

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Brief History of Illustrated Children's Literature for Ethiopian Children**

#### **Introduction**

In Ethiopia, the earliest examples of illustrated books produced for children go back over one hundred years but the proliferation has not been as rapid as in other parts of the world. This study focuses on the relatively short history and background to the limited production of illustrated books for Ethiopian children.

The methodology has included gathering oral responses from people of different ages talking about their earliest memories of illustrated books and the stories that they heard as children. Although Ethiopia does not have a vast range of printed children's books, its oral storytelling tradition is huge and diverse across the different nations, nationalities and peoples. Some of these stories have now been put in print, sometimes produced for an audience outside Ethiopia. There have been a number of books and articles written specifically on children's literature in Ethiopia which have also been used, as well as a variety of actual Ethiopian children's books dating back to 1946. Early literature included Yaned Gebremichael's *Sile Insesat Agelgiot Lehisana Bereket*, Kebede Michael's stories<sup>1</sup> and *Afincho* (meaning with a big nose), the first illustrated Amharic translation of *Pinocchio*.

This chapter will trace the history and the impact of children's illustrated literature on Ethiopian children. It will describe the current situation and, hopefully, indicate the future potential. The development from the oral storytelling traditions that still survive today to the access to printed materials from other countries is explored along with the introduction of illustrated literature for school children's texts. Currently there is a growing number of authors and illustrators from Ethiopia and elsewhere producing illustrated children's literature in a range of Ethiopian languages, as well as English, specifically for Ethiopian children both here and in the Diaspora.

## **The history of children's illustrated literature outside Ethiopia**

In Britain there is a history of children's publishing dating back to before the eighteenth century. The proliferation of books and other reading materials produced for children, however, did not happen until the last century. The earliest books for children were designed to inform, such as texts to teach them spelling. Children first learnt to read by studying their alphabet and the more affluent would have owned a 'hornbook' which was a printed board with the alphabet and part of the bible displayed. This appears little different to the way that Amharic speaking Ethiopians were taught their own alphabet up to relatively recent times.<sup>2</sup> The early religious tracts which appeared on both sides of the Atlantic from 17<sup>th</sup> Century aimed to teach the young to read at the same time as instructing them on the consequences of sin. In Ethiopia, where the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox and Muslim faiths have a strong following, there has been a link between literature and religion and church schools continue to play an important role in teaching children of some families to read.

There was a marked increase in Britain's population during the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The market for literature grew as schools developed to teach not only the affluent but also the labourers' children the basics of reading and writing resulting in literacy levels across the country rising during this same period. At the same time more families could afford to purchase reading material. Chapbooks were booklets distributed by peddlers in Britain between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century, published for all ages they included different genres including the popular folk tales. Publishing for children gained importance, particularly through entrepreneurs such as John Newbery who, during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, recognised the need to invest in this market.<sup>3</sup>

Illustrating books was considered when the authors identified that: '[c]hildren (even from their Infancy almost) are delighted with Pictures, and willingly please their eyes with

these sights.’ as Comenius, a seventeenth century German wrote.<sup>4</sup> The idea that children should enjoy their early years was beginning to be understood by others who recognised how important it was. Educationalists, such as John Locke and William Petty, identified the need for learning to be made more interesting and for books to be pleasurable. ‘The quality of illustration was poor, but the chapbook did provide them with illustrations which, although crude by modern standards, were graphic and boldly drawn...’<sup>5</sup> The development of reading material for children in Ethiopia also appears to have followed this progression at a later time.

As well as religious texts, early subject matter included writings on appropriate behaviour and fables. The subject matter then became more varied with popular classics such as stories by authors including Daniel Defoe, nursery rhymes, which originated from many sources including the barracks and were often crude and cruel, as well as the fables and fairy tales from across the world which were translated and illustrated. Norton describes how, through ‘migration, trade, and warfare’ oral traditions of the different cultures influenced each other from the earliest times.<sup>6</sup> While such traditions have almost disappeared from the so-called ‘developed world’, there is still a culture of oral storytelling in other countries such as Ethiopia. Many of these fables include a moral message, thus providing education as well as enjoyment. The published children’s literature which began emerge in Ethiopia in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was often based on the oral tales that had been, and continue to be, passed down generations and across families.

