ISAK DINESEN'S ECOLOGICAL POWER

Peter Mortensen

BRILL

Isak Dinesen's Ecological Power

Nature, Culture and Literature

READINGS IN ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

VOLUME 19

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LEIDEN | BOSTON

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The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025944214

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1572-4344
ISBN 978-90-04-72443-3 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-72654-3 (e-book)
DOI 10.1163/9789004726543

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgements

In an April 1926 letter to her brother Thomas, Isak Dinesen complains bitterly about her "pathetic 'authorship,'" frustrated that all her ideas for literary compositions in different genres invariably "turn into *mbuni* before my pen can touch them." Whether the book at hand amounts to more than so much *mbuni* – a waste product from the manufacture of coffee – is for others to judge. That the book exists at all is due to the help and good will of many people.

I owe gratitude, for example, to Brill's anonymous peer reviewers and to the many colleagues in Denmark and abroad (none mentioned, none forgotten) who have read, listened to, and engaged with my arguments in various formats and professional settings over the years. The winds of change that currently sweep across the academic landscape make me grateful, too, for having been privileged to work with companionable colleagues under relatively stable conditions and capable management at the Aarhus University English Department for more than twenty-five years. My family deserves great credit for their faith in my project, their tolerance for Dinesen-related lore, and the good cheer with which they have countenanced my sometimes gloomy musings on issues like climate change and the future of humanities research. Friends and teammates of my table tennis club, the magnificent Sisu/MBK, have given much-needed relief from logocentric overload. Finally, I should not neglect to thank the Carlsberg Foundation for generously granting me a one-year monograph fellowship, without which I would scarcely have been able to collect the scattered strands of my thought.

The discussions that follow incorporate some elements of these previously published texts, which are here used with permission:

- 'Both Men and Beasts': Rereading Karen Blixen's Anthropomorphisms. *Orbis Litterarum* 73, vol. 6 (2018): 506–519 (chapter two).
- 'A Coffee-Plantation is a Thing that Gets Hold of You and Does Not Let You Go': Plant- Writing in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*. *Journal of Literary Studies* 35, vol. 4 (2019): 28–45 (chapter two).
- 'The Juices of the Body': Ecomasculine Fluidification in Two Stories by Isak Dinesen. *Men and Masculinities* 25, vol. 1 (2022): 106–125 (chapter three).
- Witches' Milk: Queer Breastfeeding and Alternative Kin-Making in Isak Dinesen's 'The Caryatids.' *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 30, vol. 4 (2022): 264–277 (chapter four).
- Isak Dinesen's Weird Voodoo Novel. *Journal of Horror Studies* 14, vol. 1 (2023): 29–45 (chapter five).

The work presented here is supported by the Carlsberg Foundation, grant CF24-2260.

Abbreviations

Editions of Dinesen's Works in English and Danish

AA	*The Angelic Avengers.* London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2001.
AD	*Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard.* New York: Vintage, 1993.
CV	*Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.
DAF	*Den afrikanske Farm.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2007.
DG	*Daguerreotypes and Other Essays.* Translated by P. M. Mitchell and W. D. Paden. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
GV	*Gengældelsens Veje.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2013.
KBD	*Karen Blixen i Danmark: Breve, 1931–1962.* 2 vols. Edited by Frans Lasson and Tom Engelbrecht. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996.
KV	*Karneval og andre fortællinger.* Edited by Frans Lasson. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1994.
LA	*Letters from Africa, 1914–1931.* Translated by Anne Born, edited by Frans Lasson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
LT	*Last Tales.* New York: Vintage, 1991.
OA	*Out of Africa and Shadows on the Grass.* New York: Vintage, 1989.
OMM	*On Modern Marriage and Other Observations*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.
R	*Rungstedlund – En radiotale/Rungstedlund: A Radio Address.* Special ed. for COP15. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2009.
SA	*Skæbne-Anekdoter.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2020.
SF	*Sidste Fortællinger*. Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2016.
SFF	*Syv fantastiske Fortællinger.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2012.
SGE	*Skygger paa Græsset – Essays.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2020.
SGT	*Seven Gothic Tales.* New York: Vintage, 1991.
VE	*Vinter-Eventyr.* Edited by Nicolas Reinicke-Wilkendorff. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2010.
WT	*Winter's Tales.* New York: Vintage, 1993.

