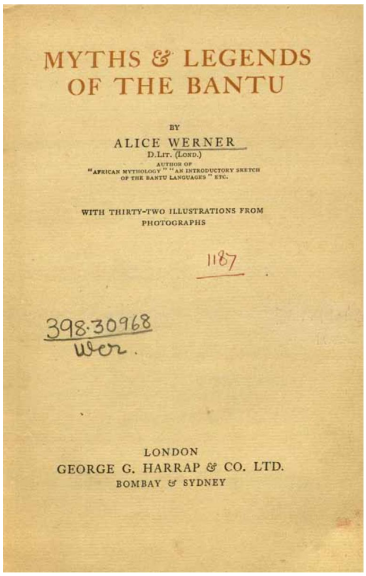
Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Were-Wolf Husband by Alice Werner", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Hanna Paulouskaya and Marta Pszczolińska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/581. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Alice Werner

The Were-Wolf Husband

United Kingdom (1933)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Werewolves



Cover from The Archaeological Survey of India, Central Archaeological Library, New Delhi, Book Number: 1187.

General information	
Title of the work	The Were-Wolf Husband
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Tanzania and other English-speaking African countries, United KIngdom, United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1933
First Edition Details	Alice Werner, “The Were-Wolf Husband” in *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*, London: George G.Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1933, 190–191.
ISBN	Not applicable for editio princeps
Available Onllne	*The Were-Wolf Husband* (accessed: July 29, 2021).
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (children and young adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Creators

Alice Werner , 1859 - 1935
(Author)

Alice Werner (June 26th, 1859 – June 9th, 1935), born in the Imperial Free City of Trieste on the Austrian Littoral, was a German linguist, writer, minor poet and teacher. She was one of the pioneers of African Studies in the twentieth century. She studied at Newnham College at Cambridge University. Her visits to Nyasaland and Natal reinforced her scholarly interests in Africa. In 1917, when the School of Oriental Studies (later SOAS University of London) opened its doors to students, she began teaching Swahili and Bantu continuing this work until her retirement, as professor emerita, in 1930. Two years earlier, she obtained there her PhD in Literature. She also taught at Oxford and Cambridge. She was awarded the Silver Medal by the African Society in 1931. Her poem *Bannerman of the Dandenong. An Australian Ballad made* her popular in New Zealand, Australia and other parts of the world. However, her major achievement remains her book *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (1933). It presents the beliefs of the Bantu, their origins, their gods and their myths. Werner's earlier important publications include: *Introductory Sketch of the Bantu Language* (1919), *The Mythology of All Races, vol. VII.: Armenian,* by M.H. Ananikian, *African*, by Alice Werner (1925). She died in London at the age of 75.

Sources:

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Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Summary

There was a girl, who, after attaining maturity, rejected all the suitors that came for her hand in marriage. This girl's wish was to have a perfect husband. Her parents, who did not want to have a commoner for a son-in-law, supported her decision. One day, a sword dance was organized in the girl's village, and young men came from far and near to take part in the dance. Amongst them was a tall and handsome young man who was the centre of attention for every young girl. He wore a halo around his head, which gave him the status of nobility. The chosen maiden could not resist this handsome man, and as a result, she fell in love with him. Her parents, for their part, gave their approval without any further investigation. The dancing continued for several days, during which the girl remained glued to her charming prince. Suddenly, the man unconsciously turned his back to the girl, and she noticed he had a second mouth at the back of his head. This panicked her, so wasting no time, she informed her parents about it, but her father shouted at her and instructed her to continue dancing with him.

After the dance, he formally presented himself to the maiden's parents, and the marriage was celebrated with their consent. After that, the couple spent a few days with the girl's parents. When it was time for them to go, her brothers decided to follow them secretly because they were convinced that the handsome man was a rimu*. After covering a good distance, the husband stopped and asked her if she could still see the smoke from her father's roof, and she confirmed. After a few hours, he asked again if she could see the hills in her village, and her answer was affirmative like before. When they had finally gone far enough, he confirmed that he was a rimu. When he was about to kill his wife, her brothers came out of the bush and killed him with a poisonous arrow. The girl was rescued and taken back home to her parents.

* Werewolf.

Analysis

Pride is a vice that has caused the downfall of many heroes from time immemorial. Mythological female figures and even ordinary human

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beings that have fallen into this trap, end up regretting their actions . Many such characters brandish their wit or beauty as tools to underrate others. The end result, in most cases, is negative. As frivolous and selfish as it is, the male world will trail towards such women, not to boost their egos eternally, but sometimes, to serve as the catalyst to their demise. It flames these women's emotions, makes promises, and suddenly disappears, abandons them when they are already withered.

Women honor and revere marriage in Africa. Unmarried women receive little or no respect. Thus, the internal wish of any woman in Africa is to have a husband or, as in polygamous communities, share one. It may happen that people will spend their entire life looking for their ideal spouse. The result, like in this story, is ending up in the hands of monsters, water spirits, or occultists, who might use them as a ritualistic ingredient. It is especially problematic in African society, which does not cherish unmarried women. This phenomenon is prevalent in most African societies, yet many beautiful girls refuse to learn from it. They continue to perish physically and psychologically because of a lack of wisdom. A glaring example is the protagonist in this myth, who, with the assistance of her father, rejects all suitors and ends up in the hands of a rimu. The rimu's appreciation of her beauty is seen in his attempt to kill her. The myth does not reveal what happens to her after being saved by her brothers, but what is certain is that she ends up in shame after her one-day marriage.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Werewolves
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Character traits Family Girls Love Maturity Relationships

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Further Reading

Gutmann, Bruno, *Dichten und Denken der Dschagganeger: Beiträge zur ostafrikanischen Volkskunde*, Leipzig: Evangelical Lutheran Mission, 1909.

Gutmann, Bruno, *Volksbuch der Wadschagga. Sagen, Märchen, Fabeln und Schwänke. Den Dschagganegern nacherzählt*, Leipzig: Verlag der Evangelish-Lutherishen Mission, 1914, 75–76 (accessed: July 29, 2021).

Ifie, Egbe, *Marriage with Gods and Goddesses in classical and African myths*, Ibadan: End-Time, 1999.

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Addenda

Alice Werner mentions Bruno Gutmann, a missionary ethnographer of Chagga people as her source of the tale.

See: Gutmann, Bruno, *Volksbuch der Wadschagga. Sagen, Märchen, Fabeln und Schwänke. Den Dschagganegern nacherzählt*, Leipzig: Verlag der Evangelish-Lutherishen Mission, 1914, 75–76 (accessed: July 29, 2021).

Origin/cultural background:

The Chaga, or Chagga, are the Bantu-speaking people who live on the southern slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in northern Tanzania. In their patrilineal society polygamy is practiced. While Chaga young boys herd cattle, the girls grind corn and do house chores. Although Ruwa is the Chaga god of liberation and sustenance, with most of the myths surrounding him approximating those of the Judeo-Christian stories in the Old Testament, it is also the name for the sun. As part of their traditional ceremonies, they sacrifice goats to purify the land, circumcise young women for the Shija (initiation into womanhood), and take young boys into the forest to perform the Ngasi (a traditional male initiation rite). These rituals promote procreation, sexuality, clean menstruation, respect for elders, preparation for battles, and wisdom in the initiated.

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