The emergence of books of fables in Britain and elsewhere in the developed world over two centuries earlier had led to an increase in illustrated books for children. Henry Cole, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, produced books of fables which were lavishly illustrated by artists such as John Linnell.<sup>7</sup> They were among the first books to have colour-printed illustrations. Fantasy writing also developed, with animal fantasies popularised through Aesop’s fables, Hans Christian Anderson’s imaginative tales translated from Danish and, in Italy, *The*

*Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. A translation of this famous story into Amharic was to be one of Ethiopia's first illustrated children's books.<sup>8</sup>

As the Industrial Revolution gathered pace in Britain, one genre that emerged was that of contemporary life in the country. Books described the conditions that the poor lived in and the punishments that young children endured – a life far removed from that of the middle class readers. Yet children in that period did not experience the comforts that are taken for granted today such as light and warmth in the home. Again the comparison with Ethiopia is evident because, as a result of the poverty experienced in the country, relatively few children have the benefits of electric lighting or access to books and space to study. Many children, while they may have the skills to read and some access to learning material through school, are denied a range of books through library services and, if they do find reading material, may have to read in unsuitable conditions. A large part of the rural population and many living in poverty in towns live in a windowless hut shared by the whole family and, for many, this lifestyle seems unlikely to change.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when bookshops began to offer a range of children's literature and chapbooks, access to children's books in Britain had been through peddlers. They would offer slim volumes at a very low cost and publishers emerged across the country to meet local demand. Cost was always a major factor in limiting the publication of illustrated materials and remains a barrier to the development of a children's book industry in Ethiopia and other sub-Saharan African countries. Many literate adults in Ethiopia would be able to describe the book that they were first introduced to as such resources were generally inaccessible.

Fitsame Teferra recalled the first books she remembers being given as a child including an Amharic version of Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* and *Mushirawa Ayit* (The Mouse Bride). Yihenew Worku showed the author his collection of early Russian illustrated Amharic stories which included *Who Says Meeow* by Suteyev, *One Elephant* by Alexander Kuprin, illustrated

by Borovsky and published by Progress, and *About Lenin* written by Ulyanova and illustrated by Rakutin. Writers, such as Tesfaye Gebre-Mariam Hailu recalled reading Kebede Michael's stories.<sup>9</sup> Where countries use more than one written language and have relatively small print runs, the costs of publications are multiplied. Ethiopia has over eighty spoken languages and at least three major written languages apart from English, the language of secondary education. English is also used for a number of publications and for some primary school textbooks.

In the United States of America, during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the children's literature was predominantly that imported from Britain but, particularly following the war of 1812, more American written books emerged and the history of English media publishing diverged. The characters of American literature reflected the children living in that part of the world. The same was evident in Australasia during a later period. The importance of context and the need to provide stories that children could relate to was recognised in British colonies throughout the world at different times depending on their progress in economy and education. For example, Muir describes the situation in Australia where:

...as children's books flourished in nineteenth century England and were being produced cheaply and in large numbers as printing became more mechanised, they were widely imported into the colonies. There was, therefore, little incentive to write and publish Australian books. During the first hundred years of settlement Australia was occasionally the setting for children's books, but these were almost all published overseas, written and illustrated by English and occasionally other European writers and artists.<sup>10</sup>

In British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa the transformation is still taking place. Ethiopia was a country that was never colonised although Britain had played a significant role in Ethiopian history. It experienced a few years occupation by the Italians between 1936 and 1941 but, during much of the long reign of its emperor, Haile Selassie I, any children's books which appeared were often imported from Britain. Prior to 1974, when he was deposed, Haile Selassie I personally presented English books as gifts to Ethiopian students

including, for example, *The Practical Encyclopedia for Children* published by Odhams in 1948.<sup>11</sup> During this imperial regime the Ministry of Education also produced school text books with support from UNESCO and the Ministry of Overseas Development in Britain.<sup>12</sup>

The British colonial past had an impact on the content of books in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century including children's stories. Land and peoples across Africa, Asia and Australasia had become subject to British rule and the exploits of adventurers such as David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley. There were newspaper items which had an influence on adventure stories by authors such as R.L.Stevenson, author of *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* (which was produced initially as a serial in a boy's paper). Ethiopian children's literature shows some evidence of writing in this genre but it does not appear to have developed a tradition of adventure and fantasy novels or books focusing on school life which emerged in other parts of the world at the same time as the adventure stories. Parents and teachers in Britain and other countries in Europe and North America started to recognize the importance of entertainment through literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Alice through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll and *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley were among the earliest fantasy novels which were followed later by works such as the Narnia novels by C.S.Lewis.

The rise in educational opportunities in Britain, particularly following the Education Act of 1870 and the subsequent increase in the number of literate youngsters, and the rise in the number of boarding school students, resulted in a proliferation of books and magazines with school tales as the subject matter. These included *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Dr Thomas Arnold and the 'penny dreadfuls' with serialized stories aimed at the less affluent. They continued in popularity with Enid Blyton's books for all ages and the content of the periodicals, *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper* which emerged in the latter quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and ran until the mid 1960s. More recently J.K.Rowlings' *Harry Potter*

books, read in Ethiopia by accomplished readers as well as across the rest of the world, combine these three genres of fantasy, adventure and school. By the 21st century the number of books available for English speakers in the western world is enormous<sup>13</sup> but Ethiopia's contribution to children's illustrated literature is still small though no statistics exist to provide evidence of its resources.

