

## **A moment with Alemayehu Taye** By Hailemeleket Agizew

He has written books including Betsy and the Supercopier /Children's book in English/; Haiku/Bi-lingual collection of Haiku poems Amharic and English; Graffiti, /Bi-lingual anthologies of poems/ ; Tafach Teretoch, /Children's book translated in Amharic/ and The Rubaiyat of Alemayehu /collection of rubaiyat... in Amharic/.

Alemayehu Taye Alemayehu, once a reporter for The Ethiopian Herald is not only an author; he also a poet and a translator. He was born and raised in Ethiopia. Currently Alemayehu resides in the US. After completing elementary and high school he attended higher education at Addis Ababa University/Ethiopia Pune University/India and Kentucky State University/USA. The poet has worked for print and electronic media in the country and abroad. Alemayehu is currently residing in Los Angeles California and working for Pacific Clinics as a Social Worker

**Herald:** Great to have you in Herald not as a coming back employee but as a guest please describe your writing schedule.

**Alemayehu:** I do not have one.

**Herald:** Do you outline?

**Alemayehu:** I remember that I tried outlining only once, but I didn't use it as the writing took its own path in its own manner.

**Herald:** Any habits?

**Alemayehu:** Not really, I love to talk to strangers if I may call that a habit.

**Herald:** What drives you to be a poet ?

**Alemayehu:** Reading and my love for rhythms and the whole politics in the arena of poetry.

**Herald:** I mean particularly in a non Ethiopic style?

**Alemayehu:** That should be accounted to my inclination towards trying novel styles and the courage that I have to deviate. To me poetry is all about deviation. If you are not deviant enough to sneak away from the most cherished and looked up on tradition, you will end up a chameleon or a parrot. I prefer to deviate and have a few readers instead of writing popular literature and have a few more.

**Herald:** Among Ethiopians What authors inspire you?

**Alemayehu:** I used to be a voracious reader. I read almost all of the books in Amharic written by veteran authors. If you ask me who is my hero in Amharic poetry I will be giving you Mengistu Lemma, Abe Gubegna, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, Seifu Metaferia, Gebre-Kristos Desta, Yohannes Admassu, Solomon Deressa, Fikre Tollosa, Fekade Azeze and all other veteran poets whom I failed to mention their names here. All the young poets are my favorites too.

**Herald:** What have you learned from the experience of these Ethiopian poets?

**Alemayehu:** The craft of composing poetry. The art of sensitivity to poetic diction. The beauty of deviation and the courage of impacting one's own signature in one's own works.

**Herald:** How did you come up with the Japanese Haiku Poem?

**Alemayehu:** Reading introduced me to Haiku. Flirting with it, researching and criticizing other haiku writers nurtured it.

**Herald:** What was the most challenging aspect of writing Haiku?

**Alemayehu:** The most challenging aspect of writing Haiku is writing it simple. Haiku is all about painting images in a limited number of simple words to share what you felt instantly to your reader. Scholars always point out that an individual with no experience as a poet will turn out a great Haiku writer. Beginning to write Haiku after you have read and written a lot of regular form of poetry is a challenge by itself.

**Herald:** Tell me how the Ethiopic Ge'ez in some way or the other correlate to Haiku?

**Alemayehu:** Haiku and the whole tradition of Haiku writing is some how similar to the Ethiopic Ge'ez Qene. One of the most notable feature is that both Qene and Haiku are highly poetic in nature, meaning both Haiku and Qene have hidden and additional interpretations and connotations in addition to what is relayed simply and denotatively. Furthermore, the same way our Qene is connected to christianity and the Holy Bible, Haiku is inherently connected to Buddhism and the teachings of Buddha. The other similarity is both Haiku and Qene is to be composed in a certain manner with a limited number of words and in a distinctive kind of rhyme and rhythm. The fact of composing as opposed to writing differs Haiku and Qene from the other contemporary forms of poems. Talking about the similarities one should note that there is also a huge difference between Haiku and Geez Qene.

**Herald:** I am noticing\_ Haiku\_ Senryu and\_ Tanka in your second edition book of Haiku, can you share one from each?

**Alemayehu:** Sure let me start with a Tanka on page 89

### **Tanka**

finally  
winter departs amiably  
though  
you are still in my head  
nibbling my heart slowly

Tanka is another form of Japanese poetry with five lines in a 5/7/ 5 7/7 syllable combination.

A **senryu** on page 61

deep winter  
himalayas secluded  
Buddha in palace

/Senryu is a form of Haiku which has nothing to do with nature./

A **haiku** on page 60  
evening  
a meteor glows brightly  
silently, it dies

**Herald:** How about a Rubai, from "The Rubaiyat of Alemayehu" do have one to share

**Alemayehu:** I have one written in Amharic and translated into English by Herald columnist Alemeshet Kebede. This Rubai is inspired by a book by Andrew Morton, "Monica's Story" The Rubai is dedicated to Monica Lewinsky the poem goes like this.

**Rubai 58**

Though denounced by intellects  
Disliked but smoked such great in number  
Cigar of downtown got a fantastic praise  
King of kings has praised its taste  
/translation by Alemeshet Kebede/

**Herald:** What is the message you want readers to take away from your books "The Rubaiyat of Alemayehu" and that of "HAIKU" ?

**Alemayehu:** I am providing my readers with a freedom to take away and embrace whatever message they prefer to embrace. Once my works are on print, they are no longer mine they belong to the readership so "it is all yours, enjoy! is my message"

**Herald:** As an individual who introduced Haiku to the Ethiopian readership do you think your work made a noticeable impact into the minds of aspiring poets in the country? What do you advise young poets regarding Haiku?

