HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1954)

Amos Tutuola (1920-1997)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Amos Tutuola (1920–1997) was one of Nigeria's most original literary voices, a writer who brought Yoruba imagination into global literature. Tutuola was born in Abeokuta, in southwestern Nigeria, into a culture rich in oral storytelling, spirit lore, and communal performance. His formal schooling ended early. he attended St. Peter's School in Abeokuta and later the CMS School in Lagos. But his traditional education was deep: He grew up listening to folktales, chants, and mythic narratives that shaped his creative world. Before becoming a writer, Tutuola worked as a blacksmith, messenger, and laborer. With *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), Tutuola astonished readers at home and abroad. Nigerian critics were divided: Some admired his bold use of English and Yoruba cosmology, while others disliked his unconventional grammar. European and American critics praised his inventiveness, comparing him to surrealists and myth-makers. His work opened doors for African imaginative fiction on the world stage. Tutuola wrote several books after *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* including *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958), *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967). Though he did not receive major international awards, his books became classics, studied in universities worldwide. Tutuola died in Ibadan in 1997. Today, he is considered a pioneering figure in Nigerian and global literature, a writer who proved that oral tradition could stand proudly on the world's literary stage.

Book *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is a visionary novel that blends folklore, myth, and spiritual imagination. It is about the journey of a child who survives by navigating a supernatural world that mirrors human society in distorted but revealing ways. The book received mixed reactions: Some readers admired its originality, while others criticized its unconventional English. Nevertheless, it was celebrated for its creativity and became a landmark of African imaginative literature. Critics in Europe and America praised Tutuola's bold storytelling, comparing him to writers of mythic modernism. The novel treats themes of exile, transformation, cultural hybridity, fear, survival, and the boundary between the living and the dead. The novel earned lasting international recognition and helped establish Amos Tutuola as one of the most influential voices in African fiction.

Background In the early 1950s, when the book appeared, colonial rule was still in place in Nigeria and across West Africa, but nationalist movements were gaining strength, and cultural self-assertion was becoming central to political life. Writers, artists, and intellectuals were reclaiming indigenous stories, languages, and cosmologies as part of a broader effort to define African identity beyond colonial frameworks. Tutuola's work belongs to this moment: It draws heavily on Yoruba oral traditions, spirit lore, and storytelling rhythms, offering a narrative that resists European realism and embraces African metaphysics. Culturally, the novel reflects a world where traditional beliefs coexisted with Christianity, producing a rich spiritual hybridity. Ghosts build Methodist churches, worship with "dead publishers," and follow divine voices, a symbolic representation of how Yoruba cosmology absorbed and reinterpreted Christian influence. This blending mirrors the lived reality of mid-century Nigeria, where communities navigated multiple belief systems at once. Politically, the book resonates with the trauma of war, displacement, and slavery. The narrator's flight from a slave raid echoes historical memories of pre-colonial conflicts and the transatlantic slave trade, which continued to shape collective consciousness. His wandering through dangerous ghost towns reflects the instability and fear experienced by many communities under colonial rule, where violence, forced labor, and social fragmentation were common. At the same time, the novel's emphasis on survival, adaptation, and intercultural encounters reflects the hope of a society moving toward independence. The narrator's transformation into a culturally hybrid being symbolizes the emergence of a new African subject, one shaped by tradition, modernity, and spiritual

multiplicity. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* captures the complexity of a historical moment when Nigeria was redefining itself politically, culturally, and spiritually.

MAIN CHARACTERS

The Narrator	A child lost in a forest of ghosts
The Earthly People	The narrator's community
The Ghost	Supernatural beings who inhabit a mysterious forest

SYNOPSIS

In an unconventional language that blends Yoruba vernacular tempo with English grammatical norms, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* tells the story of a young boy who is forced to flee his village during a violent slave raid. Separated from his family, he runs blindly into a forbidden supernatural wilderness known as the Bush of Ghosts. From this moment, his life becomes an extraordinary journey through a world where spirits, monsters, and magical beings live in organized towns, each with its own customs, laws, and dangers. The narrator encounters ghosts who fight over him, transform him into animals, imprison him, or try to use him for rituals. He is carried from town to town, sometimes as a servant, sometimes as a curiosity, sometimes as a victim. In the seventh town, he lives among smelling-ghosts; in another, he is mistaken for a cow and nearly sacrificed; in others, he meets ghosts who behave almost like humans, with churches, schools, and families. He even marries a female ghost and temporarily forgets his earthly origins. Despite constant suffering, he also experiences moments of kindness, hospitality, and unexpected fraternity. Ghosts feed him, shelter him, teach him their language, and welcome him into their communities. Each encounter reveals a different aspect of the ghost world, blending Yoruba cosmology with Christian imagery and imaginative invention. Throughout the journey, the narrator grows from a frightened child into someone shaped by multiple cultures, beliefs, and identities. His long search for a way home becomes a symbolic quest for self-knowledge. When he finally leaves the ghost towns, he is no longer the boy who entered the bush but a transformed being enriched by extraordinary experiences.

CHAPTER 1**-The Meaning of Bad and Good**

Discovering What "Bad" Means: The narrator is seven years old when he first begins to understand the meaning of "bad." His father has three wives, and the narrator's mother, who has only two sons, is hated by the other wives, who have only daughters. They fear that the boys will inherit their father's property: *"hated my mother, brother and myself to excess as they believe that … my brother and myself would be the rulers of our father's house"* (1). This early experience of hostility teaches him what "bad" feels like.

A Mother Who Works Hard: The narrator's mother is a small-scale trader who travels from market to market, sometimes returning late. She leaves food for her sons before leaving, protecting it from the jealous wives. The narrator remembers she *"left two slices of cooked yam for us,"* a gesture of care in a strained household.

A World Filled With Wars: The narrator grows up in a time of constant conflict. He says: *"… there were many kinds of African wars … general wars, tribal wars, burglary wars and the slave wars"* which threaten people in towns, villages, and markets. Slave raids are especially terrifying because captured people are sold to foreigners and taken to unknown places. The narrator says these raids *"were causing dead luck to both old and young,"* showing how unpredictable and deadly life could be.

Eating Yam While Danger Approaches: One day, while their mother is away, the narrator and his brother eat the yam she left for them. As they eat, they hear gunfire echoing through the hills. At first, they do not understand the danger. They even dance to the sound, thinking the gunshots are exciting, unaware that war is about to enter their town. Soon, the gunfire becomes frightening. The two wives who hate them flee with their daughters, leaving the boys behind. When the narrator and his brother step outside, they find the town empty of people. Only domestic and wild animals remain, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, and monkeys and deer, running *"up and down in the town*" in panic.

Trying to Escape North, Then South: The boys first try to flee north toward their grandmother's village, but the terrified animals block their path. They turn south instead, heading toward a large river. The narrator describes how *"every place was shaking"* from the gunfire, making their escape chaotic and frightening. As they run, they stop under a fruit tree for shelter. Two ripe fruits fall to the ground. The brother picks them up and pockets them. He tries to carry the narrator, who is too young to run fast, but he is also a child and cannot lift him far. He falls repeatedly, unable to carry him more than a few steps.

A Painful Decision: Realizing his brother cannot carry him, the narrator tells him to leave him behind and save himself so *"he can take care of our mother as she had no other sons more than both of us … if God does not save my life we should met in haven"* (5). His brother cries, but the narrator does not. He explains, *"If fear is overmuch, a person would not fear for anything again."* Before running, the brother gives him both fruits *"instead of one,"* a gesture of love and sorrow. The narrator returns to the fruit tree, using it as shelter from the sun. When the attackers come within an eighth of a mile, the gunfire becomes so loud that he cannot hear anything. He hides in the bush beneath the tree. He later calls this tree his "Future Sign," because it becomes a symbol of survival and destiny. Alone in the bush, the narrator waits with no family to protect him. Within fifteen minutes, he hears his brother shouting—he has been captured as a slave but not killed. The narrator realizes

CHAPTER 2-*In the Bush of Ghosts*

Running Sixteen Miles into the Unknown: After being left behind during the attack, the narrator runs blindly through the forest, covering about sixteen miles. He enters a terrifying wilderness known as the *Bush of Ghosts,* without realizing it. He explains that he enters it unknowingly *"because I was too young to know that it was a dreadful bush or it was banned to enter by any earthly person"* (5). His innocence shields him from understanding the danger he has stepped into. The narrator eats the two fruits his brother gave him before they separated. These fruits keep him alive as he wanders day and night through thick weeds and tangled bush. He describes the vegetation as so dense that he can barely see the sky. But he continues walking, driven by fear and instinct.

A Strange Hill Swept Clean: Inside the ghostly bush, the narrator finds a small hill that looks unnaturally clean, *"as if swept."* This eerie detail signals that he has entered a supernatural realm. The environment is no longer behaving like ordinary nature. It is controlled by unseen forces. The narrator discovers a mysterious house with a portico that shines like *"polished brass or golden plate."* The building seems impossible in such a wild place. Inside, he finds three rooms, each with a different metallic glow: one golden, one silverish, and one copperish. The air is filled with the smells of food: "baking bread," "roasting fowl," and African dishes, suggesting hospitality, but everything feels uncanny.

Meeting the Three Ghosts: Each room contains a ghost: a golden ghost, a silverish ghost, and a copperish ghost. They signal him, each wanting him to come closer. The narrator is terrified but fascinated. The ghosts speak to him, trying to persuade him to serve them. Their voices and lights create a surreal atmosphere, and he feels pulled toward them against his will. The ghosts use their colored lights to influence him. When the golden ghost shines his light, the narrator's body becomes transparent and immobile. The copperish and silverish ghosts also use their lights, each producing different sensations. The narrator counts the lights, trying to understand their power.

A Fight Among the Ghosts: The ghosts offer the narrator bread, fowl, rice, potatoes, and African dishes. The copperish ghost, who has African food, seems especially eager to win him over. The narrator enters the house of the copperish ghost for its African food. The other ghosts come in. The narrator is torn between fear and hunger. The ghosts argue among themselves about who should claim him as a servant. The three ghosts begin fighting fiercely over him. He explains *that "all of them held me tightly in such a way that I could not breathe in or out"* (12).

Choosing With the Heart, Not the Mouth: The narrator's heart begins to beat loudly, *"as if a telegraphist is sending messages."* Some faceless, eyeless, earless and footless ghosts come to settle the dispute and

ask him to choose with his heart and not with his mouth, fearing he might show favoritism. His heart chooses the silverish ghost, even though his mouth would have chosen the copperish ghost because of the African food. The battle among the ghosts resumes. It is so intense that *"even breezes could not blow."* All creatures in the bush freeze in place. The narrator watches helplessly as the supernatural conflict escalates.

CHAPTER 3-*The Smelling-Ghost*

The Smelling-Ghost Ends the Fight: Arrives a terrifying figure known as the Smelling-ghost, a creature whose entire body is covered with snakes, centipedes, flies, bees, and mosquitoes. His smell is so unbearable that *"people ran away from him,"* and his mouth, nose, and eyes are described as *"dirty and always open."* He wears scorpions as rings, poisonous snakes as beads, and a live boa constrictor as a belt. He is the king of all smelling-ghosts in the seventh town of ghosts. The Smelling-ghost enters the house where the golden, silverish, and copperish ghosts are fighting over the narrator. His presence is so dreadful that the three ghosts stop immediately. The narrator says the ghost's smell "entered my nose" and made him tremble. The Smelling-ghost calls him out of the room, demanding to settle the dispute.

A Threat to Cut the Narrator into Three Pieces: To resolve the argument, the Smelling-ghost threatens to cut the narrator into three parts so each ghost can take one. This horrifying suggestion causes the narrator to *"faint for more than an hour before [his] heart came back to normal"* (16). The three ghosts start fighting again because they don't like the smelling-ghost solution. The narrator is caught in the middle, terrified and powerless. The Smelling-ghost grabs the narrator and throws him into a bag filled with rotten blood, mosquitoes, snakes, and centipedes. The narrator describes the smell as *"too dreadful for me to bear."* Inside the bag, he suffers, unable to escape or breathe properly.