In the rest of Africa the situation appears similar to Ethiopia with a dearth of publications in local languages and a history of imported books from the nations which had previously colonized them. Edwards and Ngwaru identified a limited number of books in South African languages and noted the alternative views towards translations of books for younger children, some seeing them as: 'likely to be at odds with the children's lived experience. Others feel that the main issue is to ensure that children have access to a wide range of reading material in African languages and that translation offers one means to this end.'<sup>14</sup> Another issue they raise is that of local language books being produced predominantly for the schools market, an issue that currently affects Ethiopia where recent World Bank Funding for textbook development has encouraged Regional Educational Bureaus to produce supplementary readers.<sup>15</sup> In a continent where very small incomes are earned by the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans and a culture of reading has yet to develop, the market for children's books is likely to remain small for the foreseeable future with the majority of publications aimed at schools.<sup>16</sup>

### **The history of children's literature in Ethiopia**

In a description of the lives of children today Dr Heather Montgomery stated that: 'children have few responsibilities, their lives are characterised by play not work, school not paid labour, family rather than public life and consumption instead of production.'<sup>17</sup> While this may be true of all developed countries and some families in the developing world, for the

majority of Ethiopian children it is not the case. The lives of many children there bear no resemblance to that of their contemporaries in Britain, the rest of Europe and North America. While school is now becoming accessible for the vast majority, many will not begin their education until they are seven and more than half will not proceed to secondary education, particularly females, as this report indicates:

According to the JRM (*Joint Review Mission Draft Report 2005*), the most current participation rates in Primary education in Ethiopia are 79.2% with secondary education (Grades 9 – 10) at 27% (34.2% for males and 19.6% for females). Obviously there are wide regional differences, particularly between urban and rural areas. There are still high drop out rates (22.8% for Grade 1 and across the primary sector higher for boys than girls – 14.8% and 14.2% respectively) but these are showing signs of decreasing.<sup>18</sup>

The Millennium Goal of full primary school participation by 2015 is still an aspiration for Ethiopia; childhood expectations in the developed world are far removed from those of Ethiopian youngsters. If children do not develop literacy skills or gain access to a range of books, literature cannot develop. Thus the children's publishing market in Ethiopia today is small and limited yet, when it started to develop back in the 1950s, educational opportunities for children were even more restricted and literacy rates were minimal. Sixty years on there appears to be some signs of progress and reasons for optimism.

Across Africa people have passed on their folk tales, songs, myths and poetry from one generation to the next by word of mouth, with no written sources. The oral storytelling tradition was, and remains, important in Ethiopian society particularly among certain cultures such as the Oromo. The common belief that when an old man dies a library is lost persists in this region of Ethiopia as in other parts of Africa. Sutherland and Arbuthnot recognized the oral tradition of Africa with: 'tales pertinent to contemporary life'<sup>19</sup> and Slim and Thompson identified how, in Africa: 'many communities have specialist narrators of local traditions... and descriptions of major events such as battles, invasions, famines and drought.'<sup>20</sup> In books such as Schlomo's *Ethiopian Folk Tales* and Laird's more recent compilations and her



contribution to the website [www.ethiopianfolktales.com](http://www.ethiopianfolktales.com), there is reference to the source of the tales. Schlomo explained how the stories were told by students from across the country. ‘For generations, stories such as these, with their perceptive wit and useful lessons, have been used to entertain and instruct young children.’<sup>21</sup> In the introduction to Laird’s collection of stories Wolde Gossa Tadesse wrote: ‘The stories we have in this book... are as old as the societies that narrate them.’<sup>22</sup> In an earlier book Laird describes how: ‘...in Ethiopia great treasuries of stories still live in people’s heads and have never been written down. Old people sit together in the evenings, when the day’s work is done, and tell each other tales that were already old hundreds of years ago.’<sup>23</sup>

Seifu Metaferia studied the oral tradition in Ethiopia, identifying the age of seven as important as the age when: ‘his fantasy enjoys tales most.’<sup>24</sup> It is at this age that the boy (there is no reference to girls) attends priest school, starts fasting, herds calves and lambs and takes on responsibilities for the family. The narrator of stories, often a grandmother according to Seifu, would sometimes sit with children under a tree during the day and at the end of the day storytelling. Many years earlier Enrico Cerulli had undertaken research into the folk tales and songs of the Oromo people (Galla) of Southern Ethiopia where the prose was handed down from father to son. Courlander and Leslau also considered the source of the stories they collected in their 1950 publication:

In the old days, perhaps, it was different. But now the tales you hear in the villages of the Amharas you may also hear among the Gallas and the Guragés, and even beyond the Ethiopian borders in the land of the Shilluks and Dinkas. For they have been carried back and forth for centuries in the migrations of cattle herders, by camel caravans, and by the traders who cross the mountains with bracelets, knives, and spears to sell.<sup>25</sup>

They question the source of the stories, suggesting that they may have come from Congo, the Sudan, India or Arabia. Their own anthology, published in America, was possibly the first written source of these stories.