Introduction

1 Hopenhagen

Expectations ran high during the prelude to the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). From December 7 to 18, 2009, diplomats, CEOs, NGOs, lobbyists, celebrities, and more than 100 world heads of state including German chancellor Angela Merkel, French president Nicolas Sarkozy, and US president Barrack Obama were to meet at Bella Center in Copenhagen, Denmark, to discuss a framework for comprehensive climate change mitigation beyond the end of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. In 2000, the chemist Paul Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term "Anthropocene" to designate a new geological epoch characterized by ubiquitous and irreversible human change to global environmental systems (Crutzen and Stoermer 2013). In the summer of 2003, an anticyclone over Western Europe led to an extended and severe heat wave estimated to have killed more than 70,000 people. Two years later Hurricane Katrina claimed more than 1300 lives, and three years after that, Cyclone Nargis, which struck the densely populated Irrawaddy Delta in Myanmar, killed at least 130,000 people. In 2006, former US Vice President Al Gore released his Nobel Peace Prize-winning climate change documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth.* The period from 2000 to 2009 was the warmest since modern recordkeeping began, and by the end of the decade, it appeared as though many people recognized the grave threat posed by climate change. Academic conferences were organized, art exhibitions were held, and large and at times violent demonstrations took place, as lobbyists, activists, and protesters from around the world converged upon "Hopenhagen" to increase pressure on decision makers to keep the global maximum temperature rise below the critical threshold of 2 °C. Despite enormous media attention and a widespread sense of existential urgency, however, relations between industrial and developing nations remained gridlocked. Following a tumultuous conclusion to the summit, only a vague and nonbinding statement with no clear goals, the so-called "Copenhagen Accord," was produced.

COP15's surprises included an unexpected guest appearance by the Danish writer Karen Blixen (1885–1962), who wrote most of her books under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen. In preparation for the summit, the Karen Blixen Museum joined forces with the Rungstedlund Foundation, the Gyldendal publishing company, and the Copenhagen Metro to print and distribute 10,000 free bilingual copies of Dinesen's radio address "Rungstedlund" to conference

delegates and others using the Metro to traverse the Danish capital. Dinesen first read "Rungstedlund" aloud on Denmark's public Radio on July 6, 1958, hoping to collect funds that would allow her to convert her childhood and current home, a forty-acre semirural estate in a rapidly suburbanizing area north of Copenhagen, into a bird sanctuary following her death. In the address, Dinesen appeals directly to her listeners, recounting the rich cultural and environmental history of her eponymous house, which has been both a farm, an inn, and a private residence for illustrious people including the poet Johannes Ewald (1743–1781). Acting as a radiophonic tour guide and raconteur, she conveys the aesthetic beauty, biodiversity, and nature-cultural blending that have always distinguished Rungstedlund, a harmonious "middle landscape" (Marx 1964, 114) situated by the Øresund coast "approximately midway between Copenhagen and Elsinore" (*R*, 18), and she explains why she believes that the place should be protected from metropolitan sprawl:

> Rungstedlund comprises about forty acres of gardens, woods, and meadows, all of which – among the well-kept gardens of the shore road – seems something like a wilderness. Around the pond and the canal in the garden there is a whole woods of the same sort of broad-leaved dock that Hans Christian Andersen's "happy family" lived beneath. There is a large peaceful field, protected from the wind, where horses and cows wander about. There are many old trees, and under them a particularly rich woodland floor with anemones, primroses, and violets. In a corner to the northwest, towards which the entire property rises, lies Ewald's Knoll. (*R*, 22)

Dinesen ties her conservation efforts to larger questions of urban development, opposing policies that tend to lay down "asphalt and flagstone where before was woodland floor" (*R*, 44). "From time to time," she writes, "I think that Danish 'democracy' protects the people who don't need it more than those who really do; I think it protects automobiles rather than bicyclists" (*R*, 34–35). Lest her plan be perceived as "undemocractic" (*R*, 34) however, she justifies "the mission of Rungstedlund" (*R*, 35) not just in terms of its biodiversity benefits – "Dr. Salomonsen of the Ornithological Society [...] declared Rungstedlund was large enough to maintain a population of all the common Danish songbirds" (*R*, 40) – but also as a socially- minded public-welfare measure intended to secure a much-needed human "breathing space in the middle of a big city" (*R*, 37). For Dinesen, Rungstedlund corresponds to what E. O. Wilson (1984, 103–118) calls "the right place," a habitation that meets all criteria and fulfills all essential material, psychological, and aesthetic needs. She formulates

an environmental ethic based on her own sense of rootedness, belonging, or "topophilia" (love of place) (Tuan 1974), yet she also stresses the estate's global connectivity and openness, as a stopover, waystation, or meeting place for human and nonhuman wanderers alike:

