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How Green are our Stories? Explorations of ecological subjectivities in Ethiopian children's literature

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This study explores the place given to ecological crises in Ethiopian children's literature. Through examining ecological subject positions in the works, it attempts to investigate values ascribed to nature. More than fifty narratives in fifteen children's literature books published in Amharic have been considered for the investigation. An Ecocritical approach has been used as a framework to analyze the works. The analysis reveals that stories considered place a limited emphasis on ecological concerns. The unit of image analyses conducted indicates the predominance of anthropocentric concerns. Most of the stories give little emphasis to the idea of essential unity of life, and to the ethical responsibilities of children towards care of the environment. The propinquity they embed is also infested with gender ideology. Some of the stories, however, present ambivalent subject positions with regard to the model of relationships between humankind and nature they offer to the children. This is observed in the stories which give an undecided viewpoint as to which standpoint the reader should hold at last. Based on the findings, it appears that less emphasis has been placed on the greening of children's literature published in Amharic. In line with this, it is recommended that attention needs to be paid to environmental issues if there is a need to shape minds that are conscious of the problems.

Key words: Children's literature, greening, Ecocriticism, ecological crisis, ecological subjectivity, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental crisis is currently a problem of international worry. It has become momentous and received attention in several fields of study as the perceived calamities happening, and expected to happen are becoming worrisome. While some suggest that technological advances can solve the problem, others attest that it cannot be alleviated only through technological advances,

but also through transformations in the way people perceive the environment. The greening of disciplines, which is currently becoming pervasive, has its roots in the intent of transforming the perceptions in the context of humanities and social sciences.

Greening the socialization of children has recently become a critical focus area, as it is thought to aid in

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shaping generations towards curbing the perceived catastrophe hovering over humanity (Bhalla, 2012). The greening of children's literature is one of the mechanisms considered inevitable in shaping minds towards environmental consciousness.

As argued by different scholars, stories are vehicles of making sense of the world. They are used in various cultures in the socialization of children (Sutherland, 1985). Although children learn cultural norms in many ways, literature is one aspect of the environmental socialization process. It is argued that "through books, children learn about the world outside their immediate environment" (Weitzman et al., 1972:1126). The environment here includes the cultural (human) as well as physical (nonhuman) others the children are expected to learn about. In addition, these books are thought to provide them with "role models" – images of what they can and should be when they grow up, including how they see and identify themselves with the natural (physical) as well as cultural environment.

How we think about the environment, how we frame it in our minds begins to form in childhood while we are being socialized into cultural norms. Among the various ways through which these norms are inculcated to children is the use of literature. Children's literature offers children the opportunity to get socialized into ways of being as it embeds constituted versions of local and global settings. These ways of being are inevitably guided by ways the adults who produce the texts see fit. This is evidenced in Hunt's (2001:26) claim about the power and importance of children's literature that it "is invariably a communication from the experienced adult to the inexperienced child". Then, what is incorporated in the books appears to be the values of the culture filtered through the minds of the adults. Close textual analysis makes visible the discourses that frame the texts and shape readers (children) as ecological subjects. This study aims at exploring the discourses and the subjectivities they attempt to establish.

In accomplishing this task, the study relies on the assumption that symbols, images and codes that societies construct in their cultural contexts reflect and promote the governing norms of the culture. The social/cultural artifacts, like literature, that owners of the culture produce, harbor these norms/ideologies which in turn affect the making of symbols and images. As a result, the construction of cultural symbols to represent the environment, influence ideological perceptions, morals and subsequent behavior comparably in the same way that the actual physical environment in which we live does.

Children are socialized into norms by adults. Based on cultural beliefs attached to childhood, children are believed to be incomplete subjects, who are assumed to be learning to become "cultured persons" (Hall, 1997:22). This refers to the fact that the children are shaped to

attune themselves to the social, cultural and environmental norms. The process of socialization necessitates, on a fundamental level, that they learn "the system and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture ... to function as culturally competent subjects" (Hall, 1997:22). Hence, scrutinizing the ecological subjectivities constructed in the stories becomes essential to understand to what direction of belief and act the children are being led vicariously.

This becomes significant today, which is considered to be the age of "environmental limit" (Glottfelty, 1996). Comprehending how societal ideologies and perceptions about ecology are represented in children's literature leads to an understanding of human cognition about the environment. This can help in improving the way ecological issues are addressed in children's literature to effect a positive change.

Because it provides various subject positions embodied by adults, children's literature is thought to be a powerful mode of shaping the mindset of children. It is believed that they are able to learn about the many facets of their environment and better understand the inter-relatedness of their lives with their surroundings. As a result, scholars like Gaard (2008:67) argue that it has to be our instant activity saying: "If we wish to pass on a safe and healthy world to children then protection of environment will be the issue of immediate concern." The environmental values of a society, which the narratives impart, then should be part of the socialization of the children.

Children's literature, intertwined with ecological issues, can render the most valuable service to humanity in that context. After all, literature does something for us in a way that no other thing can do (by giving humankind the opportunity to vicariously step outside the carefully constructed boxes of their own perspectives), and it needs to be explored in all its permutations. Although much has been written about children's literature and the natural world as independent subjects, very limited effort has been exerted in integrating the issues and looking at how children are socialized ecologically through literature in Ethiopia.

Rationale

Children's literature is one of the major tools employed by parents and schools in the socialization process of children. It is a method for introducing children to new concepts, cultural norms and social practices. Apparently, not just artifacts that reflect current ideologies, morals and values about everything, but are often models of what society values as important, and thus indeed hopes to pass on to the next generation.

Such artifacts which embed social constructions directly influence a child's environmental socialization, be it pro or anti-environmental. This means that the children are

presented with the ecological ideals that may either be eco-friendly or otherwise. This, in turn, effects how they interact with the environment now and in the future. As a result, it becomes significant to ask critical questions and bring evidence based findings on how the literature socializes the children environmentally, through the perspective it presents on human-nature interaction and the governing ideologies it attempts to impart.

As ecological crisis is a global phenomenon, no nation or society is immune to it. Hence, Ethiopia is not an exception to this. Ecocritical studies of children's literature have become an important concern of critics in the West since the proliferation of the theory in the academia. But seen from such a perspective, so far, there are no inquiries in the context of Ethiopian children's literature. It is the recognition of this gap that has led to the undertaking of an exploratory study. As a result, the study explores environmental socialization through analyzing representation of the environment in children's literature written in Amharic.

