Dapo Adeleke, Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: My Life in the Bush of Ghosts by Amos Tutuola", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Marta Pszczolińska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/431. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Amos Tutuola

My Life in the Bush of Ghosts

United Kingdom (1954)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype Metamorphosis



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

General information	
Title of the work	My Life in the Bush of Ghosts
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide (see: translations)
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1954
First Edition Details	Amos Tutuola, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954, 174 pp.
ISBN	Not applicable for editio princeps
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Didactic fiction, Fantasy fiction, Folk tales, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Dapo Adeleke, independent researcher, dapojj@gmail.com Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
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Creators



Amos Tutuola , 1920 - 1997
(Author)

Amos Tutuola was born in the year 1920 in Abeokuta, the present capital of Ogun State, Nigeria. Tutuola started out in life as a servant to a businessman by the name Monu who sent him to school in place of wages for his service. Tutuola would eventually learn and become a blacksmith. He then worked for the Royal Air force between 1934 and 1939. Mr. Tutuola would also be involved in other vocations such as bread-selling and also worked as a messenger with the Nigerian Labour Department. Tutuola did not start writing until 1946 when he published *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the work which was received with skepticism and regarded as a shame to the Nigerian literature because of its poor use of Grammar. However, in spite of its flawed rendition, the work was well received with applaud in the West. Tutuola wrote many other books after the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, such as *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), *Sibi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1956), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958), *The Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967), and *Pauper, Brawler and Slanderer* (1987). Tutuola did not earn so much on his publications but these shot him into the literary limelight which enabled him to work as a storekeeper with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in the then Oyo State of Nigeria. Amos Tutuola died in 1997 at the age of 77.

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Additional information

Translation

Japanese: □□□□□□□□: □□□□□□□□□□ [Janguru hōrōki: afurika no yūki to gensō], trans. Fukuo Hashimoto, Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 1962.

Serbian: *Moj život u šumi duhova*, trans. Ljiljana Ćalovska, Beograd: Rad, 1969.

Italian: *La mia vita nel bosco degli spiriti*: preceduto da *Bevitore di vino di palma*, trans. Adriana Motti, Milano: Adelphi, 1983.

Polish: *Moje życie w puszczy upiorów*, trans. Ernestyna Skurjat, Warszawa: Iskry, 1983.

Spanish: *Mi vida en la maleza de los fantasmas*, trans. Maribel de Juan, Madrid: Siruela, 1990.

Japanese: □□□□□□□□□□□□ [Busshu obu gāsutsu], trans. Fukuo Hashimoto, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1990.

German: *Mein Leben im Busch der Geister*, trans. Wulf Teichmann, Berlin: Alexander, 1991.

French: *Ma vie dans la brousse des fantômes*, trans. Michèle Laforest, Paris: UGE, 1993.

Dutch: *Mijn leven in het land der geesten: roman*, trans. Peter Abspoel and Hans Plomp, Haarlem: In de Knipscheer, 1999.

Russian: *Моя жизнь в лесу духов* [Moia zhizn′ v lesu dukhov], trans. A. Kistiakovskiy, Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2002.

Swedish: *Mitt liv i spökenas bush*, trans. Niklas Nenzén, Stockholm: Sphinx, 2011.

Summary

Just like his first novel, *The Palm-wine Drinkard,* Amos Tutuola's second novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* has its roots in the folkloric oral tradition of the Yoruba tribe of the Southwest of Nigeria. The author uses the first person narrative technique to tell his story set in the jungle inhabited by goblins and other weird and fantastic monsters acting in the spiritual realm. As common in folklores, the

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basic themes of the novel are focussed around didactic instructions to children about life in all its ramifications.

My life in the Bush of Ghosts opens with the narrator's learning of the difference between "bad" and "good" at the age of 7, in a polygamous home where his mother is a petty trader in their village. The village is attacked by slave traders, and in the ensuing pandemonium, the narrator escapes into a jungle called "Bush-of-Ghosts". He takes with him two fruits which his elder brother plucked from a tree called "future sign" and gave him. He becomes a wanderer, searching for a human world in this mysterious jungle whose inhabitants are not humans but live together like a community of humans. They possess effective *juju* that makes them invulnerable to death. It is in this community that the narrator discovers his cousin who died a long time ago. His next encounter is with a "Smelling-Ghost" infested with "uncountable" parasites of insects such as bees, wasps, mosquitoes and others flying around it. It wears many living scorpions on its fingers as rings and poisonous snakes coiled round its neck as beads. This Smelling-Ghost leads him to a city where it is the king. With the aid of the *juju* power he possesses, the Smelling-Ghost transforms him many times into different animals such as: a camel, a horse and later back to himself. The narrator steals the Smelling-Ghost's *juju* and flees, but, he soon finds himself in the village of cows where he is transformed into a cow. Although he is now a cow, he does not eat grass and wanders around like the other cows but always remains aloof. They are angry at him and decide to take him to the market for sale, but no one is interested in him and he is returned home. On the third attempt, an old woman eventually buys him in order to offer him as a sacrifice to a certain god who will assist her in restoring her daughter's sight. A fortune-teller once told her that unless she sacrificed a cow to appease a certain god, her daughter would be blind for life. He finds himself among "burglar-ghosts". He spends some time with them before leaving. At the eighth town of ghosts, he marries the daughter of a wealthy ghost, then with her, he continues to search for the world of humans. He roamed in the Bush-of-Ghosts for twenty-four years with various weird experiences. He eventually finds himself under the tree, "Future-sign" from which his elder brother plucked two fruits and gave him at the beginning of the story. Having found himself under the tree he knows he is close to his home which he has missed for twenty-four years. Suddenly, two men grab him from behind, tie his hands and lead him away. He has fallen into the hands of slave traders from whom he had earlier tried to escape.

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	He is taken away to join the others in the bush. He eventually escapes, returns home and meets his mother and brother who do not recognise him. He finds out that so many things have changed in the town.
Analysis	The story has a universal appeal, for it focuses on the evils of slave trade. Amos Tutuola employs the technique of the tale as a vehicle to illustrate the evils of slavery, how it disintegrated a once closely knitted family and turned the captured into a sub-human without identity in the hands of their masters. Also, the introduction of the element of adventure and wandering makes the story good for children and young adults. Like *The Palm-wine Drinkard, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is regarded as classic in the context of African Literature from the perspective of the western literary value.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype Metamorphosis
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Ghosts Good vs evil Magic Relationships Sacrifice
Further Reading	Cosentino, Donald J., "In Memoriam: Amos Tutuola, 1920–1997", *African Arts* 30.4 (1997): 16–17 (accessed: September 7, 2021). Hoekema, David A., "African Personhood: Morality and Identity in the "Bush of Ghosts"", *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 91.3/4 (2008): 255–286 (accessed: September 7, 2021). Larrabee, Eric, "Amos Tutuola: A Problem in Translation", *Chicago Review* 10.1 (1956): 40–44 (accessed: September 7, 2021). Lindfors, Bernth, "Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets", *Cahiers D'Études*

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Africaines 10.38 (1970): 306–334 (accessed: September 7, 2021).

Thomas, Valorie D., ""1+1 = 3" and Other Dilemmas: Reading Vertigo in "Invisible Man", "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts", and "Song of Solomon"", *African American Review* 37.1 (2003): 81–94 (accessed: September 7, 2021).

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