> I have come to look upon Rungstedlund as belonging particularly to the migratory birds. The seasons here are first and foremost characterized by their arrivals and departures. How many times have I not, in the nights around the spring or autumnal equinox, stood outside the house and listened to their flight high in the heavens above the roof! [...] The human inhabitants of the house have also been birds of migration. (*R*, 33)

By disseminating Dinesen's essay in a sleek and stylish pocketbook edition, the 2009 publishers wanted to bid visitors welcome to Copenhagen, showcase the host country's green credentials, open new avenues towards engagement with Denmark's perhaps most distinguished twentieth-century writer, and infuse the ongoing climate agreement negotiations with a sense of urgency and optimism. Against all odds, Dinesen's innovative crowdfunding project was successful, for more than 85,000 Danes each donated one *krone*, and today the estate still runs as a bird sanctuary supervised by the Danish Ornithological Society. Recollecting Dinesen's endeavor, the publishers hoped, might energize discussions and engender a hopeful spirit of collective purposefulness among conference attendees. In the foreword to the publication, the Karen Blixen Museum curator Catherine Lefebvre argues that "[i]n many areas, Karen Blixen was remarkably ahead of her time, and her message – in 1958! – that we should be riding bicycles rather than driving cars is quite in keeping with the climate summit to be held in Copenhagen on December 7–18, 2009" (*R*, 9). Speaking to Denmark's Radio's P1 on December 16, 2009, Lefebvre further encouraged listeners to read the book and pass it on to others as a "sustainable" gift (Solvang and Starch 2009 [author's translation]). Dinesen, Lefebvre said, was "far ahead of her time," "visionary," "relevant," and "contemporary," combining a "local" and a "global" outlook and understanding "the significance of climate and nature for humans" (Solvang and Starch 2009 [author's translation]). If Dinesen were alive today, "she would surely have involved herself in something related to nature and climate, because these issues meant a great deal to her" (Solvang and Starch 2009 [author's translation]). Deeply concerned with the future, "green to the core of her soul," she sought "to emphasize the significance and right to exist of nature, animals, and birds in particular" (Solvang and Starch 2009 [author's translation]).

2 Nature, Environment, Ecology

I acquired the COP15 republication of "Rungstedlund" while visiting Copenhagen in those dark and cold December days of 2009, and it piqued my curiosity and enabled me to begin formulating the questions that this study explores. What manner of literary environmentalist, if any, was Dinesen, and how much do green ideas shape her thinking and writing in different genres? How do rampant climate change, mass extinction, ocean acidification, and other looming threats change our reading of Dinesen, and how can Denmark's arguably best-known twentieth-century writer inspire pressing adjustments of our cognitive and behavioral templates and help us recompose our *oikos* (family, household, or home)? In what ways are the values, mentalities, and sensibilities of a yet-to-be-realized sustainable civilization anticipated in the complex, multilayered, and often inconclusive tales of this eccentric and enigmatic writer? What light can new(ish) eco-oriented reading methods shed on texts that have been studied with great intensity, ingenuity, and acumen for many decades? With what plausibility and to what ends can an ecological Dinesen be posited alongside or in addition to the many rivalling Dinesens who already exist?

Born in 1885, Dinesen lived through a tumultuous period and read the early signs of the twentieth century's great acceleration, the phenomenal growth of human population numbers, economic activity, resource use, waste production, and greenhouse gas emissions that has thrust the planetary environment into a volatile state and confronted present people with rapidly escalating crises unique in the history of *Homo sapiens*. To associate Dinesen with environmentalism, as the COP15 publishers did, risks ahistorical overstatement, for she died in September 1962, the very year and month when Rachel Carson's trailblazing *Silent Spring* appeared, and she did not witness how an organized, scientifically grounded Danish environmental movement began to coalesce with the founding of NOAH by Copenhagen University students in 1969 and the heated 1970s protests against the government's plan to introduce nuclear power. Danish nature advocates, however, founded Dansk Naturfredningsforening (The Danish Society for Nature Conservation) already in 1911, and long before the 1960s, translated books grappling with environmental issue, such as Aldous Huxley's *Dyret og sjælen* (*Ape and Essence*) (1948) and Fairfield Osborn's *Vor udplyndrede jord* (*Our Plundered Planet*) (1949) were published and debated.[1] Dinesen's library at Rungstedlund held texts like Henry S. Salt's *Animals'*

1 Dinesen admired and enjoyed friendly relations with Huxley, "a pioneer in environmentalism" (Childress 1975), whom she met in London in 1934 and who visited her at Rungstedlund in 1960 (Thurman 1982, 272, 438).