Although children's literature in book form is a relatively recent phenomenon in the context of Ethiopia, it has been an important part of the culture of the diversified ethnic groups in the country in its oral forms (folk tales, fables, legends, etc.). There are limited studies conducted in the area of children's literature in Ethiopia. Moreover, the studies conducted thus far, on either the written or oral forms did not give attention to environmental concerns. Previous studies, few among them actually, focused on the prospect (Tefaye, 1982), status of development (Dereje, 1994), and its use and place in cognitive instruction at schools (Samson, 2002).

While acknowledging the efforts made so far, to fill the gap indicated, the researcher undertakes an Ecocritical analysis to explore what exists in that respect. Besides, Ecocritical investigations on literary works in Ethiopian contexts, the researcher believes, are new as there are no published works in the area. As a result, by undertaking the investigation, the researcher hopes to ignite the mushrooming of scholarly criticisms on Ethiopian literature through its experimental exploration.

To this end, emphasis has been paid to how narratives on Ethiopian children's literature books published in Amharic produce cultural meanings and ideologies about the environment and position the children through forming environmental subjectivities. In other words, the study emphasizes the exploration of subjectivities constructed about the environment in the children's literature considered.

The main objective of this exploratory study is to examine environmental concerns and subjectivities represented in selected Ethiopian children's literature books written in Amharic. The study attempted to answer the following three questions:

What place is given to the issue of environment and

environmental crisis in children's stories?

How is human-nature proximity represented in the stories?

How are environmental subjectivities and subject positions embodied in the stories?

To this end, the study was delimited to children's literature books in Ethiopia published in Amharic. As it is an exploratory research, much focus has been given on the assessment of the representation of nature in selected narratives. Children's literature can raise a number of values or issues, but the study is not concerned with other values or issues raised in the narratives unless they have significance in relation to the figuring out of environmental issues and subject positions. The study does not attempt to analyze the mechanism through which the children interpret the ecological subjectivities from the texts, but focuses on what is presented in the texts, as a result it does not involve how they reason out about it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecocriticism is a relatively recent approach to the analysis of literature which emphasizes the representation of the relationship between "literature and the physical environment" (Glottfelty, 1996:38). Its application to the analysis of children's literature came only after it gained ground with experimentation on adult literature. Today, it is held with high significance that the training of the child should also incorporate the environmental perspective, and many writers include environmental themes in their writing for children. It is felt that there is an utmost need today that children must be made aware regarding the present state, protection and preservation of the environment.

Garrard's (2004) recognition of Ecocriticism as a form of cultural studies legitimizes its applicability to analyses of children's literature. While some Ecocritics have advocated a return to the mimetic tradition of realism in environmental writing, others have raised the question of "how accurately literature can represent the natural environment", or how exactly language refers to reality" (Oppermann, 2006:111). So any representation of the physical world and of human engagement with it, whether through words or images is a product with value added. In other words, if representations are never transparent windows onto the world, then the study of representations needs to take into account what the acts of representing, with its methods, values and rules, adds to the represented.

In agreement with this, Oppermann (2006:112) contends that, "representations of nature both in environmental and traditional literature project an effect of reality but do not merely represent the real material condition of nature. In

fact, what they do is create a model of reality that fashions our discourses and shapes our cultural attitudes to the natural environment". By extension then, children's literature, too, as an expression of a perceived reality as well as an expression of cultural attitudes, offers a rich location for research. Moreover, if the purpose of children's fiction is to pass on cultural messages deemed significant and appropriate for their age and sensibilities, an understanding of how young children's literature locates a child or an adolescent, and his or her relationship to the natural world, may speak to how we align ourselves with the natural world in light of the environmental crisis.

Using the various questions Ecocritics raise, which inform the methodological focus, this study attempted to explicate how discourses of the environment are inscribed in the texts. It mainly relies on the framework of Ecocriticism informed by the three basic questions Gaard (2008) suggests: (1) "How does the text address the ontological question, 'who am I'? Is the human self-identity constructed in relation to or in opposition to nature, animals and diverse human culture?" These questions focus on the proximity or distance between the child self and the natural other that the texts try to establish. (2) "Did the narrative's conclusion offer an appropriate strategy for responding to the ecological problem?" This question, on the other hand, emphasizes the roles and activities of the child in the context of the environmental problem presented in the story. The third question is (3) "What kind of agency does the text recognize in nature? Is nature an object to be saved by the heroic child actor? Is nature a damsel in distress, an all sacrificing mother, or does nature has its subjectivity and agency?" These last series of questions dwell on the voice and place given to nature.

In order to understand how depictions of the environment produce cultural meanings, one must understand the production of ideologies through social practices of representation. In addition, it is crucial to examine which ideologies are operational, and how they are related to the societal power structure. Hall (1997:6) argues that utilizing the semiotic approach means focusing mainly on "how language produces meaning," while the discursive approach examines the "effects and consequences of representation— its politics". This study employed both the semiotic and discursive approaches to analyze the representation of ecological subjectivities in Ethiopian children's literature.

There are two theories of representation that make up the theoretical framework for this study: the mimetic approach and the constructionist approach.

The reflective approach places the essence of meaning in the actual, "object, person, idea or event in the real world" and sees this meaning as fixed (Hall 1997:24). Language (in its broadest sense – including visual signs) is thought to simply reflect this innate and true meaning.

In this sense, ideologies, themes, morals and values contained within the narratives are reflections of the ideologies already present in society. Following this notion, any depictions of nature, animals, environmental ideologies and problems reflect the reality of society's current environmental notions and situation. To an extent, the mimetic approach has some merit. However, this approach has its own limitations because all representations are not mimetic. The approach also does not account for the myriad of signs and concepts that are fictional, fantasy or imaginary.

So in the case of children's literature, the physical characters, animals and settings portrayed that do not exist in reality cannot theoretically be thought to reflect reality. On the ideological level, however, the approach holds relevance to this study in that ideologies are not tangible, physical objects but are represented through meaning. Even fictional and imaginary representations signify ideological meaning. In this way, it is quite possible that environmental symbols reflect the real and dominant ideologies present in today's society.