Arrival in the Seventh Town of Ghosts: The Smelling-ghost carries the bag through the bush, searching for animals to kill and eat. When he finds a half-dead animal, he kills it and eats it raw, sharing the meat with the snakes on his body. Animals flee from his smell, which can be detected miles away. The narrator remains trapped in the bag, listening to the ghost's conversations and planning an escape. At one point, the narrator tries to escape by grabbing a tree branch as the ghost walks past. But the ghost notices and sits on the bag, crushing the narrator and making it hard for him to breathe. The narrator's attempt fails, and he remains trapped. Later, the Smelling-ghost attends a midnight meeting with other ghosts. After the meeting, he returns to his town, the seventh town of ghosts, carrying the narrator in the bag.

CHAPTER 4-*My Life in the 7th Town of Ghosts*

A Town That Celebrates Filth: The entire seventh town of ghosts reeks so intensely that even newborn babies smell like dead animals. The town is isolated from other ghost towns because its inhabitants spread their odor wherever they go. Day and night are equally dark, allowing *"uncountable snakes to fill up the air,"* making movement dangerous. The narrator learns that the ghosts hold an annual Exhibition of Smells, where the ghost with the worst odor wins the highest prize and becomes king. The narrator notes that these ghosts *"appreciated dirt more than clean things,"* revealing a culture built on the opposite of human values.

Surrounded by Thousands of Smelling-Ghosts: At night, the Smelling-ghost pushes the narrator into a room filled with flies, snakes, and other pests. When the narrator asks for a blanket, the ghosts shout, *"What is called 'cover-cloth'?"* This reminds the narrator that *"[he] was not with [his] mother or in [his] home"* (23). He cannot sleep because *"the bad smells were blowing from everywhere,"* and the creatures crawl over him until morning. When he steps outside, over two thousand smelling-ghosts gather around him. They sit in a circle and stare at him with amazement, since none of them has ever seen an earthly person. Their odor is so strong that he can only *"breathe once a minute,"* while they enjoy the smell as if it were perfume.

Transformed for Entertainment and Servitude: In front of the crowd, the Smelling-ghost begins transforming the narrator into different animals. First, he becomes a monkey, climbing trees to pluck fruit. Then he becomes a lion, a horse, a camel, a cow, and finally himself again. The ghosts watch silently "as dolls," fascinated by his earthly nature. The ghost's wives bring food and drinks, but everything smells

terrible. Flies cover the dishes so thickly that *"it was hard to see what sort of food"* they were eating. After the feast, the ghosts dance around the narrator, beating drums and singing ghost songs until late at night. The next day, the Smelling-ghost's son performs a "lucky-ceremony," transforming the narrator into a horse-like creature. The narrator is forced to carry loads, run errands, and endure punishments. The ghosts treat him as a servant, and the ceremony marks the beginning of new suffering.

Escape Attempts and Pursuit: The narrator is repeatedly transformed into different animals, sometimes a camel, sometimes a cow. Each transformation comes with new tasks or punishments. The ghosts enjoy watching him struggle, and he becomes a plaything in their supernatural world. At one point, the narrator escapes using a magical object called a *juju*. He transforms into a cow and flees into the bush. The Smelling-ghost chases him relentlessly. The narrator encounters a lion, then a group of cow-men who mistake him for one of their animals and capture him. The cow-men herd him with their cattle, unaware he is human. The narrator is trapped again, unable to communicate or escape. His transformation magic keeps him alive, but he remains far from safety.

CHAPTER 5-***My Life With Cows***

Taken to the Pasture and Unable to Behave Like a Cow: The cow-men drive the herd to a pasture. The narrator cannot eat grass like the cows, so he drinks water instead. His refusal to graze makes the cow-men believe he is stubborn or sick. He tries to show them he is human, but they do not understand. He says, *"I could not do as other cows,"* and this only increases their suspicion. Because he behaves differently from the other cows, the cow-men flog him repeatedly. They think he is a wild or useless animal. The narrator suffers from hunger, exhaustion, and constant beatings. His body grows weaker, and he becomes *"very lean for want of food and again from ill-treatment."*

Taken to Market Again and Again: The cow-men take the narrator to the market to sell him. Butchers refuse to buy him because he looks sick and cannot behave like a normal cow. One butcher says that if the cow-men take him home, *"they must kill me at once otherwise I would die unexpectedly"* (35). The narrator is taken back home, beaten along the way, and prepared for another market day. On the third market day, an old woman buys him. Her daughter is blind, and a fortune-teller has told her to buy a cow and sacrifice it to a local god. She buys the narrator cheaply because he is thin and weak. She ties him to a pillar outside her house, exposed to the sun and rain.

Fed Cooked Yam but Left in the Storm: The old woman gives the narrator cooked yam, which he eats gratefully. But at night she leaves him outside, unprotected. A heavy rain begins at ten o'clock and beats him until morning. Mosquitoes attack him all night. He has no hands to drive them away and no fire to warm himself. He shakes from cold and fear, unable to rest. Throughout the night, the narrator endures rain, cold, and insects. He says he was *"feeling the cold so that [he] was shaking together with [his] voice."* The chapter ends with him tied to the pillar, exhausted, soaked, and still mistaken for a cow, a human trapped in an animal's fate.

CHAPTER 6-***A Cola Saved Me***

Led to a Ritual: After being bought by the old woman, the narrator is taken to her town for a ritual sacrifice. The townspeople gather with knives, spears, cutlasses, and axes. He is laid down before their god while they dance and chant, preparing to kill him as part of the ceremony. The ritual cannot begin without a cola nut, but the old woman realizes she forgot it at home. She leaves to fetch it, giving the narrator a brief moment of hope. A joke-man mocks him, *"he would eat cow meat today until he would nearly die because he had eaten cow's meat for long time"* (40). But the narrator uses the distraction to plan an escape. When the townspeople loosen their grip, the narrator bolts into the bush. He runs blindly until he falls into a pond. There, he sees his reflection and realizes he has changed form again, a lingering effect of the Smelling-ghost's magic. He is shocked by the transformation. Before he can flee further, the cow-men find him and drag him back. They still believe he is a cow, not a person. His brief escape ends, and he is once again trapped in their world of misunderstanding and cruelty.

Changed Back into a Person by a Homeless-Ghost: A homeless-ghost encounters him and uses magic to change him back into human form. This transformation gives him hope, but it also draws the attention of other spirits. The narrator meets another ghost carrying a piece of wood with a hole in it. Inside the hole is a snake that reacts to the sound of knocking wood. The ghost knocks the wood repeatedly, and the snake responds with movement and sound.

Carried Away by a Homeless Ghost: The narrator wakes up to a terrifying discovery: He is being carried through the bush by the homeless ghost inside a piece of wood containing a snake. Confused and frightened, the narrator imagines the worst, that the ghost might throw him into a fire or carry him far away from safety. He begins to cry loudly. The snake hears the cry, becomes frightened, and coils tightly around the narrator, who cries louder.

A Cry That Turns into Music: As the narrator continues crying, something surreal happens: The homeless ghost hears the sound not as distress but as beautiful, lofty music. The ghost becomes enchanted, dancing and staggering as though drunk on a magical drink prepared by the king of the Bush of Ghosts. Believing the "wood" he carries is producing this music, he keeps walking while dancing. Along the way, he meets countless other homeless ghosts who also hear the cry as music. They gather around him, listening as if tuning in to a radio broadcast, completely unaware of the narrator's suffering.

Days of Dancing and Endless Misery: The ghost's excitement grows, and he begins performing for crowds of other ghosts, who dance day and night to the narrator's involuntary "music." The narrator, still crying from fear and exhaustion, becomes trapped in this strange spectacle. The snake that had coiled around him remains stuck, tightening painfully as the ghost continues to dance. The narrator's misery deepens: His tears fuel the ghosts' joy, and his suffering becomes entertainment for the entire ghost community. He is carried from town to town, forced to *"perform"* while the ghosts celebrate, unaware of the torment behind the sound they adore.

CHAPTER 7-*At a Ghost Mother's Birthday Function*

The Invitation: The homeless-ghost is invited to perform at a grand birthday ceremony held by a prominent ghost, because the "music" of the narrator's cry had made him popular among all ghosts. But after being trapped without food or water, the narrator's voice has weakened so much that he can no longer produce the cry the ghosts expect. The guests, already full from eating and drinking, grow impatient and try everything to force the sound out again, but nothing works. Finally, in frustration, the homeless-ghost begins splitting the wood.

The Narrator Escapes into a Ghost Town: After the homeless-ghost splits the wood, the snake slips out first. The gathered ghosts panic and run to hide inside the house of the famous ghost hosting the ceremony. With the wood already split almost in two, the narrator forces his way out as well and flees into the deep bush before the ghosts returned. When they come back and find the hole empty, they finally realize that the sound they had adored was not magical music from a piece of wood but the cry of a human being. The narrator escapes far from that town before dawn and enters a new ghost town, where he meets a ghost who looks and behaves almost like an earthly person. Exhausted and starving, he greets the ghost respectfully, and the kind ghost offers him a seat, and gives him food without hesitation.

Ghosts Who Influence Earthly Women and Babies: The narrator learns that ghosts use invisible powers to influence earthly women. Some ghosts make women conceive *"born and die babies,"* children who die shortly after birth. Others cause miscarriages or strange illnesses. Ghosts also visit earthly towns at midnight to collect sacrifices left at shrines. The narrator is shocked to learn that *"earthly persons do not die but simply stop breathing,"* according to ghost belief.

Living With a Burglar-Ghost: A burglar-ghost takes the narrator into his home and gives him a separate room. The ghost tells him to take care of the house while he is away for ten months. At midnight, the ghost becomes invisible and leaves. The narrator stays behind, befriending a young ghost and learning some

ghost language. After ten months, the burglar-ghost returns with bales of clothes, animals, and money, all stolen from earthly towns. The narrator sees clothes belonging to his mother and brother among the stolen goods: *"I saw plainly many clothes which belonged to my friends and my mother"* (50). The ghost sells the clothes to other ghosts who lack invisible powers.

A Feast for the Burglar-Ghost's Good Luck: To celebrate the ghost's safe return, the narrator and the burglar-ghost kill fowls, pigeons, goats, and sheep. They cook the animals for the other burglar-ghosts in town. The narrator eats with them, accepting the strange customs of ghost society. The narrator's young ghost friend invites him to visit his mother's town, the 8th town of ghosts, twenty miles away. The narrator travels with him, eats and drinks with the ghost family, and plays with other young ghosts. He begins to feel accepted in their world.

Falling in Love with a Ghostess: While playing in the town, the narrator sees a beautiful young ghostess and immediately wants to marry her. His friend recommends him to her, and she agrees. The narrator says she accepted *"at the same time,"* showing how quickly ghost courtship can happen. The ghostess's father is a prominent figure in the town. He arranges the wedding for the next official ghost wedding day, which is nine days away. Ghosts have a special day set aside for marriage, and the narrator is now part of their customs and celebrations.

CHAPTER 8-*My First Wedding Day in the Bush of Ghosts*

A Best Man Chosen from the Worst of Ghosts: Before the wedding day arrives, the narrator's friend chooses a terrifying ghost to serve as his best man. This ghost is infamous for cruelty and *"evil words,"* and had been punished in hell for fifty years before being expelled to the Bush of Ghosts. The narrator notes that *he "was still growing rapidly in bad habits,"* making him a disturbing companion for a wedding.

A Wedding Performed by the Devil Himself: On the wedding day, the narrator, his friend, the bride's father, and many ghosts go to the ghost church. The officiant is the Devil, who acts as Reverend. During the ceremony, the Devil asks the narrator to state his earthly name. When he does, the entire congregation exclaims, *"Ah! you will be baptized in this church again before you will marry this lady"* (54). The narrator agrees, unaware of what this baptism involves. The narrator is baptized with fire and hot water, the ghostly method. The pain is unbearable. He says he cried so loudly "a person at a distance of two miles would hear my voice." His skin is scratched and burned. He begs to leave and refuses to marry, but the ghosts shout that he must finish the baptism *"willing or not."*

The Ghosts' Question: During the chaos, one ghost asks how an earthly person managed to enter the Bush of Ghosts, a place *"strictly banned to every earthly person."* The narrator explains that he was too young to know *"bad and good"* when he mistakenly entered the bush and has been trying to find his way home ever since. After the baptism, the wedding celebration begins. A giant slave-ape beats a tree like a drum, producing a sound so powerful that *"all the ghosts, evils, terrible creatures … started to dance at the same time."* The narrator, intoxicated by strong ghost drinks, staggers and accidentally kills a small ghost from the 9th town.