Unlike many other African countries, Ethiopia has a long association with books dating back to the sixth century BC and the use of the Sabeian alphabet.<sup>26</sup> Henze points to parallels with South Arabian writing with evidence proving links between the South Arabian kingdoms and northern Ethiopia from 1000 BC.<sup>27</sup> It was Christianity, adopted by Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, which led to the development of literature with books recording hymns and beliefs. Although, according to Fogg, very little Ethiopian painting survives from before the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, there is a rich variety of illustrated manuscripts surviving from this period. In describing one 15<sup>th</sup> Century book of prayers written in Ge'ez in black and red ink and illustrated with: 'abstracted paintings in rich earth colours,' he explained that: '[f]ollowing an ancient tradition, Ethiopians used small, easy to carry books for spiritual and bodily protection.'<sup>28</sup> Ethiopian binding, dating from these early times, has survived till today and has spread across the world and influenced modern bookbinding techniques.

One of the earliest children's books to appear in Ethiopia was the fully illustrated *Coloured Picture Bible for Abyssinian Children*,<sup>29</sup> translated into Amharic by one of Emperor Theodros's captives, the Reverend Martin Fladd who had spent nearly sixty years living in Ethiopia. It was illustrated by Richard André (a pseudonym of English artist, William Roger Snow) and published by one of the missionary societies, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in 1886.

Books might have been owned by some of the relatively few literate people in the country but in Ethiopia, unlike the developed world, literacy rates were still low in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Henze surmised that by 1941 it had: 'probably not exceeded five per cent, primarily resulting from the work of traditional church schools.'<sup>30</sup> At this time, following the Italian occupation, the Emperor had decided that English was to be the official second language of the country, a decision that would influence the literature.

From this period onwards opportunities for education slowly increased. The HaHu website<sup>31</sup> describes the early history of children's illustrated books including those which appeared in schools from this time. It states that one of the first books to be published around 1941/2 was Kebede Mikael's volumes consisting of tales, fables and other texts in prose and verse. Later, *Enqilf Leminie* by Balamabaras Mahteme-Selassie Wode-Meskel was published by the Ministry of Education in 1959/60 to be used as instructional material. Another of the earliest illustrated children's book to be published in Ethiopia in Amharic was Pinocchio, produced in two volumes in 1952 in the Ethiopian calendar (1960 in our calendar) and translated from the original by Lema Feyessa.

By this time Peace Corps volunteers had arrived from the United States and teachers from countries, including India, were hired to teach in secondary schools. Although there had been a small amount of fiction written in Amharic by Ethiopians prior to the Italian invasion of 1935, this increased during the 1960s with one author, Abbe Gubeny, who: 'wrote historical novels that were eagerly read by young people'<sup>32</sup> but who was reputedly sent into exile by the Emperor Haile Selassie after he wrote a novel, *Aliwelledim*, about a fetus that did not wish to be born in Ethiopia because of the shortcomings of the country.

The Oxford University Press published books in English for Ethiopian schools during the 1970s, some of which were written by Richard Sherrington and illustrated by Eric Robson whose illustrated works continue to be published in Ethiopia. Adventure stories, such as *Adventure in Addis Ababa* and *The Treasure of Lebna Dengel*, developed from a series shown on Ethiopian television and were printed in Ethiopia.

Geoffrey Last,<sup>33</sup> an advisor in the Ethiopian Ministry of Education in 1982, described Ethiopia in 1974, the year when the emperor was deposed by a revolution and replaced by a military government, as a:

...society which relied on memory for the accumulation of culture and on the spoken work for communications. In this year the total population was estimated at 26.6

million of these, 93% were illiterate...it has been estimated that a maximum of half a million, or less than 2% of the 10 plus population were equipped with at least a grade eight education...<sup>34</sup>

According to Last, under the new government a literacy campaign aimed to raise the educational standards of children to ensure that there would be a primary school place for every seven year old by 1987. It was intended that by 1992 all young people between the ages of 7 and 12 would be able to access six years of regular school. It was also expected to eradicate illiteracy among adults. He reported that from 1979, when the Literacy Campaign started, over 23 million booklets had been printed and the concept of Community Reading Rooms had been realized with over 4,000 being constructed across Ethiopia. He also added that: ‘...as far as I am aware, there is no book available in Amharic for the general market which reflects the interests of the young readers...’<sup>35</sup>