Rights (1900) and Tage Damgaard's *Moderne hedenskab – Et bidrag til belysning af det biologiske og idealistiske livssyn* (*Modern Paganism: An Effort to Illuminate the Biological and the Idealist view of Life*) (1954) (Bondesson 1982, 281, 278). She was well acquainted, moreover, with the deeper intellectual currents and literary traditions that many believe underpinned the development of the modern environmental movement, including the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the poetry of the British romantic writers, and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose Zarathustra enjoins his listeners to "remain faithful to the earth" (1954, 125).[2] Her thinking and writing drew particular inspiration from the back-to-nature discourse of her father, the professional soldier, hunter, traveler, wilderness adventurer, and nature writer Wilhelm Dinesen (1845–1895), who after two years (1872–1874) in Wisconsin used the Native American pen name "Boganis" to contrast the destructive ways of white Christian settler colonialism with the superior but in his view doomed culture of North American hunter-gatherer peoples (Dinesen 2010). Another source of influence was Dinesen's younger sister Ellen Dahl (1886–1959), who early engaged herself in efforts to have particularly conservation-worthy and threatened landscapes in Denmark protected (H. Petersen 2017).

On January 14, 1914, a few months before the outbreak of World War I, Dinesen arrived in present-day Kenya, then the British-controlled East Africa Protectorate. Here she joined her soon-to-be husband, the Swedish Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke (1886–1946), on the pair's newly purchased coffee farm, Mbagathi, near Nairobi. The couple were lured, like so many white settlers, by economic opportunities opened by the late nineteenth-century colonial scramble for Africa, the 1901 completion of the Uganda Railroad, and the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, which established the processes under which lands in the Protectorate would be alienated to European settlers. Both Dinesen's husband, whom she divorced in 1925, and her intermittent British lover, Denys Finch Hatton, who died in an airplane crash in 1931, made their living as professional "white hunters," guiding wealthy European and American tourists on trophy-collecting shooting expeditions with sometimes staggering numbers of animal casualties. Dinesen's letters from Kenya, written between the ages of 28 and 46, and her subsequent memoirs *Out of Africa* (1937) and *Shadows on the Grass* (1960), document her enthusiastic embrace of the big-game safari, which offered romantic and thrilling adventure to white huntsmen and -women but also depleted key animal populations and helped the conversion of wilderness

2 That Dinesen knew *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is evident from her choice of an epigraph from that text for *Out of Africa*: "*Equitare, Arcum tendere, Veritatem dicere*" ("To ride, to shoot with a bow, to tell the truth") (*OA*, XIII).

into human-dominated agricultural landscapes. Numerous photographs from the World War I era that show Dinesen posing triumphantly over carcasses of animals belonging to now critically endangered species invariably leave a sour taste in the mouth.[3] When she was not shooting lions, leopards, elephants, ostriches, rhinos, and buffaloes for sport and sometimes food, Dinesen first comanaged and from 1921 singlehandedly directed her second farm, Mbogani, which was perhaps at some point East Africa's largest commercial coffee enterprise, but which accumulated substantial economic losses over the years. The farm was part of the 4.5 million acres of land that had already been divvied out among white farmers "as if it had been vacant" (Thurman 1982, 119). Cultivating the farm's 6000 acres for her maternal uncle Aage Westenholz' Karen Coffee Co. Ltd. gave Dinesen responsibility for more than 1000 Africans of different ethnic backgrounds, who as so-called "squatters" (*OA*, 10) were permitted a small amount of land where they lived and grew food in return for labor especially during harvest time. It also implicated her directly in the deleterious environmental transformation of the Kenyan Highlands, as forests were clearcut and the western-style planting of monocultural cash crops came to replace traditional East African agricultural techniques, with "great areas of land that were [...] virgin forest [...] now like a stretch of garden" and "with all the new little coffee plants in dead straight rows and the soil between them without a single weed" (*LA*, 6).

In letters, essays, interviews, and radio addresses following her 1931 repatriation, the otherwise reticent Dinesen repeatedly reflects upon the economistic, expansionistic, and extractivist mentality that brought her and so many other white settlers to Africa. In the early 1950s, Dinesen embroiled herself in acrimonious public debate about new legislation governing "vivisection," the use of live animals in experiments in Danish scientific research. During this controversy, she wrote several articles and delivered speeches in which she strenuously critiques the anthropocentric (human-centered) entitlement that allowed vivisectionists to clinically objectify and instrumentalize other living creatures. In a speech read aloud during a public debate held at Aarhus University on April 23, 1951, for example, Dinesen controversially compares Danish research facilities to Nazi concentration camps:

3 In a letter to her family narrating one safari in the first year of her Kenyan residence, Dinesen gloats over shooting forty-four head of game with 100 bullets (*LA*, 18). In his social history of Kenyan hunting, Edward I. Steinhart writes that Dinesen "took to hunting in Kenya with a real passion that bordered on blood-lust," and that she wrote about big-game safaris in ways that "would contribute indelibly to the romanticization of that tradition" (2006, 105).