Judged in the Court of Evil: The narrator is immediately summoned to the Court of Evil for murder. In the Bush of Ghosts, *"a little mistake is a serious offence,"* and the minimum punishment is fifty years in prison. The narrator is saved only because a kind lawyer, whose mother comes from the Bottomless Ravine's town, defends him. Without this lawyer, he would have been imprisoned for decades. After being freed, the narrator returns to his in-laws' town and lives with his ghost wife for about three months. During this time, he forgets his earthly family completely. Only after months pass does he remember his mother and brother again.

Leaving Alone: One morning, the narrator tells his father-in-law that he wants to travel to another town. He does not reveal that he intends to continue searching for the way back to his earthly home, which he left at age seven. The father-in-law allows him to leave but refuses to let his daughter go with him. The

narrator realizes that *"however an earthly person might love ghosts, ghosts could not like him heartily."* With this understanding, he leaves the town alone. Before departing, he walks around the town and says goodbye to the prominent ghosts, then sets out once more into the Bush of Ghosts, still searching for a path back to the human world.

CHAPTER 9-*On My Way to the 9th Town of Ghosts*

Leaving the 8th Town and Searching for Home: The narrator leaves his wife's father's town, the **8th town of ghosts**, late in the evening. He travels through bushes and forests, hoping to find the road back to his earthly home. When he realizes he cannot reach the 9th town that night, he climbs a tree and sleeps on a leafy branch. His sleep is interrupted by knocking at the base of the tree. He looks down and sees a short, corpulent ghost waving at him. The ghost has twisted legs, one arm, and a single, big eye on his forehead. When the narrator refuses to come down, the ghost opens the eye's cover, flooding the entire bush with bright light.

Surrounded by Uncountable Ghosts: The narrator sees that countless ghosts of the same kind have surrounded the tree. Their behavior shows they intend to seize him. When he still refuses to descend, they shake the tree violently until he falls into their hands. Their breathing produces terrifying sounds, *"the cry of frogs, toads, pigs … and dogs barking at the same time."* The ghosts carry him by force to their town, the 9th town of ghosts. They place him in a pitch-dark underground room with no door. Underground rooms are common in the Bush of Ghosts, and this one becomes the site of his next ordeal.

Transformed Into a Blind Man and Scraped Like Sandpaper: Inside the room, the ghosts transform the narrator into a blind man. They rub his body with palms, scraping his skin. Then they cut his flesh with fingernails, which are about four inches long. He cries from the pain. Suddenly his sight returns, and he sees about a thousand snakes covering him. They do not bite him. The largest snake, the "director," vomits colored lights onto the floor. The lights illuminate the room and the narrator's face. Once the snakes see him clearly, they vanish along with the lights, plunging the room back into darkness.

His Body Transforms Again: The underground room transforms into a giant pitcher, and the narrator finds himself inside it. His neck becomes three feet long and stiff. His head grows enormously, too heavy for the neck to lift. Two new eyes *"as big and round as a football"* appear on his head, replacing his normal eyes. The ghosts gather around the pitcher and knock his huge head with sticks. He has no hands to defend himself because only his head and neck protrude from the pitcher. After some time, they stop, leaving him exhausted and helpless.

His Mouth Turns Into a Bird's Beak: Hunger overwhelms the narrator. He cries, *"I want to eat."* Immediately, the food he loves most, the kind his mother cooked, appears in front of him. But his stiff neck cannot bend, and his head cannot reach the food. He struggles for thirty minutes, overturning the pitcher, but still cannot reach it. Just as his mouth is about to touch the food, it transforms into the beak of a small bird. He cannot eat. When he tries to cry, he produces the sound of a bird instead of a human voice. His hunger becomes unbearable.

Ghost Towns Compete to Steal Him: The narrator is placed at a crossroads where sacrifices are left. When he cries even once, dogs approach, bark, and eat the remaining sacrifice. Goats and sheep kick his head. Dogs lick the blood on his head with their tongues. He has *"no hands to drive them away."* This torment continues day and night. News spreads across the ghost region that a strange being sits in a pitcher at the crossroads. Other ghost towns believe he is a god. They try to steal him for themselves. He becomes an object of supernatural desire, trapped in endless suffering.

CHAPTER 10-*River-Ghosts: Gala-Day Under the River*

Stolen at Night by River-Ghosts: Around two o'clock in the morning, a group of ghosts arrives and stuffs the narrator into a large bag. They carry him on one ghost's head and travel to their town, which lies under

a great river. These beings are known as River-Ghosts, and they have stolen him from the crossroads where he was suffering in the pitcher. The narrator is taken before the chief ancestor, who sits on an idle chair facing a terrifying god. This god is considered the most powerful deity in the river town. The chief ancestor had ordered the narrator's capture after hearing rumors about him.

Becoming the Interpreter of Their Wishes: The chief ancestor sacrifices a ram, pouring its blood onto the narrator's enormous head, *"as big as an elephant's head."* The ram's flesh is cooked and placed before him. When the narrator begins to eat, the River-Ghosts are astonished and delighted. None of their gods can *"eat, breathe, or make any sign."* His ability to eat makes him extraordinary in their eyes. The River-Ghosts admire earthly gods and the heavenly God. They begin consulting the narrator for every decision. The chief ancestor asks him first, and if the narrator nods his stiff head, the request is approved. If he shakes it, the request is denied. The chief ancestor becomes his interpreter, the only ghost allowed to approach him. The River-Ghosts build a small house for him and worship him there. They bring sacrifices, and he feeds on whatever he wants. They pour animal blood on him instead of giving him water. Flies swarm him constantly, covering him so completely that the chief ancestor must sweep them away with a broom to see him.

Ritual Washing and Decoration: After a week, the River-Ghosts gather for a grand ceremony. The chief ancestor washes the narrator's head and stiff neck. Then he dresses him in ritual garments. The narrator is presented with a huge pipe. The pipe holds *"half a ton of tobacco,"* and when lit, smoke pours from the narrator's mouth like a boiler. The ghosts dance, clap, ring bells, and beat drums around him. Whenever the smoke bursts out, they laugh loudly: *"a person two miles away would hear them."* The narrator becomes intoxicated by the tobacco gas, as only ghosts can normally smoke such powerful tobacco.

Singing Earthly Songs and Delighting the Ghosts: In his intoxication, he begins singing earthly songs he has not sung since entering the Bush of Ghosts. The ghosts are thrilled. They dance away "five thousand feet" and then dance back again, eager to hear more. They surround him, open their mouths downward, and stare at him in amazement. Their spit falls on him, and its smell makes breathing difficult. The chief ancestor uproots a 300-foot coconut tree and places the narrator on its top. Another ghost balances the tree upright on his head, then jumps onto the chief ancestor's head. Together, ancestor, ghost, tree, and narrator dance wildly while the rest of the River-Ghosts dance around them.

Flying to the 20th Town: The Gala-Day becomes so spectacular that the King of the Bush of Ghosts, who rules from the 20th town, sends an invisible message demanding that the narrator be brought to him immediately. Suddenly, quills appear on both sides of the narrator's pitcher and on the coconut tree. Feathers sprout on the ghosts' arms. The chief ancestor's feathers are the largest, as he must carry the tree and the narrator. With their new wings, the entire group flies toward the 20th town, the seat of the King of the Bush of Ghosts.

CHAPTER 11-*In the 20th Town of Ghosts*

A Field of Dead Ghost Children: After flying on the coconut tree, the narrator and the River-Ghosts reach the 20th town of ghosts, the capital of the entire ghost world. Millions of ghosts are already waiting in the sky, watching for their arrival. When they see the narrator with the smoking pipe, they shout, point, and rush toward the King's palace. The palace cannot contain them, so they run to a massive field. When the narrator lands in the center of the field, he sees a horrifying sight: *"over twenty thousand children smashed to death"* before he arrived. The ghosts begin dancing with him, unable to resist his earthly songs and the spectacle of smoke pouring from his mouth.

A Midnight Intruder: After dancing until late at night, the chief ancestor orders everyone to stop. He commands the coconut tree to stand still, then to bend down, using magical words. The narrator is lifted off the tree and taken to the palace. A special doorless room is built to keep him safe from other ghosts who might try to steal him before the next day's grand celebration. The narrator is given an entire roasted sheep to eat. At midnight, the wall of the room splits open, and a strange ghost enters carrying a huge coil of rags.

The narrator recognizes the rags as the remains of the cloth his mother wove for him before he entered the Bush of Ghosts. They are now torn and soaked in rotten blood.

A Violent Struggle With the Gatekeeper: The intruding ghost tries to seize the narrator, but the palace gatekeeper intervenes. A fierce supernatural battle erupts. The ghost uses juju to turn night into day and day into night repeatedly. The gatekeeper fights back with his own powers. The narrator escapes during the chaos, running far from the 20th town before dawn. At dawn, he rests, then continues wandering. He finds the skin of a long-dead animal and carries it. Later he reaches a pond whose water is icy, shaded by tall trees. Pieces of ghost soap lie at the bank, showing that ghosts use the pond. He listens carefully for danger, hears nothing, and enters the water. He drinks voluptuously the first real water he has tasted since entering the pitcher, and he washes the rotten blood from his body.

Sour Fruits and a Tree With a Hidden Hole: The narrator washes the animal skin and spreads it in the sun to dry. The silence of the pond frightens him. He realizes that *"if a bush is too quiet there would be fear without seeing a fearful creature."* When the skin dries, he wears it as clothing, though it only covers him from waist to knees. Hungry, he eats sour fruits that fall from a tree. He then finds a large tree with a hole big enough to contain a person. Inside lives an armless ghost who was expelled from his town. The narrator enters the hole and falls asleep.

The Talking-Land That Cries Out in Pain: The ghost returns, bumps into the narrator, and shouts, *"Who is that?"* The narrator answers, *"I am an earthly person."* The ghost accuses him of stealing property and calls for help. Thousands of armless ghosts begin hunting him through the bush. While fleeing, the narrator steps on a patch of bush that screams, *"Don't smash me!"* He withdraws his foot in shock. When he steps on another part, it cries out again. He wonders*, "Can land talk like a human being?"* The talking-land reveals his location to the ghosts, forcing him to run faster. He escapes into another bush, even more dreadful. Every part of it blows loud alarms *"as if enemies are approaching a town."* When he stops moving, the alarms stop. When he moves again, they resume, revealing his position to the ghosts chasing him.

Choosing Ugliness Over Survival: Behind a tree, the narrator sees a young ghostess hiding under a small bush. She is so hideous that she cannot live in any ghost town. Her ugliness fascinates him. He chases her, wanting to see her clearly. She laughs loudly at her own appearance, and he laughs too. But the alarms continue to blow, showing his movements to the ghosts pursuing him. The narrator becomes obsessed. He says, *"It is better for me to die than to leave this ugly ghostess without seeing her ugliness clearly"* (87). He chases her again, even as the ghosts close in. Their hands touch his back. Realizing she will not stop for him, he finally abandons the chase and runs toward another part of the bush.

CHAPTER 12-*In the Spider's Web Bush*

Rain, Darkness, and a Spider-Eating Ghost: While running from thousands of ghosts who want to kill him, the narrator dives into a strange bush covered entirely with thick spider webs. The ghosts stop at the edge because this bush belongs to a special kind of beings called *"spider-eating ghosts."* Once inside, the narrator becomes completely wrapped in webs, *"unable to move or call for help."* A heavy rain falls, and one of the spider-eating ghosts arrives to eat the spiders. He discovers the narrator buried in webs and mistakes him for a corpse. The ghost cries out joyfully, believing he has found his father's dead body: *"I have been searching for your body for a long time."* He plans to take the narrator to town for burial and ceremony.

Mistaken for a Dead Father and Prepared for Burial: The ghost carries the narrator to town, where other ghosts gather, mourning and celebrating the supposed return of the father's body. The narrator cannot speak or move. They prepare a coffin, place him inside, and seal it, along with the spiders still stuck to him. He is buried alive, unable to protest. Later, a ghost who specializes in digging up corpses, a resurrectionist, exhumes the coffin. He carries the narrator away, not out of kindness but because he wants to eat the spiders wrapped around him. The narrator remains silent, fearing that speaking would reveal he is alive and lead to his death.

