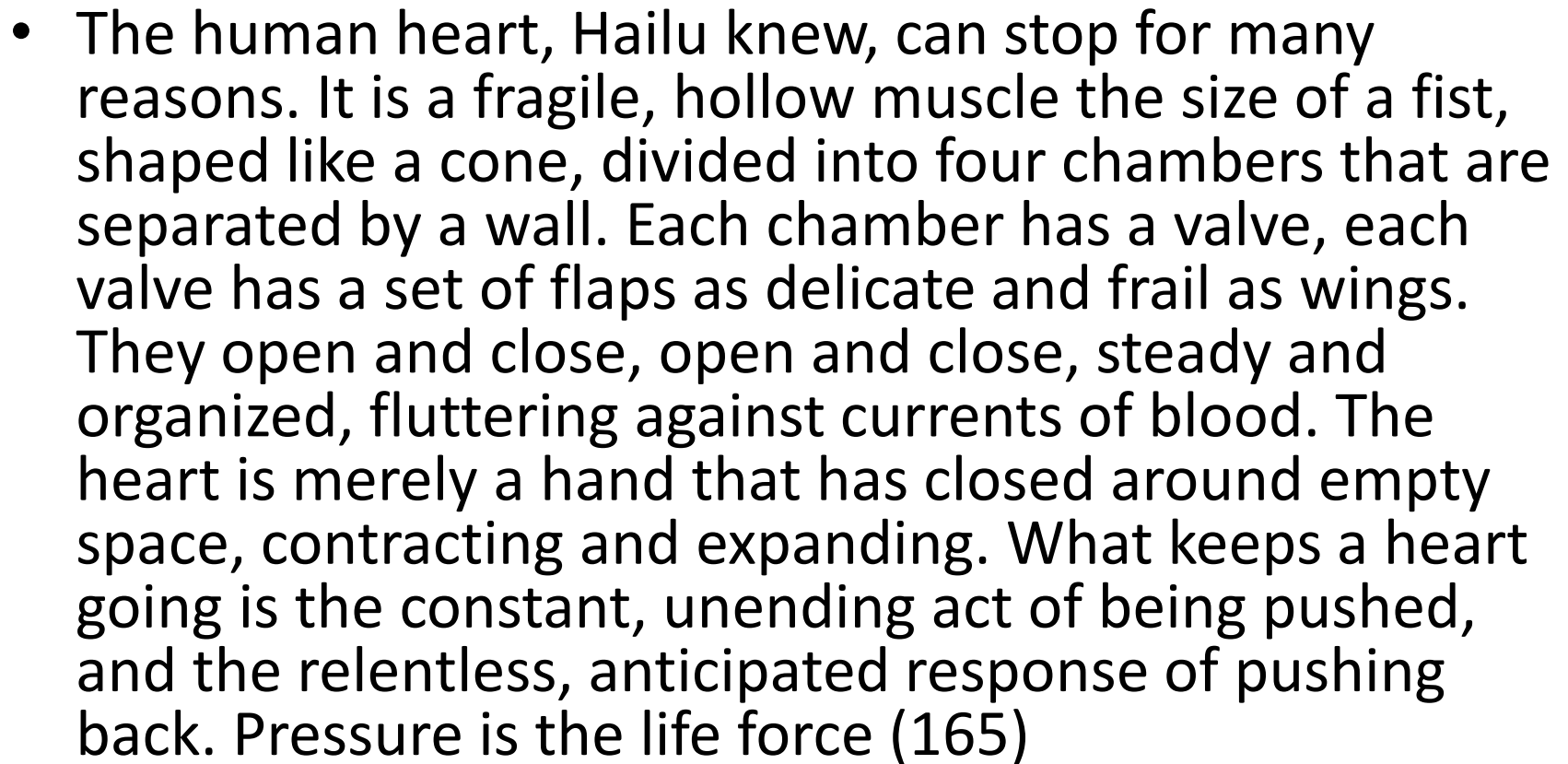
Key Actions

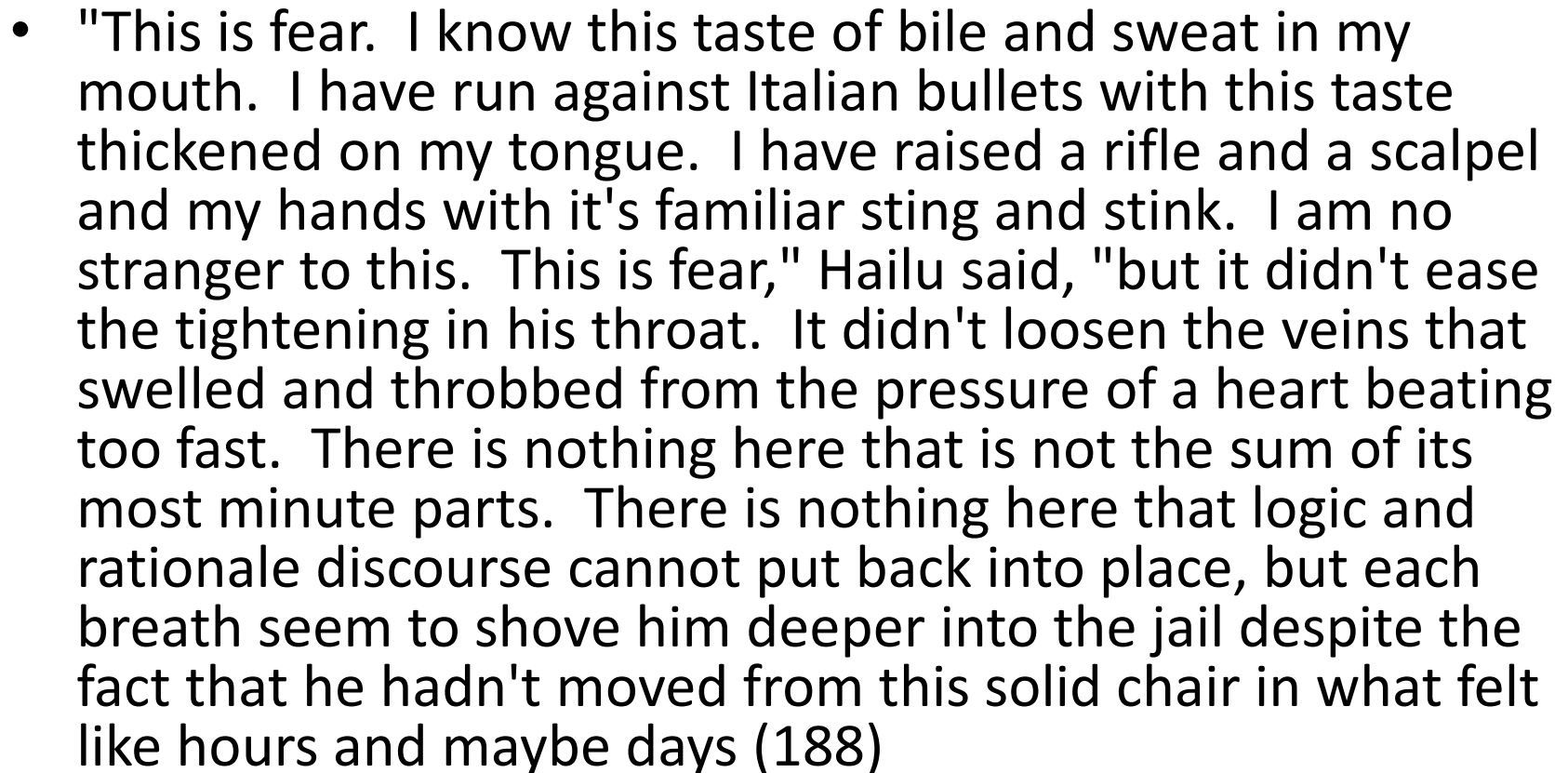
- Dawit dragging body away (180, 184)
- Hailu giving girl cyanide pill (166)
- Why do these characters make these choices?
- How do these actions change the plot?
- Why do you think Mengiste uses young girls as the locus for each act?



What is Mengiste trying to convey here?

- Hailu tried to focus on the arm dangling a long chain and handcuffs in front of him, but his vision blurred. The borders of his bed bled into the hazy outline of the officer's shoes. Straight lines undulated like coiling snakes. All sharpness was gone from the world, his body nothing but bruised bones and swollen flesh" (220).

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- The human heart, Hailu knew, can stop for many reasons. It is a fragile, hollow muscle the size of a fist, shaped like a cone, divided into four chambers that are separated by a wall. Each chamber has a valve, each valve has a set of flaps as delicate and frail as wings. They open and close, open and close, steady and organized, fluttering against currents of blood. The heart is merely a hand that has closed around empty space, contracting and expanding. What keeps a heart going is the constant, unending act of being pushed, and the relentless, anticipated response of pushing back. Pressure is the life force (165)

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- "This is fear. I know this taste of bile and sweat in my mouth. I have run against Italian bullets with this taste thickened on my tongue. I have raised a rifle and a scalpel and my hands with it's familiar sting and stink. I am no stranger to this. This is fear," Hailu said, "but it didn't ease the tightening in his throat. It didn't loosen the veins that swelled and throbbed from the pressure of a heart beating too fast. There is nothing here that is not the sum of its most minute parts. There is nothing here that logic and rationale discourse cannot put back into place, but each breath seem to shove him deeper into the jail despite the fact that he hadn't moved from this solid chair in what felt like hours and maybe days (188)

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