> Until the day of capitulation many people, including myself, doubted that concentration camps were real. But they were real. They were here and there, in beautiful landscapes, with decent people's houses nearby. Those decent people have since declared, with outrage, that they were ignorant of the camps. [...] The animal concentration camps are right among us, in our beautiful cities, with decent people's houses nearby. Let us at least make clear what kind of guilt we incur, and how we might be held accountable, because we know nothing about them. (Bjørnvig 1982, 214–215 [author's translation])

Especially after World War II, Dinesen responds to economic development, urbanization, and the growing artificialization of everyday life with what we might recognize as proto-environmentalist arguments. She issues stern warnings about the growth of what she already in 1933 calls "our mechanical and mercenary civilization" (*KBD*, 1:100 [author's translation]) and the dominance of an ideology that puts the interests of humans, particularly wealthy and powerful humans, above all other concerns. In "Rungstedlund," she uses the traditional tropes of pastoral to depict her country house as a *locus amoenus*, an idealized place of rest and comfort and a repository of beliefs and ideals devalued by a faceless modernity. Speaking to the *Paris Review* in 1956, Dinesen laments how an environment where "[e]verything is mechanical and urban" means that children "aren't acquainted with the elements or in touch with them": "[C]hildren are raised up without knowing live fire, living water, the earth" (Brundbjerg 2000, 203). Addressing the readers of *Fyns Stiftstidende* in 1957, she declares that "I have always ranked humans' kinship with animals [...] highly" (Brundbjerg 2000, 227 [author's translation]). In a 1957 *New York Times* interview, Dinesen cites a line by the romantic poet Walter Savage Landor, "Nature I loved, and after Nature Art," and she claims that her primary allegiance lies "with the elements, with plants, birds, animals, and then with the primitive people" (Brundbjerg 2000, 256). Most poignantly, perhaps, in the untranslated 1954 radio address and article "Fra lægmand til lægmand" ("From Layman to Layman"), she reflects on the cost of technological progress from the perspective of a person who has learnt "that I was one with the earth, so that what was good for the earth was good for me" (*SGE*, 318 [author's translation]). She directly references her African experience, as she cautions her readers against the unintended consequences of the shortsighted western growth paradigm:

> [T]he first condition for behaving practically is to have imagination – that is to say: being able to consider a matter in the fairly long term.

> A thing can be practical in the moment, and lead to great practical difficulties in the future. I have also noticed this in Africa, where the white settlers cut down the forests. Once it seemed like a good practical measure to acquire firewood and lumber. It can appear a good practical course of action to lay ties for the railways that will carry the country's products to the coast. But after half a century, when the forests are cut down, the soil has eroded, and the climate has changed, we are left with the ties and the locomotives – but there are no more products to carry to the coast. And today a lament can be heard from many parts of Africa: "We have laid this land waste! We have squandered it!" (*SGE*, 315 [author's translation])

The environmentalist Barry Commoner would later generalize this insight and call it the fourth law of ecology: "There is no such thing as a free lunch" (1971, 41).

3 Precursors and Argument

Biographers and coffee table book writers often mention Dinesen's fondness for animals and flowers, but animal-, nature-, environment-, and ecology-oriented perspectives are curiously underrepresented in the voluminous, multifaceted, and polyglot academic criticism grappling with Dinesen's literary writings. One of Dinesen's earliest critics, Hans Brix, writes that in Dinesen's tales "natural phenomena appear only when they are intimately connected with the story's accounts of people" (1949, 144 [author's translation]). In his 1964 essay "Karen Blixen og fuglene" ("Karen Blixen and the Birds"), the ornithologist Finn Salomonsen observes that "Karen Blixen and nature is a great and captivating topic almost untouched" by previous scholars (1964, 43 [author's translation]). Dinesen's fiction and nonfiction, Salomonsen finds, use bird references with various degrees of scientific exactitude to anchor stories in specific times and places, endow human characters with telltale features, and provide the atmospheric "background music" (1964, 56 [author's translation]) to a predominantly human action. Another early text, Norwegian Kåre Knutsen's *Til Guds glede – Karen Blixen og dyrene* (*For the Joy of God: Karen Blixen and the Animals*) (1982), provides a superficial hagiographic account that assembles biographical anecdotes and snippets of quotation to align Dinesen with the pro-animal rights campaign.