Captured by a Creature Who Wants to Roast Him: After escaping the resurrectionist, the narrator wanders through the bush, falling into holes and getting caught on thorns. He reaches a clearing where an unknown creature prepares a fire to roast and eat him. The fire is too weak, so the creature calls other ghosts to fetch dry sticks. They argue among themselves, giving the narrator a chance to slip away while the fire still burns. A violent rainstorm begins. Trees fall everywhere. The narrator searches for a safe place and finds what looks like a heap of dried leaves near a large tree. Because it is pitch-dark, he cannot see clearly. He crawls inside, thinking it is a shelter.

Inside an Animal's Pouch: The narrator unknowingly enters the pouch of a large animal that had already taken shelter there. The pouch is warm. He falls asleep instantly. When the storm becomes unbearable, the animal leaves and carries him inside its pouch across the bush. The animal travels until it reaches a bush belonging to the 13th town of ghosts, inhabited only by short ghosts. The narrator remains asleep the entire time, unaware he is being transported deeper into the ghost world.

CHAPTER 13-*The Short Ghosts and Their Flash-Eyed Mother*

Dragged Out of the Animal's Pouch: The narrator wakes up inside the pouch of a bush animal. When the short ghosts scrape the animal's rare hair, the pouch shakes. They think the animal has come back to life, and they prepare to shoot it. One ghost notices that the inside is moving. He opens the pouch and drags the narrator out by the feet. He suddenly finds himself surrounded by silent, staring ghosts.

A Town of Baby-Sized Ghosts With Terrible Eyes: The narrator tries to run, but the short ghosts seize him. They stare at him for half an hour without speaking or moving. When he tries again to escape, they grab him and drag him before their ruler, the flash-eyed mother, the only woman in the town. Her appearance is so terrifying that the narrator closes his eyes and cannot reopen them fully. The flash-eyed mother sits permanently in the center of the town, beaten by sun and rain day and night. She is so enormous that she *"filled the town as a round vast hill,"* making it impossible for the inhabitants to move freely. The town is six miles around and completely clean, like a football field. Her body is covered with millions of baby heads, arranged in circular layers.

The Mother's Main Head and Flashing Eyes: Above all the baby heads is her main head, huge, towering, and visible from four miles away. It has a mouth large enough *"to swallow an elephant uncut."* Her two enormous eyes constantly flash fire. These flashes are used to punish, frighten, and control the ghosts. The narrator is forced to stand before her. She flashes fire at him repeatedly to test whether he is truly an earthly person. Her appearance is described as *"fearful, dreadful, terrible, curious, wonderful and dirty."* She wears animal skins and sits unmoving, ruling the town through terror.

The Mother's Hidden Alarm: The narrator is compelled to join the short ghosts in hunting bush animals. They are only "a year and half old babies," but strong as iron and armed with pistols given by their mother. When they kill an animal, they bring it to her. She cooks it, feeds the millions of heads first, then herself, and finally the narrator and the short ghosts. The flash-eyed mother has a hidden alarm inside her body. Every morning, after cooking a special pap for the short ghosts, she blows the alarm. Its sound is terrible and repeated. The ghosts line up like soldiers, each holding a small cup. She serves them pap "to the half," while the baby heads complain loudly that she is giving too much food.

The Baby Heads' Endless Complaints: The baby heads never sleep at the same time. Some sleep while others talk loudly until the sleepers wake. They insult their mother when she snores, saying, *"Hear our flash-eyed mother who is snoring like strong wind."* When she wakes, they shout, *"Take away your flash eyes from us."* The narrator is still trapped in the terrifying world of the flash-eyed mother, living among baby-sized hunters and millions of fire-eyed heads.

CHAPTER 14-*Barbing Day in the Town of Short Ghosts*

A Century Without Haircuts: In the town of short ghosts, both the millions of heads on the flash-eyed mother's body and the short ghosts themselves grow thick, dirty hair. They only cut their hair once every century, just before the great Secret Society of Ghosts Festival. The narrator is excited, thinking he will finally get a normal haircut after fourteen years. On barbing day, everyone must gather in one place. A terrifying being made entirely of fire appears, holding clippers and knives made of flame. The narrator is shocked to see the heads shouting with joy as the burning clippers touch them. They celebrate the fire cutting through their hair.

A Clever Escape From the Fire Clippers: As the barber works, the narrator notices that the heads' hair is home to *"uncountable beetles, bees, wasps,"* and other biting insects. The flash-eyed mother's hair is even stranger: numerous small birds have built nests inside it. After half the short ghosts are barbed, the baby heads complain that they are hungry. The flash-eyed mother orders the already-barbed ghosts to go hunt an animal. The narrator seizes this moment, slipping into the group of those who have already been barbed, pretending his own haircut is done.

The Flash-Eyed Mother's Secret Business: One day, while the narrator is sick and assigned to stay home to serve the flash-eyed mother, he discovers her secret trade. She sells flashes of fire from her eyes to ghosts from other towns. Each flash is worth *"a heavy amount of ghosts' money."* This revelation shows her not only as a ruler but also as a powerful economic force in the ghost world.

CHAPTER 15-***The Super Lady***

The Antelope Who Was Not an Antelope: While wandering through the bush in search of the road home, the narrator spots an antelope and prepares to shoot it. But just as he approaches a large tree, the animal vanishes and a stunning woman appears in its place. He realizes, with shock, that "*it was that antelope changed to this lady*," and fear grips him. The mysterious woman raises her hand, silently ordering him to drop his gun. Terrified, he obeys instantly. She then removes the antelope skin from her body and hides it in a hole at the base of the tree. The narrator watches, trembling, unsure whether she might be a dangerous ghostess like the flash-eyed mother. He tells her, "*You are a wonderful and terrible antelope who changed to a lady in my presence.*"

A Sudden Proposal: The lady walks directly to the narrator and asks, *"Will you marry me?"* He refuses, explaining that he is an earthly person. She smiles and replies that she prefers earthly men to any other creature. Her beauty is overwhelming; her face is *"as fresh as an angel's."* and she holds his hands tightly so he cannot run away.

Following Her Into the Unknown: The narrator follows her slowly as she leads him through the bush. After a few minutes, the narrator realizes she means no harm and thinks that perhaps she might help him find the way back to his town. She does not release his hands, "*because perhaps I might run away from her*," and he admits that this is true. After about a mile and a half, they enter a strange settlement. When he asks for its name, she tells him simply that "*it is a nameless town*." The place feels empty and eerie. She brings him to her house, and he discovers that she lives entirely alone. No other ghost, creature, or person shares her dwelling.

CHAPTER 16-***In the Nameless Town***

Earthly Comforts in a Ghostly World*:* Inside the house, the lady urges the narrator to bathe and dress. She provides soap, sponge, and clothing that fit him perfectly, making him look fresh. She explains that witches from the human world often visit her father's town for their secret meetings and leave behind items she collects. Her explanation deepens his unease, but he cannot deny the comfort the clothes bring. The lady then prepares food that looks and tastes exactly like earthly dishes. For the narrator, this is a revelation: Since entering the Bush of Ghosts, nothing he had eaten resembled human food. This meal, familiar and satisfying, reassures him briefly. It is as though the lady is trying to recreate a small pocket of earthly life within her supernatural domain, perhaps to make him feel at ease or to make him stay.

The Lady's Dark Family History: The lady begins recounting her past. She reveals that her mother was a powerful ghost and her father a formidable wizard, feared by witches and wizards across many towns. She describes gatherings where supernatural beings prayed, complained, and plotted. Among these rituals was a horrifying rule: Each member had to sacrifice a son or daughter for the group. The narrator listens in growing fear as she explains how her parents once planned to kill her for such a ritual. The lady explains how she overheard her parents' plan and fled. Her grandmother, sympathetic and wise, gave her the power to transform into an invisible bird. With this gift, she escaped the deadly ritual and fled permanently to the Nameless-town, a place inhabited only by women. Over time, she mastered her powers, learning to change into any creature she wished.

A Woman of Many Forms: The lady describes her transformations with vivid detail: becoming an antelope with horns, a lioness with a fierce mane, a boa constrictor coiled and watchful, and even a tigress with burning eyes. These forms allowed her to survive, defend herself, and navigate the dangerous world of ghosts, witches, and wizards. The narrator realizes that the antelope he had tried to shoot was one of these forms, a disguise she used to observe him before revealing herself. Later, she feeds him. She then invites him into a bedroom decorated with costly ornaments that seem impossible to craft without supernatural power. Though the bed looks inviting, he hesitates, fearing she might transform again while he sleeps. She reassures him gently.

CHAPTER 17-*Where Woman Marries Woman*

A Town Where Women Marry Women: As the narrator and the supernatural lady wander through the Nameless-town, he discovers a community inhabited entirely by women. No men live there or even visit. What shocks him most is that all these women have long brown moustaches like he-goats. When he asks his companion why, she explains that these women were once betrayed by their husbands and now refuse to marry men, choosing instead to marry other women.

A Dangerous Family and a Disguise: After eight months together, the narrator asks to meet the lady's parents, who are a wizard and a witch, and to see her grandmother's town. They set out on a long journey, traveling for a week before reaching her parents' town. Before entering, she warns him that her parents had once promised to kill her for their witch-and-wizard society, and that appearing before them in human form would put her life in danger. Using her supernatural powers, she transforms into a goat with a rope around its neck and instructs him to lead her. Though she looks like an animal, she can still speak to him, and only he can hear her voice.

A Meeting of Witches and Wizards: When they reach her father's house, they find more than three thousand witches and wizards gathered for an important meeting. The narrator sees her parents seated on highchairs, addressing the assembly. To his astonishment, he also recognizes several elderly men and women from his own hometown among the members. After observing the gathering from a distance, the lady tells him it is time to leave. Once they are safely a mile away, she transforms back into her human self and continues telling him stories about the terrifying powers and evil intentions of the witches and wizards, who can travel around the world in a minute and consider even worshippers of God their enemies.

CHAPTER 18-*Hopeless Town*

Entering a Town of Silence: The narrator arrives in Hopeless-town, a strange settlement inhabited entirely by ghosts and ghostesses. Immediately upon entering, he is warned that no one in this town is allowed to speak, move their lips, or even blink their eyelids. Communication happens only through shoulder movements, a silent language shared by adults, newborns, and even animals. This unsettling rule makes the narrator feel both confused.

A Journey into Everlasting Fire: As he continues through the town, the narrator learns that his wife and her sister have gone ahead to visit their grandmother, who lives in a region of everlasting fire. Trying to find them, he wanders deeper into Hopeless-town, encountering ghostly beings whose movements and

expressions are rigid and eerie. His inability to speak or ask questions leaves him isolated, and the town's oppressive silence heightens his fear.

Before the King of Ghosts: The narrator is seized by the inhabitants and taken before their king, a terrifying figure who rules the town with strict and mysterious laws. Because the narrator unknowingly violated their customs, he is punished harshly. The king's judgment is swift, and the narrator is left bewildered, unable to defend himself or explain his ignorance. The experience reinforces the danger of being an outsider in a world governed by supernatural rules. Just as the narrator's situation becomes dire, his wife and her sister intervene. They plead with the king, explaining that he is a human who does not understand the laws of Hopeless-town. The king releases him. Though freed, the narrator remains shaken by the ordeal.

CHAPTER 19-*On The Queer Way to Homeward*

A Hospitable Reception: As the narrator and his supernatural wife begin their long journey back toward the Nameless-town, they travel through a series of ghostly villages and towns far more distant than any they had visited before. Their first stop is a village near the 26th country of ghosts, inhabited by about forty thousand peaceful ghosts and ghostesses. Despite arriving late at night, they are welcomed with warmth and celebration. The villagers cook food, bring drinks, and gather around the couple, dancing, clapping, drumming, and joking. Before the couple departs, the generous villagers give them gifts. The couple continues their journey, traveling seven miles until they reach a wide river blocking their path.