Hence, the main theoretical underpinning for this study comes from the constructionist approach to meaning in language. This theory views representation as a system of socially constructed practices. The words and images that we use are seen as signs, which are not fixed. This differs substantially from the mimetic theory that sees meaning as fixed to certain signs because of their innate qualities. Constructivism purports that signs are arbitrary and culturally specific, and are used to signify whatever the particular society or culture designates them to reflect. They function within the system or process of representation in a very complex and arbitrary way. The sign signifies whatever concept society has socially constructed it to mean (Hall, 1997). In the case of the representation of environment in children's literature, how we represent ecological themes, morals, values and predicaments is socially constructed, and produces ideological meaning accordingly.

In addition, discourse theory informs the analysis in this study. In its broader sense, discourse represents the language and knowledge we use in communication. As children's literature is a communication between the experienced adults and the inexperienced children (when considering adults as producers and children as consumers), they are used to transmit knowledge about everything in the culture including knowledge about environment. The study emphasized delving into how adults present knowledge about the natural environment to children in the literary works. As a result, it has become imperative to include discourse analysis as part of the framework of the study. Foucault's (1972) discourse theory of power relations involved in discourse has been applied in the analysis of the power dynamics that surround the representation. This enables the researcher to look at the forces behind, by going beyond the semiotic

representation to understand how the representation in the texts reflect or counter the dominant ideologies.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS

The study is an exploratory project with the units of analysis being social artifacts: children’s books. Attempts have been made to uncover the symbols within the narratives that produce meaning about the environment using semiotics. Using semiotics involves interpretation which is a subjective practice unless grounded in some yardstick. Indeed, meaning is not fixed and the interpretation presented here might differ from the one others may present by reading the texts. To minimize the personal bias, the researcher used some environmental indicators suggested by the theory of Ecocriticism. Among the indicators include: objects, issues, concepts and themes which give clue towards the meaning represented or the ideology imparted in the texts. A textual analysis of the selected books has been conducted based on such signs, and both pro and anti-environmental indicators (issues, themes, ideologies, animals, settings, etc.) have been identified and described within the context of the story.

In order to do this, stories in the books were read several times focusing on how nature was depicted and the position accorded to human or non-human characters in the stories. Based on Buell’s (1995) four main criteria about environmental literature, the subjectivities were categorized as pro or anti-environmental. Buell suggests the following to consider the text as environmental:

- (1) *the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device;*
- (2) *the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest;*
- (3) *human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation, and*
- (4) *some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or given is at least implicit in the text. (7-8)*

Following that, the researcher analyzed the underlying cultural meanings associated with those representations as to whether they could be aligned to the capitalistic and androcentric ideologies which are thought to be the main enemies of the unity of life.

In short, the process of dealing with the texts as the data of the study involved coding for manifest content, that is, “the visible surface content...concrete terms contained in communication” (Babbie, 2004:319) as well as coding for latent content; “the underlying meaning...tone” (319). The actual words and story lines were analyzed for key environmental terms, themes and ideologies as well as for their overall prevalence within the book. In general, the plot and moral(s) of the story were analyzed for environmental content as well as the environmental themes that are presented in each book to arrive at the subject positions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How green are the stories? Analysis of the place of ecology

As has been elaborated upon in the introduction, theoretically speaking, the issue of ecology must be addressed in children’s literature if one considers the socialization of children to the ecological concerns of our world today. Indeed, it has been reflected by some Ecocritics that children’s literature cannot escape this

task when considering the severity of ecological crisis today. This section attempts to give answers to two basic questions: (1) what emphasis has been placed on the issue of environment in the context of Ethiopian children’s literature, and (2) to what extent do the writers of the works give voice to non-human nature.

Seen from the discourse of greening, children’s literature in Ethiopia (the ones considered in this study) appear to overlook the representation of the global ecological crisis, except for a handful of stories. However, most of the stories, in one way or another, address life forms and things in the environment, though not in the ecological sense. The unit of image analyses conducted indicated below shows the coverage and frequency of references to nature (environment) in the stories. The analysis took into consideration the frequency of references to the human and non-human part of the environment.

As Table 1 shows, out of the total 1533 occurrences of the categories of image in the fifty stories considered, 815 (53.16%) are devoted to the human, while the remaining share show the references made to the non-human nature put together. So, humanity considered as an independent category, has received more attention than non-human nature. This might reveal the place accorded to nonhuman nature, but not the attitudes and perceptions that the human have towards them. This has to be analyzed based on the views and environmental themes presented in the stories.

With regard to the ecological themes or humankind’s responsibility towards environmental care addressed in the stories, one would find comparatively limited narratives. Most of the stories emphasize moral lessons that the children should learn from social life in different contexts, but places limited emphasis on ecological concerns. Accordingly, out of the 50 stories considered, only eight (*አሱባላዉና የገነት ወፍ፣ እንኮ፣ ቦርድ፣ ሎኤቶና ዉሻዋ፣ አዳም፣ ድንጋይ ወርዋሪዉ፣ ማሚትና ችሎ፣ ወፍ አጥማጁ ተካ*) have environmental themes. Taking into account the pace at which ecological crisis is reportedly happening and also considering the importance attached to the case in the global arena, this number could be considered as low. In other stories, the environment is figured just as a background and an object on which the human operates. Though there are some open comments on the negative relationship between the human and non-human (for instance, comments on hunting of wild animals or on animals as destroyers of agricultural products), the case abounds with the stories that say nothing about the relationship or about nature itself.

Such dearth of ecological concern or its silencing has an impact on the socialization of children. In the narratives, even when ecological issues are presented, they follow a purely anthropocentric perspective. For instance, the stories: ‘*ካሳሁንና ብርቅዬ እንስሳቶቻ*’ (*Kasahun and the endemic animals*), and ‘*አዳም*’ (*Adam*), propagate only

Table 1. Units of image analysis of the narratives.

Units of image analysis		
Categories of image	Occurrence	Percentage
Human	815	53.16
Plants and Animals	200	13.05
Artificial Objects	315	20.54
Physical Material things	203	13.24
Total	1533	100%
Human concern	815+315 = 1130	53.16+ 20.54= 73.70
Non- Human concern	200 +203 = 403	13.05+13.24= 26.29

human-centered perspectives. In the first story nonhuman nature is represented as just a background for human enjoyment. The ending of the latter story also enforces the cognitive superiority of humankind. This might originate from the human agency in representing nature in the narratives, and from the lack of ecological consciousness.