The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education at that time described children’s books prior to the revolution as: ‘...mostly imported ones and naturally inculcated in the child alien attitudes, values and norms. The acquisition of skills, competencies and basic knowledge, which the country desperately needed was given practically no emphasis.’<sup>36</sup>

Their educational objectives focused on production, scientific research and socialist consciousness. ‘In like manner, books which reflect the objectives set above have been prepared and disseminated to all schools.’<sup>37</sup> At that time a number of books printed in Russia and Germany were translated into Amharic for the Ethiopian audience.<sup>38</sup>

By the time their goal of full literacy and primary education for all seven to twelve year olds should have been realized in 1992, the government had been ousted and the regime was replaced by the current Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The goals of the military government in respect of primary education and literacy had not been met and, in many respects, the country’s education was no further on than it had been in 1974.

Even after the change of government in 1992, publishing did not increase noticeably.

Michael Daniel Ambatchew wrote that:

In a recent survey of the challenges in publishing children's literature in Ethiopia, it was pointed out that the Ethiopian government's support to children's literature seems to have actually declined over the last fifteen years (quoting Tesfaye, *Challenges in Publishing Children's literature in Ethiopia* 2004)...Currently, Government, NGOs, individual authors and groups of authors have been involved in the production of storybooks, however, the total production of title of books has been estimated to be less than 100 (Tesfaye 2004) throughout Ethiopian history. In fact, due to the lack of information and publicity, the actual number could be higher. Still in comparison to the approximately 38,000,000 children in the country, these books will definitely be insufficient to cope with the variety of tastes of the children, assuming that the books are all currently in print and could be distributed all over the country.<sup>39</sup>

He also noted the concerns of Testa Abebe and Shibeshi Lemma in their 1997 paper, *Assessment of Children's Books in Addis Abeba: Needs and Prospects for Publication*, which highlighted the shortage of children's authors, illustrators and book designers. This was reiterated by Shibeshi in 2004.<sup>40</sup>

Yet there were NGOs working in the field to produce books including CODE, the Canadian Organization for Development through Education, which had over 60 reading rooms, produced books and helped train teachers and librarians. Another was the SCNE, Save the Children Norway - Ethiopia, which translated books and opened Alternative Basic Education Centres. Another active charity was EBCEF, the Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Foundation, now known as Ethiopia Reads, which was founded by Yohannes Gebregiorgis with the support of Jane Kurtz. It continues to promote reading through an annual reading week and, since 2005, has presented the Golden Kuraz Award each year for a book written and illustrated for Ethiopian children. It also publishes books in English and Ethiopian languages but its main role is the development and support of libraries for Ethiopian children including a donkey library in Awassa.<sup>41</sup>

Michael Daniel Ambatchew describes the more recent history more optimistically identifying: 'a noticeable change in the quality and format of children's books. The

availability of modern printing machines, cheaper electronic devices and better transportation and communication to the outside world, are all beginning to impact upon the quality of children's books in Ethiopia.<sup>42</sup> There is an increased awareness as school libraries are recipients of a better range of quality materials, bookshops with sections devoted to children open up in different towns and textbook development recognizes the need for better quality, contextual resources. In June 2009, an Ethiopian newspaper, the Addis Fortune, reported on the bid for textbook revision to cover every subject for each grade quoting that:

The former textual and teacher-centred approach would be replaced by a teacher-directed and student-centred one that entails active role of the pupils.<sup>43</sup>

While this vast project may improve school textbooks and raise educational ability among Ethiopian students, it does not guarantee any improvement in illustrated children's literature or a change in reading culture. However, there is a growing number of organisations, authors and illustrators eager to expand this market and try new forms of publication including magazines and comic strips.

The existing authors include novelists like Shibeshi Lemma Debalkie, born in 1942, who was introduced to children's literature in his mid-teens but exposed to many oral stories in his childhood. Andarge Mesfin, who was born in 1951, was exposed to literature in his childhood in the traditional church school but did not start writing for children until his forties. Gebeyehu Ayele GebreMeskel, of a similar age, remembers reading Kebede Michael as a child as does Tesfaye Gebre-Mariam Hailu, who has written over thirty books and is now a lecturer in literature at Addis Ababa University. Samrawit Araya-Medhin Mersha was born in 1972 and brought up on Amharic translations of *Pinnocchio* and the *Arabian Nights*. Samuel Lijalem Hassan remembers reading *Mammo Killo*, while Yewoineshet Masresha Hailu, born in 1957, read biblical stories and prayers to her grandmother from the age of eight.