Three critics who have influenced this study are Thorkild Bjørnvig, Sara Stambaugh, and Dag Heede. Bjørnvig (1918–2004) was a poet, critic, translator, and ardent environmentalist who painstakingly chronicled his fraught mentor-protégé relationship with Dinesen in *Pagten* (*The Pact*) (Bjørnvig 1983). In his

1982 essay "Karen Blixen og forsøgsdyrene" ("Karen Blixen and the Laboratory Animals"), Bjørnvig returns to the all-but-forgotten vivisection controversy of the early 1950s, placing Dinesen's contributions in a philosophical context. At stake in Dinesen's confrontation with established researchers including Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr, Bjørnvig argues, was Renaissance thinker René Descartes' belief in a nonnegotiable distinction between humans and other living beings, which has come to determine the outlook of western science and shape the course of modern civilization more generally. When Dinesen envisages human-animal kinship, rather than strict separation, Bjørnvig maintains, she neither succumbs to cheap sentimentalism nor abandons serious thought. Rather, she revives a nondualistic counter-tradition that is as old and profound as Cartesianism itself, encompassing philosophers like Voltaire, John Ruskin, and Jeremy Bentham as well as literary writers including William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, D. H. Lawrence, and Robinson Jeffers:

> A strong, submerged tradition has lived its life next to the victorious and triumphant one, resulting, again and again, in deeds and works. [...] Karen Blixen continues this tradition based on preconditions and in a genre that momentarily seem to camouflage this fact, if it was not for *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*. And for her passionate participation in the 1953 debate about revision of the vivisection law. (1982, 161 [author's translation])

Bjørnvig was one of the first Danish intellectuals to engage with the anthropogenic destruction of the environment by reflecting upon philosophical ideas, cultural traditions, and literary modes of expression. He wrote long before the professionalization and institutionalization of environmentally oriented literary and cultural criticism, and he only intermittently applies his insights in analysis of Dinesen's more creative writings. But his texts, which are influenced by poets like Ted Hughes, Margaret Atwood, and Gary Snyder, by environmental writers like Rachel Carson and Loren Eiseley, and by deep ecological thinkers like Arne Næss, James Lovelock, Lynn White, Jr., and Paul Shepard, were in many ways ahead of their time.

Although she never uses the term, Stambaugh in *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen* (1988) views Dinesen through the lens of ecofeminism, the intersectional discourse that links the human domination of nature to the male oppression of women. Stambaugh assigns special significance to figurative and literal witches in Dinesen's writing, such as Sunniva in "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," Lahula in "The Bear and the Kiss," and Simkie in "The Caryatids," characters whose nature-connectedness is strong enough to jeopardize

"a triumphant Christian world" (1988, 74). Such "bearers of life" (1988, 74), Stambaugh argues, are privileged as "completely feminine" and "sexually free" (1988, 47), occupying a border realm between culture and nature, civilization and wilderness. Socially marginalized yet uniquely powerful, Dinesen's crones, witches, and prostitutes are "learned priestesses" (1988, 45) or "mother goddess[es]" (1988, 55), not of the life-denying patriarchal Christian church, but of an alternative "pagan" (1988, 59), "Dionysian" (1988, 70), or "pantheistic" (1988, 73) fertility cult, where "harmony with nature" (1988, 71) and "immersion in the material world" (1988, 81) are valued above all. Although terms like "full femininity" (1988, 32) and "the fully masculine man" (1988, 57) appear simplistically normative, by today's standards, Stambaugh's study usefully suggests that Dinesen's concern with the nonhuman overlaps with and should not be studied in isolation from other domains of interest such as religion and gender.

Dag Heede's *Det umenneskelige – Analyser af køn, seksualitet og identitet hos Karen Blixen* (*The Inhuman: Analyses of Gender, Sexuality and Identity in Karen Blixen*) (2001) marks the culmination of the sophisticated theory-informed Dinesen criticism that began with feminist readings of the early 1980s and gathered momentum with poststructuralist and deconstructionist analyses published during the 1990s.[4] Heede's Dinesen is the most "subversive" (2001, 13 [author's translation]) of all the heterodox Dinesens posited in the course of these decades, a writer whose intransigent otherness continues to resist normalizing appropriations. To be sure, Heede does not address environmental questions directly, being more concerned to demonstrate how Dinesen dismantles essentialist ideas about gender and sexual identity through cultural mimicry, parody, and pastiche. In the process, however, he writes inspiringly about "animal people" (2001, 224–226 [author's translation]) in *Out of Africa* and elsewhere, and he is the first critic to characterize Dinesen's fictional universes as "non-anthropocentric" (2001, 246 [author's translation]). Although his theoretical background is different and his main intent lies elsewhere, Heede's book enables new probings of the nodes and junctures where relations of genders, sexualities, and environments meet and inform each other. His still provocative "inhumanist" queering of Dinesen has changed my understanding of her writing irrevocably, and its influence will be apparent throughout the following. While only some of my chapters bear explicitly on issues of gender, sexuality, and family, my interest in Dinesen's queerness, which I understand