CHAPTER 20-*Lost or Gain Valley*

The Valley of Strange Rules: The narrator and his wife arrive at a mysterious place known as Lost or Gain Valley, a passage that every traveler must cross. At the entrance, they find a noticeboard explaining a strange rule: Anyone who wishes to cross must remove all their clothes before stepping onto the slender stick that serves as the bridge. The travelers lose their clothes, while ghosts and ghostesses who inhabit the area gain them. Though embarrassed and confused, the couple obeys the rule, leaving their garments behind before crossing. As they move across the narrow stick, they feel exposed and ashamed, aware that unseen supernatural beings are observing them. The valley seems designed to strip humans of dignity while enriching the ghostly inhabitants. Once they reach the other side, they encounter other travelers who have gone through the same ordeal. A cloth-seller appears, offering garments to those who have just crossed.

Hospitality Among Ghosts: The narrator and his wife walk about two miles until they reach a town inhabited by ghosts. Surprisingly, the ghosts welcome them into a house and allow them to stay. The couple cooks food and rests, trying to recover from the discomfort and confusion of the valley. The hospitality of the ghosts contrasts sharply with the humiliating experience they just endured, leaving the narrator unsure whether the valley's rules are meant as punishment, ritual, or simply part of the strange logic of the Bush of Ghosts. Once they have rested, the narrator and his wife begin their journey back to the Nameless-town. As they travel, he reflects on the meaning of Lost or Gain Valley: Humans lose their clothes, ghosts gain them, and travelers must accept this imbalance as part of crossing into supernatural territory.

CHAPTER 21-*A Son Divides Us*

Child Born Between Two Worlds: After living with the supernatural woman for a year, the narrator becomes a father. The baby boy resembles both parents, a living blend of ghostly and earthly traits. During the naming ceremony, the ghosts give him a name the narrator cannot pronounce, so he chooses an earthly name instead: "OKOLE-BAMIDELE," meaning *"you cannot follow me to my home."* The child grows at an astonishing speed, reaching milestones far earlier than any earthly child. But everything he does is done in a strange *"half method,"* neither fully human nor fully ghostly. This frustrates both parents. His mother sees him as a reminder of the earthly world she cannot enter, while his father sees him as a reminder of the ghostly world he longs to leave.

A Family Pulled Apart: As the boy's behavior becomes more unpredictable, tension rises between the narrator and his ghost-wife. The narrator feels increasingly alienated, saying that the child *"divides us,"* creating emotional distance where there had once been affection. His wife, too, becomes restless, torn between her loyalty to her ghostly lineage and her desire to keep her earthly husband. The child's dual nature becomes a symbol of their incompatible worlds. One day, the narrator loses an animal skin that belongs to his wife, a skin tied to her supernatural powers. Determined to recover it, he travels through ghostly territories, encountering beings who mistake him for a thief. He recalls being seized and accused as a burglar, a misunderstanding that quickly escalates.

Arrest, Beating, and Imprisonment: The narrator is beaten severely and thrown into a guardroom, then sentenced to hard labor. He describes the town where he is imprisoned as a place where mosquitoes are worshipped: *"They worshipped mosquitoes as their gods."* His suffering is intense. He is forced to work in an oven, surrounded by ghosts who treat him as an outsider. The surreal customs of the ghost-town make his punishment even more bewildering. Eventually, the narrator is brought before the king of the ghost-town. To his shock, the king recognizes him and calls him *"my son,"* revealing a hidden connection between them. The narrator explains earthly customs to the king, saying, *"Earthly people abuse ghosts,"* hoping to gain sympathy. The king listens, intrigued by the narrator's perspective, and begins to treat him with unexpected kindness.

Secrets of the Ghostly Palace: The king confides in the narrator, revealing that one of his wives is armless, a condition forbidden for any queen in that realm. He explains that no king may marry an amputated woman, but he loves her deeply. The narrator, moved by the king's distress, offers a bold solution: He volunteers one of his own arms to replace hers. *"I will give her my arm,"* he says, hoping to help the king restore her status. The palace chiefs and inspectors gather to test the armless wife. She is asked to grind corn, a task meant to expose her disability. The narrator watches as the king's other wives, jealous and deceitful, attempt to sabotage her. But through supernatural means, *"juju,"* as the narrator exposes it. The truth emerges. The king's beloved wife is vindicated, and the narrator's intervention saves her from disgrace.

Escape and a Town That Looks Like Home: Grateful for the narrator's help, the king asks him to stay for fifteen years, warning that *"your arm might be cut off unexpectedly"* but could be rejoined later. The narrator, terrified by this prospect, decides to flee. He leaves at night without the king's knowledge and travels until he reaches a remarkably clean town that looks almost earthly. For a moment, he believes he has finally returned home, only to discover that the journey through the Bush of Ghosts is not yet over.

CHAPTER 22-*I Meet My Dead Cousin in the 10th Town of Ghosts*

Arrival in the Ghost Town: When the narrator enters the 10th Town of Ghosts, the inhabitants rush out in curiosity. Among them he recognizes his cousin who died when the narrator was six and a half years old. Overwhelmed, he embraces him, and the cousin proudly introduces him to the others as *"my junior brother."* The ghosts welcome him warmly, treating him not as a stranger but as someone connected to their community through family and faith.

Honored as a Christian Visitor: The cousin leads him home, where the ghosts show great respect because the narrator had once brought Christianity to their town. Servants bring food and drinks, and prominent ghosts send additional gifts, turning his arrival into a celebration. By evening, chiefs, the king, and other dignitaries gather at the house. His presence is an event of importance. The welcome celebration lasts all night. The narrator drinks ghostly beverages, dances, and listens to ghost songs. When dawn arrives, the ghosts return home, leaving the cousin with countless congratulatory letters from towns under the 10th Town of Ghosts. Exhausted, the narrator asks to sleep, and his cousin opens a special room decorated with expensive ghostly fabrics. He sleeps deeply until two o'clock in the afternoon.

The Cousin's Journey After Death: The cousin explains that after dying, he traveled through several towns searching for a place suitable for Christian work*: "I went to several towns … but I could not get such a suitable town until I reached here."* Before death, he had been a staunch Methodist, and he continues

praying to God, believing he will live until *"the judgement-day."* His mission is clear: to establish Christianity among the ghosts. The cousin recounts how he approached the King of the Bush of Ghosts to request permission to build a church. After several meetings, the king agreed. The cousin found a suitable plot and built a church measuring 90 × 70 feet. With no paint available, he wrote "THE METHODIST CHURCH OF THE BUSH OF GHOSTS" using white tree juice. The mud walls were colored with ground leaves that produced grey pigment. Ghosts helped him build both the church and his house, showing their support for his mission.

Establishing Worship and Community Life: Once the church was completed, the cousin walked through the town with a flat piece of hardwood serving as a bell, announcing the new Christian practices. On the first Sunday, ghosts gathered to worship, marking the beginning of a new spiritual life in the 10th Town. The narrator learns how his cousin became a respected religious leader, shaping the town's identity through faith. The cousin explains how he later built a school and began teaching ghost children. He created educational materials from whatever resources the dead could provide. He says that *"dead publishers and educators"* supplied books and teaching tools. The school grew quickly, and soon he was preaching to large congregations and educating young ghosts, blending earthly religion with supernatural society.

Hospitals, Doctors, and Heavenly Ordination: The narrator asks four questions: Who ordained his cousin, who supplies medicines, who provides educational materials, and who supplies building materials. The cousin answers that he was ordained by *"a holy voice from heaven,"* medicines come from *"dead medicine-makers,"* and books and materials come from the town of the dead. He concludes that the dead act as the *"Crown Agent,"* organizing supplies for the ghostly community. Through these revelations, the narrator sees how the 10th Town of Ghosts functions like a complete society shaped by death, faith, and supernatural order.

CHAPTER 23-***Invisible Magnetic Missive Sent to Me***

A Restless Heart Pulled Toward Home: After becoming a chief judge in the Bush of Ghosts, the narrator feels completely settled and decides he will *"not go for ever"* back to his earthly town. But everything changes when he begins to dream vividly of home, eating with his mother and brother, playing with childhood friends, and living exactly as he did before entering the supernatural world. Each night the same dream returns, stronger than before, until he can no longer eat, sleep, or feel joy. He describes walking around and *feeling "as if I was with my people,"* even though he is still deep in the Bush of Ghosts. The dreams become so intense that he feels compelled to return home.

A Magical Summons from the Living: Back in his earthly town, his family has grown desperate to know whether he is alive or dead. They consult a fortune-teller, who reports that he is alive but living in a mysterious bush with someone who *"is taking great care"* of him. Unable to locate him physically, they ask the fortune-teller to use his powerful Invisible Missive Magnetic *Juju*, a supernatural force capable of bringing a lost person home *"with or without the will of the lost person."* After being paid in advance, the fortuneteller begins sending this invisible power to the narrator at night. The narrator's sudden longing, sleeplessness, and overwhelming desire to return home are revealed to be the direct result of this magical summons, an unseen pull from the world he thought he had left behind.

CHAPTER 24-***Bad-Bye Function***

A Farewell Wrapped in Deception: The narrator reaches a point where he can no longer bear staying in the 10th Town of Ghosts with his dead cousin. His longing for home becomes overwhelming, but his cousin refuses to let him leave. To escape, the narrator lies, claiming he only wants to visit "*a friend of mine in the 7th town of ghosts."* Seeing how thin and weak he has become, the cousin reluctantly agrees. Because the narrator is beloved in the town, he organizes a grand *"Bad-bye Function,"* a farewell celebration filled with drinking, drumming, dancing, and singing until morning. None of the ghosts know he will never return, and his cousin, heartbroken, does not attend.

Guided by a Dangerous Magic: At daybreak, the narrator slips away and begins searching for the path back to his earthly home. But the Invisible Magnetic *Juju* sent by his family to pull him home, continues to influence him. Instead of guiding him directly, it drags him through dangerous bushes and unfamiliar ghost territories. For nine months he wanders, suffering new punishments and hardships, until he finally reaches the 18th Town of Ghosts, located about six hundred miles from where he started. In the 18th town, he is welcomed by an elderly ghost whose throat produces loud horn-like sounds every hour, serving as the town's clock. The ghost is kind but too poor to feed even himself. The narrator, now trained in magic by a ghost friend who never realized he was earthly, decides to help. He travels to a nearby village and encounters a ghost magician performing tricks for the chief. The narrator joins the display, turning day into night and transforming the magician into a barking dog. Because his magic is stronger, the chief awards him all the gifts meant for both performers.

A Battle of Transformations: The ghost magician confronts him on the road, demanding a share of the gifts. When the narrator refuses, the magician transforms into a poisonous snake. The narrator counters by becoming a long stick and beating him. The magician then becomes fire and burns the stick, forcing the narrator to turn into rain to extinguish him. The battle escalates: The magician turns the ground into a deep well, trapping the narrator, who becomes a fish to escape. The magician becomes a crocodile to swallow him, prompting the narrator to turn into a bird and fly away with the gifts transformed into a single palm fruit. The magician becomes a hawk and chases him through the sky until the narrator finally becomes air and blows himself far beyond reach.

A Trick That Saves His Life: Knowing the magician will continue hunting him, the narrator devises a clever trap. He kills a bush animal, cuts off its head, and places it on the road. When the magician arrives, he sees the head and believes the narrator has died and been buried. He runs to the king. The king investigates, discovers the deception, and punishes the magician severely for lying. With the threat removed, the narrator retrieves all the gifts and avoids returning to the 18th town. His journey continues, shaped by cunning, magic, and the relentless pull of the Invisible Magnetic *Juju*.

CHAPTER 25-***Television-Handed Ghostess***

A Ghostess in Agony: While wandering through the Bush of Ghosts, the narrator encounters a ghostess crying so intensely that it sounds *"as if she was being stabbed."* Her body is covered in sores and crawling maggots, and her arms are unusually short, with tiny fingers. When the narrator asks why she is crying, she begins to tell her story. She explains that she was born more than two hundred years ago with these sores, and no doctor or sorcerer has ever been able to heal her. According to the sorcerers, the only cure is for someone to lick the sores every day for ten years, a task no one has ever agreed to attempt.