Michael Daniel Ambatchew, born in Moscow but brought up in Ethiopia, has well over thirty stories published and has delivered a number of papers on Ethiopian and African children's literature and other books including the compilation of biographies of twelve of the thirty plus Ethiopian children's authors who live in the country.<sup>44</sup> Alula Pankhurst, an anthropologist, has lived in Addis Ababa for most of his life and speaks fluent Amharic. He was one of the founding members of the Writers for Ethiopian Children and has written a number of stories for the bilingual anthologies which this group has produced.<sup>45</sup>

Yohannes Gebregeorgis, an Ethiopian who emigrated to the United States in 1981 but returned to Ethiopia in 2002, was responsible for promoting children's literature in Ethiopia in different ways including founding a children's library in Addis Ababa and publishing children's books in Ethiopia.<sup>46</sup>

There are others, not Ethiopian, who write about Ethiopia and for an Ethiopian audience, including those in the Diaspora. They include Jane Kurtz who moved to Ethiopia as a young child with her family and spent many years there. She has written a number of books including some about Ethiopia such as her own version of *Fire on the Mountain*. In her activities with Ethiopia Reads she continues to encourage reading in Ethiopia. Elizabeth Laird went to work in Ethiopia in her twenties and returned in the 1990s to travel round the country collecting folk stories from traditional storytellers for a British Council project. Frances Somers Cocks was another British visitor who discovered a link between a young slave and a famous Russian which led her to write the books on Abraham Hannibal illustrated by Eric Robson, the British artist who maintained a close association with Ethiopia.

As more children become literate<sup>47</sup> and as the quality of their education improves, a reading culture should emerge and stimulate a growing demand for story books including illustrated publications. There is a growing interest in writing for Ethiopian children and one would assume that, as more young people nurture a love of books, this would further develop

a reading culture but the situation in other African countries seems far from positive.

Edwards and Ngwaru cite the situation in South Africa where: '[a] question of particular concern is how to promote reading with pre-school children.'<sup>48</sup> A number of factors will determine this market growth including the part played by publishers who, according to Edwards and Ngwaru: 'need to look critically at the content of the materials they are producing, their methods of reaching huge untapped markets and their pricing strategies.'<sup>49</sup>

While public funding may enable more books to be published for the schools market, few publishers in Ethiopia can afford to produce good quality illustrated children's books in local languages for individual purchasers. Initiatives such as the Writers for Ethiopian Children's anthologies<sup>50</sup> and libraries supported by organisations like 'Ethiopia Reads' can begin to develop a reading culture among those children whose family circumstances often deny access to books. Good quality supplementary readers in local languages with relevant content should also develop their interest in books. As technology advances and publishing methods improve while, at the same time, electronic media enable the written word to be distributed through applications such as the e-book or Kindle, more good quality illustrated children's publications in local languages could be produced but cost will no doubt remain the major factor.

The increase in children's literature escalated in the developed countries as more children became literate, the economy improved and technology made it easier and cheaper to produce better quality products. Ethiopia appears to have followed the trend in literature development and will hopefully, over time, continue to build its market for children's publications.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by President of Ethiopian Writers' Association, Getachew Bellete.

<sup>2</sup> This was explained by a colleague, Girma Alemayehu, who worked with the author in the Ministry of Education. He and others explained how, in addition to state education, children sometimes attend a traditional school organised by the Ethiopian Coptic Church.



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<sup>3</sup> Kinnell, M. 'Publishing for Children 1700 – 1780' in Hunt, P. (ed.) (1995) *Children's Literature An Illustrated History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press p36.

<sup>4</sup> Avery G. "The Beginnings of Children's Reading to c.1700" in Hunt P. ed.1995, *Children's Literature An Illustrated History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press p7.

<sup>5</sup> Kinnell op cit, p42.

<sup>6</sup> Norton, D.E. 1999. *Fifth Edition Through the Eyes of a Child An Introduction to Children's Literature*, New Jersey: Merrill p63.

<sup>7</sup> Butts, D. 'The Beginnings of Victorianism' in Hunt, P. (ed.) (1995) *Children's Literature – an Illustrated History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. According to Butt, Cole: '...began issuing such stories as Jack the Giant-Killer and Little Red Riding Hood from 1843 onwards....Cole considered the visual quality of the books most important and he employed such artists as William Mulready and John Linnell to illustrate them.' p 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>9</sup> The author asked this question of different Ethiopians she met who each remembered specific Ethiopian books including Pinocchio. Fitsame Teferra and Yihenew Worku provided examples.

<sup>10</sup> Muir, M. (1982) *A History of Australian Children's Book Illustrations*, Melbourne: OUP p7.

<sup>11</sup> The author was shown a copy of this book presented to the father of Yihenew Worku, one of the Ethiopian illustrators that she interviewed in 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Information located in a report on Educational Materials Production in the Ministry of Education (1975 Ethiopia) by G.Eric Robson who was employed by the Ministry of Overseas Development as a graphic artist. A description of textbooks produced in 1967 was written by Edmund Murray and published in the Ethiopian Herald in 1967.