The few green stories among the narratives, however, present critical environmental problems facing the world induced through human action. If we see the story entitled ‘አሱባለዉ እና የነት ወፍ’ (*Esubalew and the bird from Heaven*), there are several environmental themes and perspectives pertinent to the global ecological crisis. The story is purely ecological in the sense that it addresses critical environmental concerns which need attention in the greening discourse. The introduction of the story sets the tone of the whole story presented in eight sections.

Simply put, the story presents a challenge to the anthropocentric mistreatment of non-human nature, and its impact on the human. Esubalew is a child protagonist represented with the qualities of kindness and nature loving eco-warrior. He is seen fighting against the injustices inflicted on non-human nature by the human. He saved a bird from being killed by the neighboring children through paying the money his mother gave him to buy oil.

The story presents a redemptive perspective on humankind’s mistreatment of nature. The non-human natures in the narrative are given voice as they are made to speak to the human about what is happening to them. The plausibility of the dialogue between human and non-human nature is made through the technique of making the setting of the story in Heaven. This other-world is where the extinct animals and plants dwell free from human spoiling, and the protagonist was made to visit them to speak to and listen to them. His objective at first was to look for the medicine that cures all human illness, which he finally understood that it hinges on the wisdom of non-human nature. After healing him of his illness, the bird of Eden takes him to Heaven to pay back his kindness to the bird in saving it from -a cruel mistreatment.

The story asserts that the qualities of kindness and goodwill grant the human the capacity to talk to non-human nature. Esubalew was granted that opportunity because he is a kind and nature loving child. Several instances in the story confirm the life/nature-centered position of this protagonist contrary to the human-centered position of other children/humans. The following are just three of them:

ይህም ልጅ ከማንኛውም ነገር የበለጠ እንሰሳትንና ተክሎችን ይወድ ነበር። ልጆች በወፎች፣ በእርግቦችና በጭልፍቶች ላይ ድንጋይ ሲወረወሩ ማየት እነኳ ፈፅሞ አይወድም።

This boy loves animals and plants, and hates children who throw stones at birds” (Teshome, 2004:5)

የመጣሁ መትም እንዳንተ ደግ፣ ለሰዉ፤ ለእንሰሳና ለአእዋፍ የሚቆረቆር ለመፈለግ ነዉ። ስለዚህ ከብዙ ህፃናት መካከል ስለተመረጥክ ደስ ይበልህ።

I came to seek for kind human like you who are very concerned about animal and birds. Rejoice as you are chosen from among the multitudes of children (Teshome, 2004:7)

በደግነትህና በርህሩህነትህ የሚያዉቁህ የነት ነዋሪዎች ገና ስትጠራኝ፤ የሉሰ ከሚባለዉ የወፍ ዝርያ በስተቀር ለማምጣት ፈቃደኛነትህን አዉቀዋል። ሁሉም ደግሞ ሊረዱህ ዝግጁ መሆናችዉን አረጋግጠዉልኛል።

The inhabitants of heaven, who knew you by your kindness and goodwill, were aware that you are willing to come to heaven, except a bird species called ‘yelos’. And they are all willing to help you (Teshome, 2004:17)

These expressions which repeatedly assert the kindness and understanding personality of the child protagonist are brought to emphasize the possibility of human-nature interaction at the instance when humanity descends from its power of mistreatment/cruelty. The neighboring children who cruelly mistreated the bird were not chosen,

and that gives the perspective an ethical dimension. The children/readers are made to see what qualities count as important to be chosen or granted the opportunity to go to heaven and talk to non-human nature.

The nature-friendly protagonist gains a lesson about the problems encroaching on humanity as a result of humankind's destructive actions. The main concern of the story is that humanity is becoming conscious of the careless use and management of nature. This has been made possible through the personification/anthropomorphization of the non-human nature to air their voice in human language. All kinds of nature were given a voice to talk to the human about the mistreatment inflicted on them.

These voices are presented in the fourth section of the story. The voices represent the challenges humankind brought on nature: pollution of water and the environment, extinction of animals, and clearing of the forest from the face of the earth, being the major points of emphasis. What matters to the reader/children, indeed, is not the statements of the issue, but the perspective and the tone with which these issues are presented in the story. Some of the non-human nature speaks with poignant tenor. Others speak with an irritated voice, while some are not willing to hear even the name 'human' because they consider them as enemies of nature. These ways of presenting the issue do have an impact on the children as do the issues. The following quote presents the voice of the sea and the fish:

የሰው ጎልቆ የህመም ምክንያት በመሬት ላይ ያለውን ወሃ በግድ የለሽነት በማሰባሰብ ነው።

ለምሳሌ በከተማ ውስጥ ያለውን ወንዝ ተመልከት። ቆሻሻ ይደፋበታል፤ የሽንት ቤት ፍሳሽ ይለቀቅበታል፤ ይህም ወንዝ በመጨረሻ ቆሻሻውን ተሽክሞ ከሐይቅ ወይም ከባህር ወይም ከወቅያኖስ ውስጥ ይገባል። በባህርና በወቅያኖስ የሚጓዙት መርከቦች ጆልባዎች እንዲሁም ከፋ-በረከቶች የሚለቁቁ ቆሻሻ ዘይት በወሃው ውስጥ የሚኖሩትን አሳዎችና ሌሎች እንስሳት ተመርዘው እንዲሞቱ ያደርጋል። አለና ቀጥሎም አይደለም እንዴ አሃ በማለት የገነት ዓሣን ጠየቀ።

The main reason why humans get sick on earth is because of their careless management of water available to them. You may take rivers crossing towns/cities. People throw garbage to it; they direct latrine sewages towards the river; and this polluted river joins other water bodies like lakes, seas or oceans with all the harmful waste. Besides, the polluted oil discharged to the sea or ocean from ships and boat engines, and several industries/factories discharge polluting waste to the waters and kill the fish living in it. (Teshome, 2004:19)

And the fish continues from that to suggest the following:

ታላቁ የገነት በሀር ያለው ጎልቆ ነው። የሰው ልጅ አሃዎችንና ሌሎች

የባሕር እንስሳትን እንዲሁም ተክሎችን በግድ የለሽነት ከሚያጠፋቸው ይልቅ በአግባቡ በባላቸው ኖሮ በሰጋቸው ውስጥ መድሃኒት ያገኝ ነበር፤ ሲል እያዘነ መለሰ።

What the big sea of Eden uttered now is correct. The human could have got medicine to their illness from the sea animals and plants which they are killing now by carelessly polluting their environment. They could have eaten them and get cured of their illness, rather than killing the living things living in the sea through discharging polluted waste to them. (Teshome, 2004:20)

These plights of the sea and the fish present a critical concern of environmentalism which the children are to be socialized into. It presents a criticism of humanity's cruel mistreatment and careless mismanagement of nature. The non-human nature (the sea and the fish) are given the human quality of speaking to making their cases known to the human. The pollution of the environment, whether it is that of water bodies or the other environment, is currently a big concern of environmentalism. People and governments are urging on taking corrective measures on the issue across the world. Presenting the children with these issues and perspective makes them understand how nature is being treated.