A Desperate Plea for Healing: The ghostess believes the narrator might be the one destined to heal her, insisting that their meeting is not accidental. She reminds him that he has been struggling to find the right path home, saying that she knows he has been *"finding the right way home in the Bush of Ghosts."* She claims that if he licks the sores, they will heal exactly as the sorcerers foretold. The narrator refuses, but she persists, insisting that it is not a matter of returning to the sorcerers, only a matter of whether he will help her. To persuade him, the ghostess opens her palm and holds it close to his face. Her hand becomes like a living television screen, showing vivid scenes of his earthly town, his mother, his brother, and all his childhood playmates. The vision is so clear and immediate that he feels transported home. As he watches, she repeatedly asks, *"Do you agree to be licking the sore with your tongue, tell me, now, yes or no?"*

CHAPTER 26-***Hard to Say "No" and Hard to Say "Yes"***

A Choice Between Horror and Hope*:* The narrator is torn between two powerful forces: the ghostess's revolting sore, *"dirty and smelling badly,"* crawling with maggots, and the irresistible vision of home she shows him on her palm. Each time he looks, he sees his town, his mother, his brother, and his childhood playmates as clearly as if he were physically present. This makes it *"hard to say 'No'."* But the thought of

licking the sore makes it equally impossible to say *"Yes."* The ghostess's strange television-hand becomes a window into everything he longs for, pulling him emotionally in both directions.

The Voice of Home: As he watches the scenes on the ghostess's palm, he hears his mother speaking sorrowfully to a friend, saying she was told by a fortune teller that he is *"still alive in a bush."* Hearing her voice fills him with longing and confusion. When the ghostess removes her hand, the visions vanish instantly, leaving him staring at an ordinary palm. She asks again whether he will fulfill her request, but he cannot answer. His mind is consumed by the images of home and the desperate desire to return, even though he knows the visions might be nothing more than a supernatural illusion.

A Difficult Decision: Unable to decide, he asks to see the vision once more before giving an answer. The ghostess immediately opens her palm again, and the scenes of his people reappear, alive, speaking, and unaware of his presence. He listens to their conversations, thinking about how he would respond if he were truly with them. The narrator is suspended between two impossible choices: help the ghostess by performing an unbearable act, or refuse and risk losing the only connection he has seen to the world he desperately wants to return to.

CHAPTER 27-*The Future-Sign Tree*

A Tree That Reveals the Future: The narrator rests beneath a fruit tree marked as a *"Future-Sign Tree,"* a place where visions of destiny appear. As he sits there, memories and signs begin to unfold, leading him back to the darkest chapter of his life: the day he was captured by slave traders. The tree becomes a symbolic doorway, reminding him of how suddenly his freedom was taken and how violently his life changed.

Captured and Dragged Into Slavery: The narrator recalls being seized by slave traders who tied him up, carried him away, and transported him to a foreign town. The journey is brutal. He is beaten, dragged, and treated like an object. When they attempt to sell him at the slave market, buyers reject him because his body is covered in sores. Each rejection leads to more punishment, as the traders grow angry that he cannot be sold. His suffering becomes a cycle: taken to market, refused, flogged, and taken back again. Eventually, a wealthy man buys him, not as a servant, but as a sacrifice to his god. The narrator is taken to the man's home, terrified and weak. As he observes the household, he begins to notice strange similarities between himself and his new master. The man's face, voice, and mannerisms feel familiar, stirring memories the narrator had buried under years of hardship.

A Song That Changes Everything: One day, while singing a sorrowful song that mentions the master's name, he is overheard and punished. The master summons him, demanding that he repeat the song. Trembling, the narrator obeys. As he sings, the master suddenly recognizes him, not as a slave, but as his long-lost brother. The revelation transforms the moment from one of fear to one of joy. The master embraces him, saying he had believed his brother dead.

From Slave to Honored Guest: Once the truth is known, the master treats him with deep affection. He gives him fine clothes, food, and drinks, and sends messengers to bring their mother and friends to celebrate the reunion. The narrator, who moments earlier feared being sacrificed, is now honored as family. Under the Future-Sign Tree, he realizes that destiny can twist in unimaginable ways, turning suffering into salvation, and transforming a slave's despair into a brother's homecoming.

CHAPTER 28-*Gladness Becomes Weeping*

A Reunion Marked by Uncertainty: After years of separation and suffering, the narrator finally reunites with his mother and brother. At first, his mother does not recognize him. His appearance has been altered by hardship, captivity, and wandering through the Bush of Ghosts. But as they sit together in a prayer circle with friends, a deep emotional pull awakens her memory. She feels something familiar in him, confirming,

as the narrator says, that *"feelings can prove blood ties."* When she realizes he is her lost son, joy floods the gathering, but it is a joy so intense that it quickly turns into tears.

A Mother's Story of Captivity: The narrator's mother recounts her own ordeal. She was captured during a sudden outbreak of war and taken to a foreign town where she could not understand the language. Sold repeatedly, she endured years of brutal labor. One mistress, a lame woman, forced her to carry her everywhere, day and night, until hunger drove the woman to trade her to a food-seller in exchange for a meal. The food-seller worked her relentlessly, giving her no rest at all. After escaping, she was captured again by a notorious slave-buyer who made her perform heavy labor *"only men could be performing."* Her strength impressed him so much that he eventually set her free after eight years. When she finally returned to her town, she found it empty of her children. She lived in sorrow until the narrator's brother returned after many years of wandering. Together, mother and son waited daily for the narrator, hoping he would come home. They had no idea he was trapped in the Bush of Ghosts, living among supernatural beings and enduring trials no earthly person could imagine. Their longing for him became part of their daily life.

The Brother's Account and the Nature of the Ghost-World: The narrator's brother explains how he too suffered captivity and displacement before returning home. When the narrator tells them about meeting their dead cousin in the 10th Town of Ghosts and about the schools and churches the cousin built there, they are astonished. They ask whether he feared encountering a dead relative. The narrator replies that anyone who enters the Bush of Ghosts stops fearing within a week, because in that realm one meets Fear itself, along with sorrows, difficulties, and punishments that begin and end within the ghost-world. His description reveals the Bush of Ghosts as a place where emotions and trials take on physical form.

Forbidden Return and a Prophetic Dream: The narrator then tells them about the *"Secret Society of Ghosts,"* a ceremony held once every century. He expresses a desire to witness it and bring news back to the living world. His mother and brother immediately forbid him from returning to the Bush of Ghosts, terrified of losing him again. But he confesses that he has already dreamed of being present at the ceremony, and his dreams, he says*, "always come to the truth in future."* The narrator concludes with the haunting line: ***"This is what hatred did."*** A line that suggests that the suffering each family member endured, captivity, separation, fear, was born from human cruelty, but their reunion shows that love can survive even the strangest and harshest worlds.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

THE NARRATOR (unnamed) *(resilient, curious, transformative)*

Resilient and curious, the narrator survives every trial by observing, learning, and adapting. His constant transformations turn him into a hybrid being shaped by all the worlds he crosses

Resilient From the moment he is separated from his family during the slave raid, the narrator survives by sheer resilience. He endures hunger, beatings, transformations, imprisonment, and constant fear. However, he continues moving forward. His ability to withstand suffering without losing his sense of self is remarkable.

Curious Even in terror, the narrator remains open to the unknown. He observes ghost customs, learns their languages, asks questions, and tries to understand the logic of each town. His curiosity allows him to navigate a world that should have destroyed him, turning danger into discovery.

Transformative The narrator is constantly reshaped, physically, spiritually, and culturally. He becomes animals, marries a ghostess, worships in ghost churches, and adopts ghost ways of living. These transformations reveal a character who evolves through contact, becoming a hybrid being enriched by multiple worlds.

THE EARTHLY BEINGS *(vulnerable, divided, hopeful)*

The earthly people are vulnerable and divided, often unable to protect one another from danger. Nonetheless, they remain hopeful, believing in survival, reunion, and the possibility of return.

Vulnerable Earthly people live under the threat of war, slave raids, hunger, and supernatural interference. Their fragility is clear in the opening chapters, where families scatter, towns empty, and children fend for themselves. This vulnerability sets the stage for the narrator's exile.

Divided Human communities are fractured by jealousy, inheritance disputes, gender rivalry, and fear. The narrator's father's wives hate him and his brother; townspeople flee without helping one another. This division contrasts sharply with the strange solidarity sometimes found among ghosts.

Hopeful Despite hardship, earthly beings carry hope: the hope of survival, reunion, and return. The narrator's longing for home reflects a human belief that life can still be repaired. Hope becomes the thread connecting the earthly world to the ghostly one.

THE GHOSTS *(unpredictable, communal, symbolic)*

The ghosts are unpredictable, shifting between cruelty and kindness without warning. Their communal societies and symbolic roles reveal distorted reflections of human life and belief.

Unpredictable Ghosts shift constantly between kindness and cruelty. Some imprison the narrator; others feed him, shelter him, or welcome him into their families. Their unpredictability creates the novel's dreamlike tension, where danger and generosity coexist.

Communal Ghosts live in structured societies with churches, schools, markets, festivals, and political systems. They dance together, judge together, worship together, and celebrate together. Their communal life mirrors human society in distorted but revealing ways.

Symbolic Every ghost represents an idea, fear, excess, transformation, justice, or spiritual hybridity. Through them, Tutuola explores themes of identity, cultural mixing, morality, and the porous boundary between life and death. Ghosts become symbols of the forces shaping human existence.

THEMES

<u>Psychology</u>

Fear: *Initiation* In the novel fear is the very force that shapes the narrator's growth. His journey through the bush resembles an initiation rite, but one without elders, rituals, or guidance as was seen in Camara Laye's *The Dark Child.* Here, fear itself is the initiator, pushing the child through stages of awareness and resilience. The first moment of terror, when he flees after being separated from his brother, marks the threshold of this initiation. Childhood ends not through ceremony, but through panic. From that point on, fear becomes the structure through which he learns to survive. Each frightening encounter teaches him a different lesson. When a ghost *"carried [him] on his head and ran with [him],"* the narrator experiences total helplessness. But inside this terror, he learns to stay alert, to observe, and to wait for the right moment to act. Fear becomes a lesson in patience. Later, when another spirit *"changed [him] to a cow,"* he confronts the instability of identity. This transformation is terrifying, but it teaches him adaptability, the ability to accept new realities and respond to them. Fear is a lesson in flexibility. Even confinement becomes part of the initiatory process. In one ghost settlement, he explains that *"they kept me inside for many days,"* a period of isolation that tests his endurance. Fear teaches him to withstand uncertainty and loneliness. By the time he escapes the bush, he is no longer the frightened child who entered it. Fear has initiated him into a deeper understanding of danger, courage, and the unpredictable nature of the world. In Tutuola's story, fear does

not destroy. It shapes. It teaches. It transforms. The bush is a vast initiatory landscape where terror is not an obstacle but a path, the fire through which the narrator becomes someone new.

Hope: *in a World of Crossing Paths* Across *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, hope emerges slowly, almost secretly, through encounters that bring different worlds, beliefs, and beings into contact. What begins as a childhood shaped by homosocial rivalry, jealousy, and intolerance gradually transforms into a recognition of shared humanity, even in places where no humans live. Tutuola uses the narrator's long journey through ghost towns to show that intercultural exchange, spiritual interpenetration, and unexpected fraternity can grow out of fear, suffering, and misunderstanding. The early chapters establish a world defined by exclusion. The narrator's father's wives hate him and his brother because they are boys, believing they will inherit property. This is the first lesson in "bad," a homosocial hostility rooted in gender and inheritance. Soon after, war and slave raids force the narrator into the Bush of Ghosts, a place *"banned to every earthly person,"* where he is repeatedly transformed, beaten, sold, and misunderstood. These experiences show a world where difference, between men and women, humans and ghosts, towns and tribes, produces fear and violence. Tutuola's narrative does not remain trapped in this darkness. As the narrator moves from town to town, he encounters ghosts who behave like humans, ghosts who worship Christian gods, ghosts who build churches, schools, and hospitals, and ghosts who show kindness without expecting anything in return. In the 10th Town of Ghosts, his dead cousin welcomes him warmly, feeds him, and explains how he built a Methodist church and founded a school with the help of "dead publishers" and a "holy voice from heaven." This blending of Yoruba cosmology with Christian imagery reveals a world where beliefs interpenetrate rather than compete, creating new forms of meaning and community.
Interculturality becomes a source of hope. The narrator learns ghost languages, participates in ghost ceremonies, marries a ghostess, and even forgets his earthly family for a time. These moments show that identity is not fixed. It expands through contact. Even in terrifying towns, the seventh town of smelling ghosts, the ninth town of deforming ghosts, he finds individuals capable of compassion, hospitality, or at least curiosity. The burglar ghost who gives him a room and shares food with him demonstrates that fraternity can appear in unlikely places. By the end of the journey, the narrator understands that all beings, human or ghost, share vulnerability, desire, fear, and the need for connection. The Bush of Ghosts becomes a vast metaphor for the world: chaotic, painful, but full of encounters that teach us to see one another differently. What begins in intolerance ends in a fragile but real recognition of fraternity, suggesting that hope grows wherever worlds meet and beliefs intermingle.