4 Heede's book has never been translated into English, but a brief version of his argument is presented in his essay "Gender Trouble in Isak Dinesen's 'The Monkey'" (Heede 1998). Different kinds of theoretically informed Dinesen criticism are well represented in Pelensky 1993 and Woods 1994.

as a stance rather than an identity, a way of writing rather than a way of being, pervades the present study.[5]

The much discussed greening of literary studies and academic scholarship since the 2000s has had only limited impact on Dinesen criticism. Even as environmental anxieties have multiplied and intensified, as the gap between the humanities and natural science has narrowed, and as new kinds of interdisciplinary culture-and-environment study have proliferated, few professional critics (other than myself) have advanced our understanding of Dinesen as a writer vitally concerned with human coexistence with and responsiveness toward nonhuman life forms.[6] *Isak Dinesen's Ecological Power* provides an in-depth, up-to-date, and in my opinion long-overdue ecocritical study of Dinesen's fiction. Writing at a critical moment, when we realize that anthropogenic changes to the global environment are on the verge of moving us past the "safe operating space for humanity" (Rockström et al. 2009) by decisively bursting "planetary boundaries" (Richardson et al. 2023), I am interested in imaginative literature's ability to confront the entanglements of earthly living and stimulate new modes of thought and behavior that respect the planet's material limits. Generally, I am less concerned and impressed with the way in which Dinesen lived her life than the way in which she wrote her texts. Deemphasizing Dinesen's easily exaggerated status as nature lover, and having no interest in reclaiming her as a green role model, I view her *stories* as an inexhaustible and until now largely untapped source of ecocultural energy, helpful in the "unsettling of dominant narratives" and the development of "new narratives that are calibrated to the realities of our changing world" (Rose et al. 2012, 3).[7] What interests me throughout this study, then, is less how the Danish public intellectual and literary "superstar" (Hertel 1996) Karen Blixen valorized, celebrated, and defended nature than the way in which her bilingual storytelling alter ego, Isak Dinesen, uses innovative narrative strategies to critique, complicate, defamiliarize, queer, weird, warp, and revision deep-rooted and powerful ideas about time, animals, plants, gender, families, the idea of

5 I emphasize that in using such terminology, I make no claim and express no views about Dinesen's own sexual predilections (or lack thereof).

6 In making this statement, I should acknowledge important exceptions such as Ann-Sofie Lönngren (2015, 127–168), who studies "The Monkey" in the context of Northern European human-animal transformation narratives, and Anna Persson (2016), who analyzes the fluid boundaries between the female self and the natural landscape in *Out of Africa*.

7 As will become clear, I include in the category of "stories" texts with a substantial autobiographical component, such as *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*.

nature, and the very question of what it means to be human in a more-than-human world.[8] Dinesen's inchoate environmental personae included those of colonial plantation manager, big-game hunter, animal rights activist, nature conservationist, flower gardener, cycling advocate, and much more. But most importantly for the purposes of this study, she wrote thought-provoking, mind-bending, boundary-shifting tales that may help us think constructively and creatively about many facets of life on our troubled planet and find strategies for cultivating a more hopeful tomorrow.

4 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism can be defined broadly as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996, xviii) and as "literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist viewpoint" (Kerridge 2006, 530), where literary and cultural texts are used as keys to recognizing and confronting the philosophical, social, political, gender, and ethical causes and consequences of the environmental and climate crisis. Ecocritics approach the environmental crisis as "a crisis of the imagination" (Buell 1996, 2), thereby raising the stakes of cultural production and consumption. Early ecocritics charged that the linguistic turn in cultural and literary theory and criticism had divorced signifier from signified and blinded critics to literature's real-world significance at the very moment when the environmental crisis, manifested in the form of chemical spills, nuclear disasters, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and, increasingly, climate change, was becoming all but impossible to ignore. In response to the "semiotic fallacy" (Coupe 2000, 3) of poststructuralism and new historicism and mindful that "it is not language that has a hole in the ozone layer" (Soper 1995, 151), early ecocritics proposed "greening the humanities" (Parini 1995) in ways that would align literary studies with the values of the environmental movement. Reflecting their professional specialization in American and to a lesser extent British literature, "first-wave" (Buell 2011, 89) ecocritics particularly gravitated towards texts from selective literary genres and traditions. North American nature writing, transcendentalist essays, wilderness narratives, and certain forms of romantic lyric poetry, they proposed,