The same voice of indictment is also heard from the forest of Eden which in the story gets angered at the expression of the word 'human' at first. The problem that the human caused to the forest is felt from the way it reacted to the expression of the word by the bird. But convinced of the friendly nature of Esubalew towards nature, which the bird told to the forest, it got calm and started to speak to him:

ሰው ጫካውን በግድ የለሽነት ከመጭጭቱ በፊትም ዕድሜው ረጅም ነበር። ከዚህ በተጨማሪ ብዙ ፍራፍሬ ስራስርና ቅጠላ ቅጠሎችን ያለችግር ያገኝ ነበር። ከተክል የሁሉም አይነት መድሃኒት ማግነት በቻለ ነበር። ዳሩ ግን ደኑን ስላጠፋው ከቀላል ሕመም እንኳን ለመፈወስ ችግር ይገጥመዋል። ስለዚህ ሰው ከህመም ለመፈወስ ከፈለገ የለን ደን በደንብ ይጠብቅ። አዳድስ ተክሎችንም ይጎዣል። አንተና ጓደኞቻችሁ እንዲሁም የወደፊቱ ትውልድ በደስታ እንዲኖሩ ዛፍ ትክሉ። በማለት መከረው። የልዩ ልዩ ዕዕዋት ዘር የያዘ አንድ ሙሉ ስልቻና አንድ የሚያምር ጎልቆ መፅሀፍ ሰጠው።/

The human used to live long on earth before they started to carelessly destroy the forest. They used to get diversified kinds of fruit and vegetables from it. They used to get all their medicine from the plants in the forest. But because they destroyed the forest, it has become difficult for them to recover from the simple illness they encounter now. So, if humans want to be healed from their illness, they must take care of the forest. Let them plant trees. You and your friends, if you want to live a happy and healthy life in the future, do plant trees. Then the forest gave him seeds full of sack and a beautiful book.

(Teshome, 2004:22)

The story presents to children a lesson on preventing environmental destruction through taking care of trees and planting them. The problem coming to humanity emanates from their careless treatment and destruction of nature. An open comment on environmental concern which the story asserts makes the story eco-focused. The environmental crisis and its impact is one major issue/theme of this story. The importance of forest to human, and the negation of all the importance through deforestation have got attention in the voice of nature quoted above. It capitalizes on the issue of deforestation and the human impact on nature which inculcates a pro-environmental value in the children. The narrative presents the point of view that human health depends on the health of the forest. Indeed, this discourse is common that people link forest with the wellbeing of the planet as it maintains the cycle of water and limits the effect of climate change. It is critical to inculcate such global discourse to the socialization of children through stories.

The story also presents the voice of other animals that have lost their abode and became extinct from the face of the earth. The bird that took Esubalew to heaven tells him:

ይሄውና እነዚያን እንስሳት ታያቸዋለህ; ለሰው ልጅ ጠቃሚ እንስሳት ነበሩ። ዳሩ ግን መኖርያቸው በመቃጠሉ ወሃው ደረቀ፣ ወሃው በመድረቅ ተከሉና ሳሩም ደረቀ። ሳሩም ተከሉም በመድረቅ እነዚህም እንስሳት ከምድር ገጽ ጠፉ። አለቸዉ

Look at those animals; they were all very useful to the human. But because their abode was burnt down to ashes, water dried from the land, and because rivers dried, all the plants that depend on them perished. And because the grass and the plants dried, the animals became extinct from the face of the earth (Teshome, 2004:26).

In the above quote as well, the human mistreatment of nature and its impact on the balance of nature gets criticized. It attributes the ecological crisis that affected both humankind and other nature to humankind's recklessness and mismanagement of nature. Hence, it presents a criticism of exploitive anthropocentrism.

The story presents a redemptive account of humankind's journey through its ending. After listening to the plights of all nature, the protagonist is seen to be caught in dejection for the evil that humanity has caused. He repents to the bird and all the nature he met and talked to and promises to take corrective measures. The following extracts show that

በገነት የተፈጥሮ ዉበት ተመስጦ የነበረዉ እሱባለዉም፣ የገነት ወፍ ሆይ በእዉነት አጥፍተናል። እንዲህ ያለዉን አስደሳች ነገር ማጣትም በጣም ያሳዝናል። ሲል በመጸጸት ነገራት።

Dear the bird of Heaven, we have really caused a big problem to nature (erred). It is a pity to lose such a beautiful thing. (P 25)

የተወደዳችሁ የገነት ፍጡሮች፣ እስካሁን ድረስ ባደረግሁት ጉብኝትም ሰዎች ምን ያህል ጥፋት እንዳጠፉ ተረድቻለሁ። በህመም የምንሰቃየዉ አየሩን፣ ወሃውንና እከባቢያቸውን በማቆሽሻቸዉ እንደሆነ አዉቂያለሁ። ስለዚህ ክልብ አመሰግናለሁ።

Dear creatures of Eden, I have understood in my tour here that the human have caused a grave problem to nature. The reason why we are suffering from various diseases happens to be because of our action in polluting the air, the water and generally our environment. I have come to understand that. I thank you for making me understand that. (p29)

The ending of the story with the protagonist's increased consciousness about the effect of the human on the environment makes the story eco-centered. The human perspective is suppressed and the change in attitude towards nature was upheld.

