Ethiopian Literature and Literary Criticism in English: An Annotated Bibliography
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This bibliography consists of three kinds of entries: a. Works of literary interest written in English by Ethiopians; b. English translations of works originally in an Ethiopian language; c. Criticism in English of written and oral Ethiopian literature. The term "criticism" is used in its broadest sense here, and includes commentaries, reviews, histories and surveys, as well as critical evaluation and analysis. I have included oral literature in the bibliography so that an idea may be given of the richness of an only partially tapped mine of vast resources, and English-language commentary on literature unavailable in English is listed so that a reader might, if he wishes, get an idea of the nature of Ge'ez and Amharic literature although unable to read the literature itself.
In Section I are included some short works which would not satisfy everyone's definition of the novel, but the phenomenon of the Ethiopian pamphlet-novel and their authors' insistence on labelling them as such have overridden my own reservations. My justification for including translations of Ethiopia's historic writings (Section V) is much the same as that which leads to the inclusion of segments of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* in anthologies of British literature; in both cases the more vivid passages are literature worth reading, and in both cases the Chronicles shed interesting light on the cultural past of their respective nations.

The role of language in Ethiopian literature is an interesting and complex one. The Ge'ez language, which survives today only as a liturgical language in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was until the latter part of the nineteenth century also the sole language used for literary purposes. Literature in Amharic, now the official language of Ethiopia, is by and large a product of the twentieth century, while literature in English is an outcome of the past decade or so. Ethiopian literature in English has been inspired partly by the fact that for some time English has been the accepted second language of Ethiopia and the language primarily used in secondary and higher education. Moreover, the impetus that has moved other African writers to use English or French as their medium in order to reach an international rather than only local audience has been felt by Ethiopian authors. Neither Ge'ez nor Amharic with their unique scripts are known to many people outside of Ethiopia, and Amharic itself is used by less than half of the populace, more than ninety percent of whom are illiterate. Thus the Ethiopian writer who wishes to communicate with an appreciable audience must translate his work or use a language of wider circulation than his own. This bibliography gives an indication of the extent to which this has been done.

Although the quantity of literature in English by Ethiopians may seem limited in comparison to some other African countries, one must keep in mind its comparatively recent birth. Other factors have also helped to inhibit vast literary output either in English or Amharic, such as the small domestic market, the high cost of printing, stifling censorship and an almost complete lack of local publishing facilities. Due to this last, some writers have had to publish their own work—in Ethiopia not necessarily a sign of inferior endeavor as it might be in the United States. Other authors, as the bibliography shows, have been content to rely only on local journals and magazines as vehicles of expression, and
Ethiopian critics have followed suit, resigned to the local nature of much literary circulation. Some Ethiopian literature in English has been published by international journals and publishers of repute, however, and it is hoped that more will follow.

When reading this bibliography it must be remembered that there is no standard English spelling for Ethiopian names. The same name may be spelled in more than one way, such as Sellassie, Selassie, or Sellasie. I have in all cases maintained the spelling which the author gives with his work. An Ethiopian takes his father's Christian name as his surname but is known by his own Christian name, and thus, as the Addis Ababa telephone directory will attest, names are always given alphabetically by first name. I have preserved this standard practice for Ethiopian names in the bibliography.

Some of the journals listed may not be well-known outside of Ethiopia, and only a few large American libraries are likely to have them. The library at Haile Sellassie I University and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library in Addis Ababa have copies of almost all the items listed. Something is a university literary publication which flourished from 1963 to 1967 and contained some work of high quality. The Addis Reporter was a weekly review of considerable standard until its demise at the hands of the censors. The monthlies Menen and the Ethiopian Mirror are at present inactive, but the Ethiopian Observer still appears fairly regularly. The Ethiopian Herald is Addis Ababa's daily English-language newspaper which has of late taken to printing the occasional story or poem.

The bibliography is as current and exhaustive as I have been able to make it, but it is possible that there are a few omissions. Thus, information on future additions would be greatly appreciated.

I. NOVELS


Daniachew Worku. The Thirteenth Sun. London: Heinemann Educa-
tional Books, 1973. A sick nobleman is taken by his educated son to a holy shrine near Addis Ababa in the hopes of finding health. The son views with disgust his countrymen's bondage to ignorance and superstition. Sophisticated narrative technique. 196 pages.


II. SHORT STORIES


———. "The House with the Big Worka." In two parts. Ethiopian Herald, April 7 and April 9, 1974. The touching search of a peasant mother for her teacher son in the city.