Identity: *Cultural Path of the Tradition vs. New cultures* When the narrator is asked to choose which dish he will eat, he faces a decision that carries more weight than a simple meal. The choice represents the cultural path he will follow. One dish belongs to his ancestors, filled with memories, traditions and familiar tastes. The other dish belongs to a different world, a world that attracts him with curiosity and new possibilities. He is told to choose with his heart or with his mouth, which means he must decide whether he will follow desire or heritage. This moment reflects the experience of many people who live between cultures. They feel pulled in two directions, unsure of where they belong. Writers such as Senghor, Césaire and Mudimbé have described this feeling as a *rift*, a space of tension, a place where identity becomes a question rather than a certainty. Tutuola captures this tension through the simple act of choosing food. The narrator does not want to betray his ancestors, but he also wonders about the world beyond his own. The choice becomes a symbol of the postcolonial condition, where individuals must navigate the expectations of tradition and the influence of new cultures. The scene raises important questions. Can two cultural worlds be reconciled? Is assimilation a path to acceptance or a path to erasure? Does rupture offer freedom or isolation? Tutuola does not give a clear answer. The narrator remains suspended between two possibilities, unable to find a stable place. His hesitation shows how difficult it is to choose a single identity when life has exposed him to many influences. Tutuola reveals the complexity of cultural belonging and the emotional weight carried by those who live between the tides.

Music: *lamentation and the politics of sound* In one unforgettable episode, the narrator is trapped inside a wooden object with a terrifying snake. The snake tightens around his neck whenever it becomes frightened, and the narrator's cries of pain echo inside the container. These cries, filled with fear and suffering, are heard by the ghosts as music. They begin to dance with joy, completely unaware of the narrator's agony. This transformation of pain into entertainment reveals a deep misunderstanding between

the ghosts and the human child. It also reflects a long history in which the suffering of certain groups becomes a spectacle for others. The narrator's voice carries fear, but the ghosts hear rhythm. His lament becomes a song that moves their bodies. This strange scene invites readers to think about how music can carry memories of hardship. Some traditions, including jazz, soul, and rap, grew from experiences of struggle, loss and endurance. Tutuola's scene suggests that the narrator's cries resemble a rhythm born from pain. The ghosts' reaction shows how easily listeners can misinterpret the meaning of a sound. They celebrate what should cause concern. They dance while the narrator fights for breath. This contrast reveals a world where communication fails and empathy disappears. The narrator's suffering becomes invisible to those who hold power. Tutuola uses this moment to explore the politics of listening. He shows how sound can hide stories of fear and survival. The scene becomes a reminder that music often carries emotions that are not immediately visible. It can be a record of hardship transformed into expression. Through this episode, Tutuola encourages readers to pay attention to the origins of the sounds they enjoy and to recognize the human experiences that shape them.

Character

Kindness: *Hospitality in a Hostile World* In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the narrator moves from one ghost settlement to another, and each encounter raises the same question: Will he be welcomed, tolerated, or harmed? This constant uncertainty creates a reflection on kindness in a dangerous world. The bush is full of beings who appear welcoming at first, only to reveal darker intentions. When the smelling-ghosts *"invited [him] inside their house,"* the gesture seems hospitable, until they imprison him. Hospitality appears as a mask for violence, a false welcome that hides danger. However, Tutuola also shows moments of genuine care. In one ghost town, the narrator is taken in by a family who *"fed [him] every day and treated [him] like their own child."* Their kindness is simple and unforced, offering a rare moment of safety in an otherwise threatening landscape. These moments remind readers that even in frightening environments, compassion can appear unexpectedly. Hospitality is a small but powerful act of humanity.

The narrator quickly learns that hospitality in the bush is never guaranteed. Every welcome must be tested, every gesture examined. When another group of ghosts *"allowed [him] to stay but warned [him] not to go outside,"* the hospitality is conditional, shaped by fear and suspicion. This reflects the modern world, where kindness often coexists with caution. In societies marked by migration, displacement, and social tension, hospitality is no longer a simple virtue. It is a negotiation shaped by vulnerability. Tutuola's ghost-world suggests that hospitality is not about comfort but courage. It is the courage to open a door in a world full of threats.

Greed: *The scramble for Africa: A body torn apart* The moment when the ghosts fight over the narrator is one of the most dramatic scenes in the book. They pull him in every direction, each ghost wanting to claim him as property. Their struggle becomes so violent that even the breeze stops moving, as if nature itself were shocked by the intensity of their desire. Some ghosts suggest cutting the narrator into three pieces so that each group can take a part. This idea reveals how little they value his life. They see him as an object, not a person. The narrator's body becomes a symbol of a land that many forces want to control. This scene mirrors the historical scramble for Africa, when foreign powers divided the continent without considering the people who lived there. The narrator's fear reflects the fear of communities caught in the middle of conflicts they did not choose. His pain shows the pain of societies torn apart by competition for resources and territory. Tutuola uses the ghosts to represent the hunger for possession that drove colonial expansion. Their fight is chaotic, loud and selfish. They do not think about the consequences of their actions. They only want to win. The narrator's helplessness shows how individuals suffer when powerful groups fight for control. His body becomes a map, a territory that others want to claim. Through this scene, Tutuola reveals the violence hidden inside political ambition. He shows how competition for land can destroy lives and silence the natural rhythm of the world. The ghosts' struggle becomes a lesson about the dangers of greed and the fragile position of those who are caught between forces stronger than themselves.

Hero: *Endurance* In Tutuola's fiction, the hero is not the kind of figure who conquers the world through decisive action or brilliant strategy. He is someone who endures. He moves through the bush of ghosts, through absurd trials and terrifying encounters, not because he is stronger than the forces around him, but because he refuses to disappear. His journey is made of persistence, of accepting the strange and the unpredictable, of continuing forward even when nothing makes sense. This endurance becomes his true

form of heroism. It is a way of saying that survival, in itself, can be an act of courage. This figure stands in contrast to the traditional Northern idea of the hero, shaped by rationality, mastery, and control. In many Western narratives, the hero imposes order on chaos. He solves problems, defeats enemies, and bends the world to his will. Tutuola's protagonist does the opposite: he adapts. He negotiates with spirits, listens to forces he cannot fully understand, and accepts that the world is larger and stranger than human logic. His endurance becomes a critique of the Northern belief that progress comes from domination. It suggests instead that wisdom can come from humility, flexibility, and the ability to live with mystery. In the broader symbolic relationship between North and South, this enduring hero reflects the historical experience of the South, regions that have faced colonization, exploitation, and cultural upheaval. These societies did not survive by overpowering the forces that confronted them. They survived by absorbing, by transforming, by holding on to imagination and spiritual depth when material power was taken away. The hero who endures more than he acts becomes a metaphor for this history: a reminder that resilience can be more profound than conquest.

Tutuola's protagonist ultimately embodies a different kind of strength. He shows that heroism does not always mean changing the world; sometimes it means remaining human in a world that tries to unmake you. His endurance is a form of resistance, a way of preserving identity and dignity in the face of forces that cannot be fought directly. In this sense, he becomes a bridge between worlds, the rational and the mythical, the colonizer and the colonized, the North and the South. His journey suggests that the future does not belong only to those who dominate, but also to those who endure with imagination, patience, and a deep sense of humanity.

Struggle and Survival: *The Bush as a Map of Mental Health and Emotional Survival* The novel offers a way to understand the inner experience of emotional struggle. The bush is a physical place, but it is mostly a landscape where fear, confusion, and uncertainty shape every step. For a modern reader, this world resembles the mental terrain people navigate during periods of anxiety, trauma, or emotional turmoil. The narrator's journey begins with disorientation: *"I ran sixteen miles unknowingly because I was too young."* This captures the feeling of being thrown into a difficult mental space without preparation, a sensation familiar to anyone who has faced sudden emotional upheaval. Inside the bush, the narrator meets spirits who distort reality, freeze time, or manipulate his senses. These encounters illustrate the way intrusive thoughts or overwhelming emotions can take control. The bush is a metaphor for the mind when it is crowded with fears that appear without warning. On the other hand, Tutuola's story is also about survival. The narrator learns to adapt, observe, and trust his instincts. He finds small sources of strength, such as the fruits his brother gave him, which sustain him through the darkest moments. These details echo the coping strategies people use today: grounding techniques, supportive relationships, or simple routines that help them move forward. The bush teaches that emotional struggle is a journey through a complex inner world. Tutuola shows that even in a place filled with spirits and uncertainty, the narrator continues to walk, negotiate, and hope. His resilience is a lesson for modern readers: The mind may be a wild bush at times, but it is navigable. Survival is possible, and stability can return.

Change

Change of Body: *The Augmented Man and the Diminished Man / The Body as a Field of Possibility* Tutuola imagines a world where the human body is never fixed. It can shrink, expand, lose its strength, or suddenly gain new powers. This constant movement between the diminished man and the augmented man is remarkable motifs. And although Tutuola wrote in the 1950s, this idea speaks directly to modern readers who live in a world where the body is constantly challenged, reshaped, and reimagined by new technologies. From the moment the narrator enters the bush, he becomes diminished, almost disabled. He is overwhelmed, frightened, and physically drained. He ran as if his body acted without him. Later, when the Golden Ghost shines its blinding light, the narrator becomes *"still as if dead."* These moments show a body that has lost its usual capacities, a body that cannot rely on its strength, its senses, or its stability. This resembles the experience of exhaustion, burnout, or emotional overload. The body feels smaller, weaker, and less reliable. But Tutuola also shows the opposite, the augmented man. In the bush, the narrator often survives thanks to forces that do not come from his ordinary organs. He is sustained by magical fruits, protected by unexpected allies, and driven by an endurance far beyond what a child should possess. His body becomes a site of invention. It gains new ways of acting, new forms of resilience, new sources of

energy. The body is no longer limited to muscles and bones. It is henceforth a flexible space where new powers appear.

This is where a simple, affirmative version of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the *body-without-organs* becomes useful. In everyday language, this idea means that *the body is more than its parts*. It is not just lungs, legs, and nerves. It is a field of possibilities. It can lose certain functions and still find new ways to act. It can be diminished and still discover unexpected strengths. It can be reorganized by fear, hope, magic, or imagination. Tutuola's bush teaches that the body is never final. It can break down, but it can also reinvent itself. The diminished man and the augmented man are not opposites. They are two states of a body that is always becoming something new. In this sense, Tutuola offers a hopeful message: even when the body falters, it still has the potential to transform.

Change of Time: *Time Distortion and the Modern Experience of Disconnection* Time in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* behaves like a living creature. It stretches, collapses, freezes, and sometimes disappears altogether. For a modern reader, this strange handling of time mirrors the way people experience life in a world shaped by digital overload, constant notifications, and the pressure to multitask. Tutuola's time distortions become a way to understand the feeling of being disconnected from one's own days. Early in the story, the narrator describes running *"sixteen miles unknowingly,"* a moment where time and distance lose their usual meaning. This resembles the modern experience of losing hours to scrolling, work, or stress, moments when time slips away unnoticed. Later, when the narrator enters the ghost town where *"everybody was dead still,"* time seems to freeze entirely. This stillness echoes the emotional numbness people feel during burnout or depression, when days pass without movement or change.