The non-human nature in Eden, except the big bird named 'yelos', have suggested the possibility of repentance for humanity and the possible recovery of the destroyed environment. The human can recover that only if, as the nature suggested, they change their attitude and work on reforestation and kind treatment of nature. The bird 'yelos', on the other hand, has a pessimistic view with regard to the treatment of nature by human, and feels humans should be destroyed. The bird thinks that the human is the enemy of animals and other nature and should be killed to spare nature from destruction. He threatens to kill the boy on his way back to the earth by suggesting:

የሎሳ ግን የገነት ወፍ፣ በምንም መንገድ ቢሆን ሰው ክፉ በመሆኑ በበሽታ በረሃብ፣ በማከራ መጥፋት አለበት። የኖረ እንደሆነ ብዙ እንስሳትና ደን ያጠፋል። ስለዚህ ያህንንም ልጅ እገድለዋለሁ። እያለ አጠነቧ ደረሰ።

In whatever means, because humans are cruel, they perish through poverty or disease. If they continue to live they will destroy many animals and plants. So I have to kill the boy. (p 32)

In general, this story presents a unique perspective seen in comparison with other stories considered for analysis. It is purely ecocentric in the sense that nature gets more emphasis than the human and the logic of partnership, not dominance, is supported in it. It also deconstructs the stereotypical representation of the non-human nature by anthropocentric logic by giving nature its voice. The deconstruction actually happens in other stories as well. For instance, we see the deconstruction of human superiority in the story "አንኮ" which talks about the tamed monkey doing all the activities humans do and discharging all its responsibility in the family. In 'አዳም'

nature (*ጸሃይ/Sun*, *ነፋስ/wind*, *ደመና/cloud* and *መሬት/earth*) equally fights humanity in a coordinated way and control the human, even at times having dominance over him. The other stories emphasize the caring and loving attitude of children towards animals, similar to Esubalew in the above story. In *‘ሎኤቶና ወሻዋ’* (*lo’eto and her dog*), *‘ድንጋይ ወርዋሪዉ’* (*the one who throws stones*), *‘ማሚትና ችሎ’* (*Mamit and Chilo*) and *‘ወፍአጥማጁ ተካ’* (*Teka, the hunter of birds*), there are children devoted to the love and care of animals.

Representation of children’s attachment to (distance from) nature

Children begin understanding their humanity and its relationship to nature very early in their life. This understanding could be fostered through both conscious and unconscious efforts. Children’s literatures, which deal primarily with the natural environment, can be an important site for the fostering. What it offers should be investigated and seen from the environmental values it entails. This section focuses on the discourse that tries to establish attachment between children and nature in Ethiopian children’s literature.

The discourse of attachment between children and animals is observed in some stories from the Ethiopian children’s literature books considered in this study. These stories portray children as very close to nature, and as endowed with a sympathetic attitude towards the treatment of the natural environment. Some of the children in the stories even go to the extent of challenging their parents’ suspicious view of animals and stereotypical valuations. In *‘ወፍአጥማጁ ተካ’* (*Teka, the hunter of birds*), the narrator of the story presents a deep love that the kid named Teka developed for birds. This kid appreciates the variegated colors of the birds and makes plans to catch one of them so that he may take care of it and enjoys looking at it always.

The story begins with the narrator’s comment that *“Teka loves birds very much”* which is a strong statement with a potential of positioning readers to that perspective. The humorous story, in which the kid catches a hen instead of the bird he intends to own, harbors the aesthetic appreciation of nature. His desire to possess the animal comes from his deep love for it. The story does not put emphasis either on the concern over the wellbeing or the mistreatment of the bird. But the discourse of attachment that the kid intends to establish could be understood from the way the narrator presents the description. Seen from an Ecocritical point of view, the story positions the child character at the greener side of the discourse as he is at least presented as not opposed to the non-human nature (animal).

In *‘ድንጋይ ወርዋሪዉ’* (the one who throws stones), Fikirte, the female character is described as close to animals

through her sympathy towards them. Another story from the same collection, *‘ማሚትና ችሎ’* (*Mamit and Chilo*) depicts the biophilic attachment between the kid and her little dog. Similar to Teka’s case in the above story, this story begins with a categorical statement that *“Mamit and chilo love each other very much; they spend the whole day together, and they get apart only at night”* (p1). By presenting this statement at the beginning, the narrator attempts to position children/readers to a location in the discourse of distance/proximity between human and nature (animals).

The parents are not located at the same subject position with regard to the animal. They are distanced from it because they feel the attachment between the two involves a risk of health on their kid. With the power and experience they had, the parents attempt to create a gap between the animal and their daughter, but she remains strong enough to hold on to her position. The power of knowledge and experience that the adults claim to have comes in the story as a source of their distance from nature: *“Mamit, because you are a kid, there are many things that you do not understand, please throw that dog away to the jungle”* (p3). The innocence of the kid could not save the dog from being thrown at first because the parents threw it away based on their claim of superiority in knowledge and experience on the matter. The mother claims *“it is better to lose the dog than let our kid infected with disease”* (p3). The parents showed no sympathy towards the animal when they threw it away.

The persistent protest of the kid, however, finally saves the dog and brings the adults to the location/subject position of the kid. The animal friendly attitude of the kid triumphs over the distancing discourse of the parents after a hard fought battle of the kid. The suffering of Mimi for the cause of the animal challenged the human-centered view of the adults who finally regretted their actions. The ending of the story promotes the attitude of devotion to the care of nature and espouses the motif of attachment through positioning the human closer to the animal. This story also positions the child character, and then the child reader, on the greener side and fosters love and care of nature.

Even in the stories which passively mirror the distance between animal and nature, we see instances which exceptionally assert attachment through sympathy. In the folktale collection published by *Mega*, the story taken from *Benishangul* (an administrative region in Ethiopia) presents the attachment between a sympathetic hunter and a wounded lion. In the village where Bord (the hunter) lived, the king was cruel and punished people by throwing them to lions as prey. The character is depicted in the story as a brave but sympathetic hunter, but not on good terms with the king. Rather than killing the wounded lion in the forest, Bord treats its wound. Eventually, the king captured the hunter and threw him to a group of lions. He was saved by the lion whose wound he Bord

had treated.

The story presents the idea that the sympathy and caring attitude that the human shows nature (animals) confers on one a lifesaving reward. Such discourse in the narratives has the potential to inculcate the value of care, and the attitude of sympathy towards nature in the readers through positioning them close to nature. This position is made to triumph over the distancing attitude of the king as the story concludes in favor of those who show sympathy to the animals. Bord's story deconstructs two essentialist views: the first is the view that associates hunters with cruelty, and the second is the view that demonizes animals, like the lion, through positioning them nearer to those who show sympathy.