Hassen Elmi. "The Two Lovers." Menen, 8, 1 (October 1963), 20–22. Demonstrates in an incredible manner that "love can burn as bright and warm as a glowing fire, and suddenly turn to bitter ashes."


experience of a prostitute and her hypocritical customer in modern Addis Ababa. Some interesting symbolism.


III. DRAMA


Rosenfeld, C. P. *The Story of the Queen of Sheba*. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1966. Dramatic reading for eight voices, the text taken from the *Kebrä Nagast*, the Holy Book of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.


“Azmari.” *Ethiopian Observer*, 9, 3 (1965), 229–39. Idealized view of present-day peasant life near Addis Ababa. Shashitu, the daughter, is an “azmari,” one gifted in singing.


**IV. POETRY**


Menghistu Lemma and Sylvia Pankhurst, trans. “On the Eve of Battle.” *Ethiopian Observer*, 1, 11 (1957), 347. The original was written in Ge’ez by Aleka Gabre Medhen before the Battle of Adowa (1896), in which Ethiopian forces defeated the invading Italians.


———. “Poems.” *Topic* (United States Information Service), 82 (1974), 40–41. With a brief introduction by Aileen Miles. Most of these poems were written while attending the 1972–73 session of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. Twelve poems are printed.


Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin. "What Price the Wound We Opened in the Tender Eye of our Love?" *Dialogue* (Ethiopian University Teachers' Association), 2, 1 (December, 1963), 48. In spite of its title, an effective comment on the danger of being too absorbed with the past. Condensed and translated from an Amharic original by the poet.


———. "New Sum of Poetry from the Negro World." *Présence Africaine*, 57 (1966), 324–34. The most extensive collection of Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's poetry. Included are all the poems appearing in the *Ethiopian Observer* (above) plus two new ones.


### V. CHRONICLES


esting view of fifteenth-century Ethiopia revealing political reorganization, local rebellion, persecution of idolators and the building of palaces. From Ge’ez originals in the British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.


VI. ORAL LITERATURE


———. "Chaha Riddles." *Rassegna Di Studi Ethiopici* (Roma), 21
(1965), 27–93. 267 riddles given phonetically in Chaha with English translations and notes.


Parker, Enid. "Afar Stories, Riddles and Proverbs." Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 9, 2 (July 1971), 219–87. Valuable source material on the habits and oral literature of the Afar, or Danakil, Ethiopia’s desert nomads. 115 proverbs are included, with translations and notes.


VII. CRITICISM


Gérard, Albert S. "Amharic Creative Literature: The Early Phase." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 6, 2 (July 1968), 39-59. Describes and discusses the works of a number of authors, and points out that "Ethiopia is at present one of the most prolific areas of sub-Saharan Africa as regards the production of poetry, plays and prose fiction in the vernacular tongue."


Harden, J. M. *An Introduction to Ethiopic Christian Literature*. London: SPCK, 1926. Still a worthwhile introduction to religious literature—and as Harden points out, few Churches have permeated their country's literature to the extent the Ethiopian Church has.


Lipsky, George A. *Ethiopia*. New Haven: HRAF Press, 1962. Chapter 8 is a brief but compact account of ancient and more recent literature. Lipsky ascribes the proliferation of modern moralistic writing in Ethiopia to the translation of *Pilgrim's Progress* into Amharic.


Messing, Simon D. “A Modern Ethiopian Play—Self-study in Culture Change.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 33, 3 (1960), 149–57. A detailed anthropological study of a play by an anonymous author entitled *I and My Evil Deeds*. The play (in Amharic) is about a peasant family which is advised by a monk to move to the city.


Sahle Sellassie. “Yegan Mebrat.” *Ethiopian Herald*, October 20, 1974. The title is Amharic for “hidden light,” and the author bemoans the fact that language difficulties and lack of translations keep Amharic literature unknown to the rest of the world. The need to translate more Amharic writing into English is emphasized.


“Cooper’s Literary Offences,” the author gives a lively insight into modern pamphlet-novels now sold in Addis Ababa.


VIII. ANTHOLOGIES

Eadie, John I., ed. and trans. An Amharic Reader. London: Cambridge University Press, 1924. An interesting collection of poetry, fiction, essays and documents, including recipes for native Ethiopian foods and drinks. Amharic and English versions are given, the latter being a literal translation rather than a paraphrase into standard English.