<sup>13</sup> 'According to Bowker, publishers in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand released 375,000 new titles and editions in 2004. Including imported editions available in multiple markets, the total number of new English language books available for sale in the English-speaking world in 2004 was a staggering 450,000. ... children's and young adult titles had a 12% share of new titles and editions, a 33% increase.' [http://www.bowker.com/press/bowker/2005\\_1012\\_bowker.htm](http://www.bowker.com/press/bowker/2005_1012_bowker.htm) downloaded on 9/11/2010.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, V. & Ngwaru, J. M. (2011), 'African language books for children: issues for authors' *Language, Culture and Curriculum* <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07908318.2011.629051> downloaded October 2011

<sup>15</sup> The author was made aware of this from the director of Shama publishers and Fitsame Teferra (through the illustration work she was contracted to do in 2011 for supplementary readers in Amharic for Amhara Region Education Bureau).

<sup>16</sup> 'At the opening session of the 30th Congress of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), held in Macau (China) from September 20–24, 2006, plenary speaker Brian Wafawarowa outlined the state of publishing in Africa and in particular the many difficulties facing the publication of books for children. He informed participants (from fifty-four member countries) that "Up to 95 percent of books published on the African continent are education books[, mostly textbooks]," and that children's publishing has not reached its full potential because of significant challenges. Among the many challenges is the lack of purchasing power and institutional support for books intended for entertainment. Hence African publishers find it financially unprofitable to publish non-textbooks, especially in the mother tongues. Most of the leisure reading for African children is produced outside the continent, according to Wafawarowa.' Khorana, M.G. 'Editor's Introduction: African Renaissance through Children's Books: an Emphasis on African Languages in Print. *Sankofa* Vol 5 2006 <http://grizzly.morgan.edu/~english/sankofa/p2-4.pdf> downloaded 7/12/2011

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- <sup>17</sup> Montgomery, H. 2006, BBC Child's tale of Ethiopian slave prince  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3212181.stm> downloaded July 2009
- <sup>18</sup> Papworth H. 2006, 'Retention of teachers in Ethiopian Schools' paper written for State Minister of Education Addis Ababa:Ministry of Education.
- <sup>19</sup> Sutherland, Z. & Arbuthnot, M.H. (1991) *Children and Books Eighth Edition*, New York: Harper Collins, p204.
- <sup>20</sup> Slim, H. & Thompson, P. (1993) *Listening for a Change*, London: Panos Publications Ltd., p16.
- <sup>21</sup> Schlomo, B. (1967) *Ethiopian Folk Tales*, Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, p56.
- <sup>22</sup> Laird, E. (2008) *The Elephant and the Cock*, Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Foundation, p7.
- <sup>23</sup> Laird, E. (2001) *When the World Began – Stories collected in Ethiopia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p94.
- <sup>24</sup> Seifu Metaferia (1982) 'Oral Literature of Ethiopia as a Source of Material for Children's Books: sample study' in *Workshop on Children's Books*, Addis Ababa: The National Children's Commission and Italian Cultural Institute, p4.
- <sup>25</sup> Courlander, H. & Leslau, W. (1950) *The Fire on the Mountain and other Ethiopian Stories*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., p4.
- <sup>26</sup> According to the Ministry of Education report for the *Workshop on Children's Books*, Addis Ababa: The National Children's Commission and Italian Cultural Institute in 1982, p3.
- <sup>27</sup> Henze, P. (2004) *Layers of Time – A History of Ethiopia* Addis Ababa: Shama Books, p27.
- <sup>28</sup> Fogg, S. (2001) *Ethiopian Art Catalogue 24*, London: Sam Fogg Rare Books and Manuscripts, p12.
- <sup>29</sup> Tract Committee for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ed.) (1886) *The Coloured Picture Bible for Abyssinian Children*, New York: E & J.B. Young & Co. Translated into Amharic by Rev. Martin Fladd and illustrated by R André. The author studied this copy in the British Library and located different versions in English with the same illustrations published by Robert Frederick Ltd in 1994 under the title *Children's Bible Stories*. See illustration in chapter 6.
- <sup>30</sup> Henze, P. op cit p256.
- <sup>31</sup> [http://www.hahubooks.co.uk/Overview\\_E02.htm](http://www.hahubooks.co.uk/Overview_E02.htm) downloaded July 2009.
- <sup>32</sup> Henze, P. op cit p 267.
- <sup>33</sup> Geoffrey C. Last , a former head of Medhane Alem School, had written a textbook for Geography for the Ministry of Education (Ethiopia) in 1967. It was illustrated by Eric Robson and produced at the Berhanena Selam Printing Press. This was one of a series being prepared by the Ministry of Education 'designed to be more closely geared to Ethiopian life than texts used in the past.' according to Edmund Murray of the Ethiopian Herald, 1967.
- <sup>34</sup> Last G.C. 1982, "Books for Children in Ethiopia – The Current Environment and Future Prospects" *Workshop on Children's Books*, Addis Ababa: The National Children's Commission and Italian Cultural Institute, p3.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid p5- 6.