What is anomalous (from an anthropocentric point of view) in this story, though, is, opposite to the case in other stories, the enmity (hunter and hunted) between the man and the lion vanishes and friendship develops. In other stories, females are thought to be sympathetic to the animals, but here, the male (surprisingly the hunter) becomes sympathetic. Such a portrayal inspires a thought of questioning the anthropocentric discourse on the human animal relation.

The discourse of proximity between human and non-human nature bears a different dimension to it in the stories. One would see a preponderant gendering of the discourse as presented in the following section of the analysis.

Gendering proximity: Intimacy of the feminine to nature

In addition to the attachment kids have with nature, the stories reveal the gender difference in the portrayal of who is closer to nature. With the exception of Bord's story considered above, in all the stories wherein we see feminine characters, the feminine figures are represented as intimate to nature (or at least not antagonistic to the non-human beings). Contrary to this, the masculine characters are depicted as distanced from nature (antagonistic and with a deep desire of controlling it). In the story, 'ደንጋይ ወርቅረዳ' (the one who throws stones) we observe the representation of gender-nature proximity enforced by the narrator.

The feminine figure (Fikirte) is represented as intimate to nature, while her brother (Takele) is distanced from it. Indeed, the way the two children are portrayed in the story is indicative of the fact that they are destined to act from the position they were made to hold. Fikirte is represented as peaceful and submissive, while Takele is portrayed as rebellious and a trouble maker. His mistreatment of animals is related to his behavior of trouble making, and Fikirte's sympathy towards animals is also correlated with her peace loving and caring behavior.

The story challenges the discourse of masculine power of control over nature through prohibiting the success of mistreatment in the plot of the story. An alternative subject position which is thought to be appropriate for all humans in the discourse of the story is the feminine position. The narrator makes readers feel the pain inflicted on the animals through reflecting on the cruel treatment inflicted by the masculine figure: "*the birds and the goose could not endure the knock. When a stone strikes them, they collapse to the ground and at once you see them no more*" (p3). In this statement readers are made to position themselves with the caring feminine figure rather than with the mistreating masculine figure as they are made to feel owe for the mistreated animal. Indeed, the expressions used by the feminine figure in her attempt to prohibit the mistreatment show the same predisposition. Fikirte says "...*what have these poor animals done to you? Why do you always trouble them by throwing stones at them?*"(p4). Using similar expressions she challenges her brother's brutal treatment of the animals.

Readers are shown both ways of treatment followed by the characters, to finally side with the female character as the story concludes. Though Takele resisted and attempted to hold onto his exploitive subject position, which the narrator makes explicit in the story, he finally drops his way to come to the location of his sister.

The androcentric and anthropocentric attitude that made him mistreat the animals was challenged. At first when his sister was opposing his actions, he did not easily submit himself to her idea. He rather claimed that she was envious of his power of killing because she was not able to do it. He says "*yes, it gives me pleasure! You always shout at me because you cannot strike them like I do because you don't have the knack. You could have rejoiced like me if you knew how to do it*" (P6). The relegation of the female as an incapable being presented in the discourse of this narrative which subjugated the mentality of the boy must have come from the social fabric. It seems that the boy is aware of the cultural difference in gender identity.

The ending of the story, however, makes the readers challenge the position held by the boy by resolving the conflict from the perspective of the feminine figure. The mistreating boy is seen to regret his action by learning from his mistake.

Therefore, the biophilic attitude of the lady, and the triumph of this perspective over the exploitive male and human-centered point of view, depicts the gender-nature proximity discourse supported by the narrator. In view of some Ecofeminists, the depiction of women as nature friendly develops the biophilic attitude and confers responsibility of caring for nature on them. Contrary to the exploitive tendency of the male figures, they are thought to value the essential unity of life. Through depicting women as intimate to nature and through forcing the

masculine attitude to submit itself to the caring feminine attitude, the story imparts an ecological motif of care.

In another story, 'ማሚትና ቸሎ' (*Mamit and Chilo*), a similar biophilic attitude and attachment to nature that female characters have towards nature is depicted. As indicated above, the story begins with a statement that positions female characters nearer to nature: "*Mamit and chilo love each other very much*" (p2). The character is so close to the animal that she is attached to it, and is firm in her stand about maintaining the attachment. Though the challenge of forced distancing came from her parents, who claim that the attachment should be broken, she insists on not cutting the tie. The narrator presents her point of view as the one that triumphs though it has to come through adversities. The commitment of the kid to the love of nature challenges the distanced position held by the parents, especially the father's anthropocentric perspective. In this story as well, the proximity between human and nature (animals) is represented with the model of the women.

The discourse of representing women as intimate to nature in Ethiopian children's literature is not limited to showing the caring attitude of women. As shown above, one of the motifs observed is, indeed, how women are intimate to nature and friendly to the non-human part of nature and hence, ecological in their natural pre-disposition. But contrary to that discourse, there are stories which use the intimacy between women and nature as a justification for women's inferiority. In other stories, men are seen to be antagonistic to animals because they have the power to kill them. The women, however, are seen to be lacking that power of resisting against the encroaching animals. They rather negotiate with other animals to be saved.

In the collection of tales published by Mega printing enterprise, the story 'አሜት ገመስና ዘንዶል' (*Gemes and the serpent*) presents an account of a woman (*Gemes*) who attempts to save herself from the attack of a serpent. Because she is not able to defend herself she has to negotiate with the animals. The passive discourse behind such a portrayal carries the project of animalizing women through claiming a matrimonial relation. This woman begs all animals saying "if you save me, I will become your wife" (p5). Here, one might ask why the woman has to negotiate through forming marital ties. There is no place in any of the narratives that attach human and non-human animals through marriage except for such cases where women have to be saved from a certain danger through promising to marry those who save them. Such a representation harbors a male voice instilling sexual desire as a motif for saving women from danger. The silent ideology of male chivalry for sexual desire might be behind such an association between women and animals. There is no story in the corpus of Ethiopian children's literature considered for this study in which a man (male) marries a non-human animal. But the

possibility is indicated for the women in such stories.

