Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Wedding of Zein [□□□□□ □□□ (Urs' al-Zayn)] by Tayeb Salih", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1299. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Tayeb Salih

The Wedding of Zein [□□□□□ □□□ (Urs' al-Zayn)]

Lebanon (1964)

TAGS: African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Wedding of Zein [□□□□□ □□□ (Urs' al-Zayn)]
Country of the First Edition	Lebanon
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	Arabic
First Edition Date	1964
First Edition Details	Two chapters were published in the Beirut magazine *Ḥiwār*: Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, □□□□□ □□□ [Urs' al-Zayn], *Ḥiwār* 10, (1964): 40–51. The entire novel was published in the Sudanese journal *Al-Khartum*, 30 Dec. 1966, 97–137. As the book it was first published in Beirut: Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, □□□□□ □□□ [Urs' al-Zayn], Beirut: Dār al-'Awda, 1967.
ISBN	not applicable for editio princeps
Genre	Novellas
Target Audience	Adults (teenagers)
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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Creators



Tayeb Salih by Engfrompalestine. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: February 3, 2022).

Tayeb Salih , 1929 - 2009
(Author)

Tayeb Salih (Ṣāliḥ, al-Ṭayyib; □□□□ □□□□□), an acclaimed writer and broadcaster, was born in Karmakol, near Al Debba in northern Sudan and educated at Gordon Memorial College (later known as the University of Khartoum) and at the University of London. After working briefly as a teacher, he moved to London to work for the BBC Arabic Service as head of Drama, and as a columnist for the London Arabic newspaper *Al Majalla*. Salih later worked as director general at the Ministry of Information in Doha, Qatar, in the Arabian Gulf, and then at UNESCO in Paris and as that organization's representative in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. Besides *The Wedding of Zein*, his works translated into English and more than 30 other languages, include *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and *Bandarshah I* (1971) and *Bandarshah II* (1976). In 2001, *Season of Migration to the North* was proclaimed as the most important Arabic novel of the 20th century by Damascus-based Arab Literary Academy, and was voted among the 100 greatest books in history. Most of his works centre on communal rural life in his hometown, which is a reflection of his humble background. He spent most of his life outside of his native Sudan, settling in London with his Scottish wife Julia Maclean and their three daughters. He died on February 18, 2009.

Source :

thefamouspeople.com, (accessed August 4, 2021).

Flood, Alison, "Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih dies aged 80", The Guardian, Feb. 19, 2009 (accessed: August 4, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Adaptations	The story was adapted into a Kuwaiti movie in 1976, which won a prize at the Cannes film festival in the same year. □□□□□ □□□ [Urs Al-Zayn (The Wedding of Zein)], directed by: Khalid Al Siddiq, Kuwait, 1976, 90 min.
Translation	Tayeb Salih, *The Wedding of Zein and Other Stories*, ill. by Ibrahim Salahi, London: Heinemann, 1968, 120 pp.
Summary	The story opens with news of Zein's wedding that comes as a surprise to everyone; the villagers all marvel at how an ugly person like Zein, who has only two remaining teeth, could marry the village belle Ni'ma. Through a flashback, Zein's childhood is exposed. Immediately after his birth, it is said, the infant Zein did not cry as every child is expected to do at birth, but burst out into laughter, and lost almost all his teeth at the age of six. He had a strange natural charm to attract beautiful young girls in the village with whom he fell in love and they in turn fell in love with him. Once Zein sings their praises, other suitors come their way and marry them. This ability of his caused most parents to invite him - the village fool - over with expectation that he falls in love with their daughters and attracts eligible young men for them. Thus, these incessant heartbreaks leave Zein moody at times, but not sad. The next part of the story presents to us another facet of Zein; besides being an ugly young man with a mysterious ability and ferocious appetite, Zein is known by many in the village for his hospitality and amicability. One night, Zein is injured and is hospitalised for two weeks. Once he is back home, the villagers think that the injury has reshaped him and has made him less ugly, since his missing teeth have been replaced. The story proceeds to expose Zein's fight with Seif ad-Din, a man who has a bad reputation in the village. During an attack on Zein by Seif ad-Din, Haneen, a holy man, suddenly appears on the scene and stops

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	the fight by blessing Zein, Seif ad-Din, and the entire village. The following year, known as Haneen's year, the villagers experience a ripple of miracles and surprises. One of which is Zein's wedding to the intelligent and pious belle, Ni'ma.
Analysis	Love has always been at the very core of human relationships and interactions; sometimes born from sheer animosity or attraction. It is either ephemeral or long-lasting as in marriage. Many world mythologies have cases of gods associated with love and marriage. *The Wedding of Zein* depicts a scenario of fantastic attraction in which the village buffoon, Zein, secures for himself the village belle, Ni'ma. Zein's simplicity, decency and politeness, attracts the attention of everyone in the village, especially the maidens. It can be said of him that his teeth are taken away and replaced with these positive traits. Zein, a man of low birth, succeeds in marrying a very beautiful maiden, an action which brings euphoria to the community. Apart from that, he is considered a bringer of good omen when it comes to marriages. In all, the story celebrates love, marriage, happiness, beauty from within and even life as a whole with Zein at the core of all these. Zein's ability to attract love and happiness from almost every member of the society shows that physical appearance or handicap is not a barrier to love and happiness.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Character traits Friendship Life Love Tradition Values

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Further Reading

Chaabane, Bechir, "A carnivalistic reading of The Wedding of Zein by Taib Salih, The Journal of North African Studies", *The Journal of North African Studies* (2020) (accessed: August 4, 2021).

De Wail, Hassan S., *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Harrow, Kenneth W., "The Power and the Word: L'Aventure Ambiguë and the Wedding of Zein", *African Studies Review* 30.1 (1987): 63–77.

Sells, Michael Anthony, "The Wedding of Zein: Islam through the Modern Novel" in Brannon M. Wheeler, ed., *Teaching Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 145–167.

Addenda

The entry is based on: Tayeb Salih, *The Wedding of Zein & Other Stories*. Translated from the Arabic by Denys Johnson-Davies. (New York Review Books Classics Series). New York: NYRB, 2010. 144 p.

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