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<sup>36</sup> Curriculum Dept MOE 1982, “The Role of Children’s Books in the Educational Development of Ethiopia” in *Workshop on Children’s Books*, Addis Ababa: The National Children’s Commission and Italian Cultural Institute, p3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p5.

<sup>38</sup> The author was shown copies of examples of such books by an Ethiopian illustrator. Examples of the illustrations are included in the chapter on illustrations but details of authors and publishers (possibly the Russian Progress Press) cannot be verified. See example in chapter 6.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Daniel Ambatchew, July 2005, ‘Implications of the Convention of the Rights of the Child for Ethiopian Children’s Literature’ (paper presented at a workshop conducted by the Ethiopian Writer’s Association held at The Russian Cultural Centre 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Michael Daniel Ambatchew, March 2007, ‘Improvements in the Arena of Ethiopian Children’s Literature’ (paper presented at a Conference on Children’s Literature organized by Forum on Street Children Ethiopia 2007).

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.ethiopiareads.org/> downloaded on 9/11/2010.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Daniel Ambatchew, March 2007 op cit.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.addisfortune.com/Heavyweight%20Bid%20for%20Textbooks%20Revision.htm> downloaded on 9/11/2010.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Daniel Ambatchew (2008) *A Dozen Contemporary Ethiopian Children’s Writers*, Addis Ababa: self published. Details of these authors were gathered by the author from Michael Daniel Ambatchew’s booklet (detailed above), and through discussions with them and/or from their biographies located in their published literature and on websites.

<sup>45</sup> Anthologies of bilingual (English/Amharic) stories for children appeared from 2002 and include: *Coocooloo*, *Alihoy*, *Alalihoy*, *Alnegam*, *Ema Gilgelay* and *Tikur Fiyelay*. Two new anthologies are currently being printed with illustrated stories by the author and other members of the Writers for Ethiopian Children.

<sup>46</sup> In 2002, identifying a gap in the market for Ethiopian children’s literature, he rewrote a traditional folk tale in Amharic and English. *Silly Mamma* was illustrated in full colour by Bogale Belachew. Yohannes also founded EBCEF, the Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Foundation, which promoted an annual reading week and presented the annual Golden Kuraz Award. Through EBCEF, twelve picture books, either bilingual or trilingual, were published for young children. In 2010, Yohannes founded a publishing company, Sololia Publishing, with *Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda: An Ethiopian Girls’ Festival* as its first picture book for children.

<sup>47</sup> ‘In addition, significant differences in reading outcomes exist by region within countries. Such is the case in Uganda, where about half of students in Central Province are unable to read compared to more than 80% in Lango Province; in Ethiopia, there is a much lower percentage of nonreaders in Addis Ababa Region (Amharic, 10%) than in all the other regions in the country, where between 18% and 69% of students are unable to read a single word. . . . In Ethiopia, between 0.5% and 13% of students could read with comprehension, depending on the language and region of the country. . . . Results from several successful interventions in Africa indicate that reading and learning outcomes can be improved if (1) teachers are trained to teach key foundational reading skills and have the necessary materials to do so (e.g., comprehensive, scripted lessons); (2) children have appropriate texts to practice reading; (3) time is devoted each day to reading instruction and practice; and (4) teachers continually assess students’ reading skills. Providing students with an opportunity to gain reading skills in their mother tongue, or a familiar language, is also key. US AID Assessing Early Grade Reading Skills in Africa Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II) 2011 <https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=323> downloaded 7/12/2011

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, V. & Ngwaru, J.M. (2011) ‘Multilingual education in South Africa: the role of publishers’ *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.592192> downloaded 7/12/2011

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> A proportion of the anthologies are given away to schools and libraries and the remainder are distributed across Ethiopia and sold at a nominal charge to raise the income to produce the next anthology.

<sup>51</sup> The author presented the following papers based on this study: (Nov. 2009) ‘A Brief History of Illustrated Literature for Ethiopian Children’ paper presented at the International Conference for Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa;

(Sept. 2010) ‘A Brief History of Illustrated Literature for Ethiopian Children’ paper presented at the Anglo Ethiopian Conference, London; in September 2010.

‘A Brief History of Illustrated Books for Ethiopian Children’ edited paper published in Nov 2011 edition of *Sankofa – a Journal of African Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, Baltimore: Sankofa.