The possibility of establishing marital relationship in this story presents a male discourse of naturalization which attaches women to nature through claiming their inferiority and 'naturalness'. In some Ecofeminists' view, this kind of association is targeted at establishing the logic of domination justifying the control over nature and women by men. So, the motif in the story is not essentially about women going wild to marry animals, but their representation as such by the chauvinist male figure attempting to define women that way in order to have a control over them.

The ambivalence of positioning: Environmental subject positions

Subjectivity involves psycho-social and socio-spatial processes that shape and determine who we think we are and how we situate ourselves in the world. As it is dynamic, ambivalent positioning could be observed in discourses talking about subjectivity. Environmental subject positions offered in narratives become ambivalent as different discourses influence the construction of the subjectivities. For instance, in a worldview influenced by an anthropocentric value system, the human stands at the apex of the hierarchy of beings. Humanity is conferred the power of taming and humanizing the non-human through its ideology of giving intrinsic value to only the human and making human life the standard of living on earth. In the story which talks about a tamed monkey in Alem Eshetu's (2000) 'ለማዳወ እንኮ እና ሌሎችም የዘንጅሮ ታሪኮች' (*the tamed 'enke' and other stories about monkeys*), we observe the entangling power and attraction force of the human capacity.

The story of the 'tamed enko' presents a conflicting point of view resulting from the anthropocentric discourse. It partly challenges the assumptions which assign significance only to what is considered as important in the human value system. And it partly affirms the superiority of the value system by making the animal succumb to human ways. At the beginning, the story narrates about how a certain family living in a suburb area tamed a monkey and gave it a name 'enke'. This monkey is represented as a humanized animal through the description of the narrator. It is seen to perform all the activities which human beings do. It wears clothes and shoes, ploughs the land, tends cattle and fetches water from the river. Enke is treated as a member of the human family and trained to accomplish all the activities that members of the family carry out. The discourse which considers the animal as devoid of reasoning/cognition is challenged by positioning the animal as just a member of a human community.

Though the subject position given to the monkey by the narrator questions the passive ideology of docility of the

animal, the discourse of human superiority is centered because it is the human who still trains the monkey to become like the human. The shift in identity from monkey to human comes through the agency of training/taming it. The ideology of hierarchal separation between human and non-human nature remains inherent in the story as the narrator and characters in the story could not totally avoid the value system.

The question of identity, of being self (monkey) and other (human), arises as the untamed monkeys come to the scene and interrogate the tamed Enko with challenging concerns of defining self. As the story is a human construction, the representation cannot be totally expected to do away with the human-centered points of view. The contradiction of representing the monkey as a being 'not different from human' through involving it in human activities comes when the narrator assumes the position of wild monkey in representing the human-animal relation. From that location/angle, there is a big gulf between human and animal life, and in no way should they be allowed to live under the same roof. Accordingly, the story presents that 'enko', is advised by the other monkeys to abhor its association with the human and be itself (monkey): *"as we can see, you are a monkey (one of us) you have to live with your kind. How do you live with human beings? They are not relatives to you"* (p6). Here, the narrator reveals the claim of distance and oppositional propensity.

From the position of the tamed/humanized/ monkey, however, there is a possibility for coexistence. This voice seems to be strong in its response against the divisive question of creating distance between self and other posed to it. Enko responds: *"though I live with the human family, I am treated equally as one of the members of the family. What is done for the members of the family is done for me, and I have no problem in living with them. I don't see my living with them as a problem"* (p7). This is a blow against the separation through justifying coexistence based on the fair treatment received. This position suggests that human-nature coexistence is a possibility in the non-anthropocentric treatment of animals as it forces the human to descend from their position of dominion.

Yet the oppositional force persists in the story and the question of identity (defining oneself as not the other) is fuelled later with the justification coming from the wild monkey to persuade Enko to go back to his jungle life. The discourse is infused with the essential difference between human and non-human forms of life:

We are sorry. You don't even have the slightest idea of the fact that you are enslaved, and have become manipulatable at the will of your masters. Look at us; we don't have any leader who orders us to do this or that. Nobody is there to tell us do something. We live in an absolute freedom. We have plenty of wild fruits for our food. We consume from the fruits and drink

clean waters of the streams in the forest. We lead our life in joy. That is our place. Why don't you join us and lead a happy life?' (p8)

The narrator reveals what it means to be a human and a monkey, and the position given to each. Life with the human is considered as a life of enslavement and servitude. Contrary to that, life in the wilderness is portrayed as a life free of impositions, and of a total self-control. Abundance and absolute freedom characterizes the life as monkey, while scarcity and servitude symbolizes life as human for the monkey. The tamed animal then vacillates between the two selves (subject positions) and finally chooses to occupy the subject position of being the animal living in the jungle. But later, the same decision is regretted and the monkey is seen to head back to the human family that tamed it.

Life in the jungle, which the tamed monkey detested later, is portrayed by the narrator as a troubling and not safe environment. Figuring the environment as such carries the ideology of claiming distance between the human and animal's habitats. This ideology distances the human from the non-human nature.

The story presents two critical challenges to the human value system. The first is the narrator's voice which makes the animal think about enslavement under the human. This presents a dialogical question of freedom from control through consciousness. The second challenge is assertion of the possibility of equal treatment of both the animal and the human, which deconstructs the relegation of animals to a lower position in the hierarchy of beings. But implicit to the second is the entangling ideology of labeling the animal as inferior because the equality is perceived to be the succumbing of the monkey to human requirements. It has to be trained first to be treated as equal to human. All in all, the story presents the conflicting discourse of a human-centered value system which at times challenges its main base argument.

Conclusion

Greening the socialization of children is considered part of the multidimensional efforts currently underway in saving and sustaining the environment. The exploratory study undertaken through an Ecocritical approach to Ethiopian children's literature set out to identify the emphasis placed on the issue in the context of Ethiopia. Accordingly, the analysis reveals that the works considered place limited emphasis on ecological crisis. With regard to the proximity discourse in the human-nature relations, some stories inscribe attachment between children and nature (mostly animals), and espouse the attitude of care and love they show to nature. This intimacy, however, is infested with patriarchal ideology.

Besides, the eco-conscious stories also fall under the entangling ideology of anthropocentrism though they present ambivalent subject positions. Hence, taking into account the importance of stories in the socialization of children, and the objective of shaping an ecologically conscious and compassionate citizens, the researcher recommends that writers, editors and critics of Ethiopian children's literature to place emphasis on the issue.

Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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