The bush itself is a place where time refuses to behave. The narrator often cannot tell whether he has spent minutes or years in a particular ghost settlement. In one episode, he notes that he stayed with a ghost family *"for many months,"* but the events feel compressed, dreamlike. This resembles the way modern life blurs time: Long workweeks feel short, while brief moments of crisis feel endless. Tutuola's manipulation of time also reflects the fragmentation of attention in the digital age. The narrator is constantly pulled from one ghost encounter to another, unable to settle or reflect. This mirrors the way modern people jump between apps, messages, and tasks, rarely experiencing uninterrupted time. The bush becomes a symbolic version of the digital landscape, full of interruptions, distortions, and sudden shifts.

On the other hand, Tutuola also suggests that time can be reclaimed. The narrator survives by paying attention to small details: the fruits he carries, the paths he chooses, the warnings he remembers. These episodes of awareness help him navigate the bush. For us today, this is a reminder that time feels less chaotic when we slow down, notice our surroundings, and choose where our attention goes. Tutuola wrote as if to offer palliatives to a crisis to come seventy-two years later, the crisis of the digital age.

Change of Shape: *Transformations/Metamorphoses* Throughout the story, the narrator undergoes constant transformations that affect both his body and his mind. Each ghost town reshapes him in a new way. He becomes taller, shorter, older, younger, stronger or weaker depending on the desires of the spirits who capture him. These changes are not gifts. They are forms of control. The ghosts alter him to fit their needs, not his own. His body becomes a surface on which others write their will. His identity becomes something that can be bent, stretched or erased. This pattern reflects the long history of attempts to reshape African people during the colonial period. Colonizers tried to change languages, beliefs, customs and even the way people saw themselves. They wanted to create a version of the African that served their interests. Tutuola expresses this desire through the narrator's physical and psychological transformations. The most striking moment occurs when the narrator forgets his origin, his background and his family for six months. He lives among the ghosts as if he had never known another world. This loss of memory resembles the loss of identity that many people experienced under systems of domination. When a person is forced to serve others, moved from place to place and treated as property, the connection to home becomes fragile. The narrator's forgetfulness shows how easily identity can fade when a person is surrounded by forces that deny his humanity. When the memory of his family finally returns, he tries to go back, but the path is filled with ambushes. Every step toward home becomes a battle. This struggle reflects the difficulty of reclaiming identity after long periods of control. Thinkers like Fanon, Memmi and Césaire described this fight as a journey filled with obstacles, because systems of domination do not allow easy escape. Tutuola shows that recovering one's true self requires courage, persistence and a deep desire to return to the world that shaped one's heart.

Change: *Becoming Other* One of the significant reflections in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is the idea that a person who leaves home, especially through violence, exile, or accident, never returns as the same being. Tutuola's narrator enters the Bush of Ghosts as a frightened seven-year-old child, pushed out of his community by war and homosocial hostility. But the long journey through ghost towns, spiritual encounters, transformations, and intercultural exchanges reshapes him so profoundly that "home" becomes a place he can only approach as someone radically changed. The novel shows that identity is not fixed. It is porous, constantly altered by contact with other cultures, other beings, and other belief systems. The narrator learns ghost languages, participates in ghost rituals, marries a ghostess, worships in ghost churches, and survives through *juju*, magic, and supernatural transformations. He becomes a camel, a cow, a blind man, a creature with a bird's beak, each metamorphosis symbolizing a shift in consciousness. These experiences accumulate into a new form of selfhood: one that is hybrid, intercultural, and spiritually expanded.

This transformation is both physical, moral and emotional. Early in the story, the narrator's world is marked by intolerance, the jealousy of his father's wives, the violence of slave raids, the rigid boundaries between earthly people and ghosts. But as he moves through the Bush of Ghosts, he encounters kindness from unexpected figures: a burglar-ghost who gives him shelter, a dead cousin who welcomes him warmly, ghost families who feed him, and communities that treat him as one of their own. These moments reveal a deeper fraternity that transcends species, cosmologies, and worlds. The narrator's eventual desire to return home is shaped by this new understanding. He no longer sees humanity as the center of existence. Instead, he recognizes that all beings, ghosts, animals, humans, spirits, share vulnerability, fear, joy, and the need for connection. His return is not a restoration of the past but an entry into a new ethical horizon. He comes back as "other": someone who has lived multiple lives, crossed multiple cultures, and integrated multiple belief systems. From this perspective, Tutuola offers a hopeful vision of interculturality. The Bush of Ghosts, though terrifying, becomes a vast school of humanity. The narrator's journey shows that crossing boundaries, cultural, spiritual, existential, can lead to a deeper recognition of universal fraternity. Returning home as a changed subject is not a loss but a gain: the birth of a self-enriched by the world's multiplicity

Life Stages

Childhood: *Innocence Before the Law as Political Condition* The narrator's youth shapes every part of his journey. He enters the bush as a child, a person who has not yet learned the rules of the world. He does not understand the laws that govern the spirits, and he cannot predict their reactions. His innocence becomes both a shield and a danger. It protects him from becoming cruel, but it also exposes him to forces he cannot resist. Childhood represents a state of being before knowledge, before the ability to interpret complex systems. In the story, the narrator faces judges, rulers and spirits who expect obedience without explanation. He is punished for actions he does not understand. This experience mirrors the position of people who live under systems that do not consider their voices. They are treated as children before the law, expected to follow rules they did not create. Tutuola uses the narrator's innocence to show how power can become confusing and frightening when it is not shared. The child's fear reveals the fear of individuals who face authority without guidance. His confusion reflects the confusion of communities caught in political structures that ignore their needs. Childhood becomes a metaphor for vulnerability. It shows how easily a person can be overwhelmed when they lack protection. The narrator's journey is a lesson about the importance of understanding and fairness. When laws are hidden or unpredictable, they create fear instead of order. Through this portrayal of childhood, Tutuola invites readers to think about the responsibilities of those who hold power. He reminds us that authority should guide, not terrify.

Relationship

Inequality*: Recognition-Reciprocity "However an earthly person might love ghosts, ghosts could not like him heartily,"* notes the narrator. This is a truth that goes far beyond the narrator's journey. It describes a relationship marked by fascination on one side and refusal on the other. In the novel, the earthly person tries to understand the ghosts, approaches them with curiosity, and sometimes even with affection. He hopes for recognition, perhaps even friendship. The ghosts never return this feeling. They admire him as an object, not as a partner. They welcome him only when he serves their needs. When he stops being useful, they push him aside. This imbalance becomes a powerful image of the relationship between the

global North and the global South. One side reaches out with admiration for culture, art, rhythm, creativity and spiritual depth. The other side keeps its distance because the admiration does not erase the long history of domination, extraction and unequal power. Thinkers like Fanon, Memmi and Césaire described this dynamic with great intelligibility. They explained that the colonized subject often tries to win the affection of the colonizer, hoping that goodwill will create equality. The colonizer cannot return this affection because the system that shapes his world depends on keeping the other at a lower position. Love cannot grow in a structure built on inequality. The earthly person can love the ghosts, but the ghosts cannot like him heartily because their world is organized around rules that exclude him. This mirrors the North-South relation, where admiration for music, literature or spirituality does not erase the economic and political structures that keep the South in a vulnerable position. Tutuola's line becomes a political reflection on relationships that lack reciprocity. It shows that affection cannot repair a system shaped by fear, misunderstanding and unequal power. It invites readers to think about the cost of admiration without justice and the loneliness of those who reach out to a world that cannot embrace them fully.

Slavery: *Forced Migration* Forced migration shapes every step of the narrator's journey. He enters the bush because war separates him from his family, and from that moment he becomes a child pushed from place to place by forces stronger than himself. Each ghost town he enters repeats the same pattern. He is captured, traded, exchanged, or forced into service. His body becomes a form of currency. His presence becomes a resource that others want to control. This constant movement echoes the history of the transatlantic slave trade, where millions of Africans were taken from their homes, transported across oceans and treated as property. Tutuola does not describe ships or chains, but he recreates the emotional truth of that experience through the narrator's fear, confusion and lack of agency. The ghosts who fight for possession of him behave like buyers competing for a valuable commodity. They pull him in different directions, argue about who should own him and even suggest cutting him into pieces so that each group can take a part. This violent desire mirrors the hunger for labor and bodies that fueled slavery. The narrator's helplessness reflects the helplessness of people who were forced into systems that denied their humanity. His constant displacement resembles the long journeys of enslaved people who were moved from one owner to another, never allowed to choose where they lived or whom they served.

Throughout the novel, the narrator tries to negotiate with the ghosts, hoping to find kindness or protection. He discovers that kindness lasts only when he remains useful. This reflects the historical reality described by thinkers like Fanon, Memmi and Césaire, who explained that systems built on domination cannot offer real affection or equality. The narrator's experience becomes a reminder of the long history of forced migration and slavery that shaped many African societies. Tutuola transforms this history into a dreamlike story, but the emotional truth remains clear. A person treated as property cannot find safety, and a world built on possession cannot create trust.

Outside World: *Consent and Personal Boundaries in a World of Demanding Spirits* Throughout the novel, the narrator encounters spirits who impose demands, set traps, or force him into situations he did not choose. These encounters can be read as early reflections on personal boundaries, a theme that is pertinent today, when people face pressures from work, relationships, and social expectations that push them beyond their comfort zones. One of the clearest examples occurs when the narrator is seized by the smelling-ghosts who imprison him in their compound*: "They caught me and put me inside their smelling house."* This captures the feeling of being forced into an unwanted space, much like modern experiences of coercion, manipulation, or social pressure. The narrator's lack of control echoes the way people today can feel trapped by obligations or expectations. Another scene involves the ghost who shines a blinding light on the narrator, paralyzing him. This bring to mind the emotional paralysis people feel when overwhelmed by demands they cannot refuse. The ghost's power over the narrator's body symbolizes the way external pressures can override personal boundaries.

Yes, Tutuola's story can be about violation. But it is also about resistance. The narrator repeatedly finds ways to escape, negotiate, or outsmart the spirits. When he flees the smelling-ghosts, he does so by relying on quick thinking and courage. His survival is a lesson in asserting one's limits. Even in a world filled with powerful beings, he learns to say no through action. People today navigate workplaces that demand constant availability, relationships that blur boundaries, and social environments that reward compliance. Tutuola's narrator shows that protecting one's sense of self requires awareness, courage, and sometimes the willingness to walk away. By reading the novel through this lens, the bush becomes a symbolic space where boundaries are tested and reclaimed.

Encounters: *A wedding made in hell / Africa and Europe* In Tutuola's story, the strange wedding between the narrator and a ghostess befits the image of a union that brings trouble instead of harmony. The ceremony is organized by forces that do not care about the well-being of the bride or groom. The best man chosen for the event is the worst ghost in the entire town, a figure known for cruelty and chaos. The officiant is the devil himself, who presides over the marriage with satisfaction, as if he were celebrating a victory. This scene shows a relationship built on pressure, fear and misunderstanding. It is not a meeting of equals. It is a forced connection where one side imposes its will on the other. The bride and groom do not speak. They do not choose each other. They are brought together by powers that benefit from their union. This image reflects the historical encounter between Africa and Europe during the colonial period. Instead of cooperation, the relationship produced suffering, exploitation and confusion. Tutuola uses the wedding to show how two worlds were tied together in a way that damaged both, especially the one with less power. The ceremony becomes a warning about relationships built on domination. When a union is created by fear, it cannot produce peace. It becomes a marriage made in hell, a link that traps rather than frees. Through this scene, Tutuola invites readers to think about the cost of forced alliances and the long shadows they cast on the lives of ordinary people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the narrator change as he moves from one ghost town to another, and what do these changes say about growing through experience?
2. What does the book show about how fear, jealousy, and division shape life in the human world?
3. How do the ghosts' mixed behaviors, sometimes cruel, sometimes kind, help us think about the complexity of others?
4. In what ways does the story blend Yoruba beliefs with Christian ideas?
5. How does the narrator's journey suggest that identity can be shaped by many cultures, not just the one we are born into?
6. What moments in the book show hope or kindness, even in frightening or dangerous situations?
7. How does the narrator's return to the human world as a changed person reflect the idea that difficult journeys can create new forms of understanding?
8. How does the narrator's suffering in the ghost world help him understand the meaning of "bad" and "good" more deeply than he ever could in the human world?
9. What does the book suggest about the possibility of friendship or understanding between beings who come from completely different worlds?