**Alemayehu:** I am considering my self to be a disciple of Matsuo Basho, Kobayashi Issa, Richard Wright and many other great poets. I have ways to go to have my own signature and impact to pass down to my readers. But as far as the literary forms of Haiku is concerned, I would love to see more young Ethiopian writers to try their hands in composing Haiku. Especially those aspiring poets that live in the country side with close proximity to nature can become great Haiku writers as Haiku is all about nature. If any one need help and discussion with me regarding Rubaiyat, Haiku and poetry in general, I can easily be contacted at [alalemayehu@yahoo.com](mailto:alalemayehu@yahoo.com) or [7alemayehu@gmail.com](mailto:7alemayehu@gmail.com)

**Herald:** Tell me about U.S.A how you describe Americans and life in the U.S.

**Alemayehu:** Life in the United States is beautiful. Americans are awesome, I really love Americans for their work ethics, hospitality and the value that they render to works of art. Americans worship their folks in the fields of art. Even poets are given proper attention and endearment in the United States. If you are an aspiring writer every door is open for you. Your imagination can take you as far as zenith. America is really a place where you can grow up in what ever way you need to grow. When I talk about all these virtues, do not get me wrong as there are vices too.

**Herald:** Do you consider America to be "A land of opportunities?"

**Alemayehu:** In a way we can say that, but it all depends on how you receive and take advantage on the opportunities out there. Your investment pays off in America. You can invest your time and energy in a crime and end up in penitentiary or spend your time and energy in school to end up\_ Barack Hussein Obama.

**Herald:** How do you see the life of Ethiopians in the US?

**Alemayehu:** I would say life of Ethiopians in the United States a success story. You do not see as many Ethiopians in jail and on the streets as the local people who grew up with all the opportunities provided to them generously.\_

**Herald:** How do you compare Ethiopia and America?

**Alemayehu:** There is no place like home Haile. I miss everything brewed in Ethiopia. I miss the streets of Addis, I miss the greenery of the country side, I miss the innocence reflected from the eyes of kids, I miss the grace\_ on the head of elderlies, I miss the beauty and humbleness of our ladies, I miss the pride and confidence of our guys. I miss the love, the brotherhood, and the social life in our sacred land. My heart is still living in home. I can't wait to come back for good and share all the blessings with my people.

**Herald:** Have you ever been in any Ethiopian congregation to recite your poems?

**Alemayehu:** Yes I have been reciting my poems to Ethiopians and other fellow Americans several times. I also had the opportunity to have a book signing following the publishing of my book of Haiku.

/Love and respects to everyone who gave their time and heart listening to my works./

**Herald:** What better opportunities are there for Ethiopian writers?

**Alemayehu:** There are millions of opportunities to writers in America. I have observed Ethiopian writers to have amazing talent and unexplored imagination. If Ethiopian writers use that beautiful mind and wild imagination to write in English, Haile! the sky will be their limit.

**Herald:** What books are on your nightstand?

**Alemayehu:** I had over two thousand books back home. I have collected some of them all the way to the States. Religious philosophical and books of poetry along with children's literature are invading my nightstand.

**Herald:** What are you currently reading?

**Alemayehu:** Everything except scripts of hatred.

**Herald:** What is your advice for aspiring writers?

**Alemayehu:** Read more. Never give up. Deviate. Welcome criticisms generated with good intention.

**Herald:** What is the best piece of advice you have been given regarding your book of Haiku and the Rubaiyat of Alemayehu?

**Alemayehu:** To keep exploring unusual styles and genres.

**Herald:** Graffiti is another bilingual anthology you have published. You seem to have a multifaceted works in that book.

**Alemayehu:** I have composed that book in a manner one can see the growing up of a poet. I have included verses from when I first start to write poems. I also have some when I was writing popular/regular poetry. The other part include my experimental works where I deviated from the contemporary forms of poetry.

**Herald:** Graffiti as a title of a book sounds very unusual to me, why you gave it a title so unique as Graffiti? Do you have a poem to share from your book of Graffiti?\_

**Alemayehu:** I wanted the term Graffiti to be familiar with my readers. I am working on another book with some how similar title. When that book got out in print, my introduction will discuss a lot about Graffiti in an altered perspective. I have one poem that I would love to share from Graffiti.

**"untitled"**

The day you left.  
You took the sun with you  
Flowers silenced  
Birds withered  
Darkness reigned  
The day you left,  
You took the moon with you  
Stars fallen  
Dreams incarcerated  
Coldness howled  
The day you left,  
Peace unto you!

**Herald:** Tell me about your last book written in English and published in the States.

**Alemayehu:** "Betsy and the Supercoppter" is a book written for children. The story is about a smart little girl who worked hard in school and achieved her dream. That book is translated into Spanish by Myra Guerero and Swedish by Alemayehu Dibaba. I am hoping it will also be translated in French soon. I did the Amharic translation and I am waiting for my energy level to rise up again so that I can shoot it out.

**Herald:** What are you working on now?

**Alemayehu:** poetry, short stories and Children's literature.

**Herald:** Any message to convey for your Ethiopian Herald stuffs and of course Ethiopians as a whole?

**Alemayehu:** Love you all folks in Herald. My heart and soul to my people in Ethiopia. I can't wait to see we all "Ethiopians" sing a song of love tolerance harmony and prosperity again. Trust me guys, it is possible, we did it before!!!!