8 The adjective "more-than-human" derives from the work of ecophilosopher David Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (1996). It counters the idea that humans "participate almost exclusively with other humans and our human-made technologies" (1996, ix) and gestures towards a view of human beings within the larger context of interconnectedness.

possessed a special power to evoke the natural world, bridge the gap between sign and referent, and elicit the emotional connection with nature that E. O. Wilson (1984) calls "biophilia."

"[A]n avowedly political mode of analysis" (Garrard 2012, 3) and "less [...] a monolith than [...] a concourse of discrepant practices" (Buell 2005, 11), ecocriticism challenges us to scrutinize our own narrative templates and deepen our careful attentiveness to earthly coexistence in pursuits of companionable "arts of living" (Tsing et al. 2017). Frequently included within the interdisciplinary umbrella category of "the environmental humanities," contemporary ecocriticism is inflected, enriched, complicated, and challenged by adjacent discourses such as posthumanism, ecofeminism, critical animal studies, critical plant studies, sustainability studies, geocriticism, social ecology, environmental justice, indigenous studies, speculative realism, new materialism, affect theory, queer ecology, and disability studies.

Following arguments by Bruno Latour (1993), Donna Haraway (2004), and Timothy Morton (2007), many contemporary ecocritics disavow the dualism inherent in the romantic concept of nature, stressing instead the innumerable ways in in which humanity is enmeshed with the biophysical world and a multitude of nonhuman lifeforms. For many, deep ecology's concern with spiritual alienation and reconnection has come to seem less compelling than more "sociocentric" (Buell 2005, 112) combinations of ecological and social justice agendas. Many have heeded warnings about "the trouble with wilderness" (Cronon 1996), attending more closely to a greater variety of landscapes and environments including those that have been changed and even despoiled by human use. Many also resist the localizing and territorializing impulse explicit or implicit in early ecocriticism, aligning their work not with an ethics and aesthetics of rootedness or dwelling but rather with the recognition "of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world" (Heise 2008, 21). A term like "environmental crisis" appears to many insufficiently illustrative of the scope, depth, complexity, and existential gravity of wicked planetary emergencies and of the intersection of human domination of nature with various forms of intrahuman oppression organized around class, gender, race, sexuality, and (dis)ability. That vexed but ubiquitous and perhaps indispensable concept, "the Anthropocene," is both widely employed and broadly contested in ecocritical scholarship, because it offers a convenient shorthand for our present predicament but also tends to conceal the biases, inequalities, and power differentials inherent in the categories of "man" and "the human." Yet contemporary ecocriticism remains a powerful discourse of critique, transformation, and hope, where the interpretation of literary texts, and increasingly a wide range

of additional cultural products in different genres and media, helps illuminate both "the pathologies that bedevil society at large" and "some of the alternative paths it might consider" (Buell 1996, 2).

Early ecocritics tended to prioritize texts from a narrow and predictable range of male-dominated, predominantly Anglo-American literary traditions, but contemporary ecocritics' interests range far "beyond nature writing" (Armbruster and Wallace 2001), encompassing everything from medieval literature (e.g. Rudd 2007) to horror (e.g. Tidwell and Soles 2021), from Renaissance drama (e.g. Watson 2006) to science fiction (e.g. Canavan and Robinson 2014), from classical epic (e.g. Schliephake 2020) to decadence (e.g. Denisoff 2021). In terms of culture and geography, the pronounced Anglocentric bias of early ecocriticism has also given way to a more multinational, multicultural, and to a certain extent multilingual orientation. Though Nordic nations are often characterized (and gladly characterize themselves) as leaders in green technology and sustainable policy solutions, developing a robust ecocritical understanding of Scandinavian literature and culture remains a work in progress to which I hope that this book will contribute.[9] Patrick D. Murphy's pioneering *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* (1998) included chapters on English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, French, German, Maltese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish literatures (Murphy 1998, 149–258) but strangely left out writing from any of the Nordic countries. Since then, studies in several languages have broached diverse subjects including Scandinavian ecofiction for children (Goga and Eskebæk 2021), ecopoetry (Larsen, Mønster, and Rustad 2017), ecocrime fiction (Rugg 2017), ecofeminist literature (Leppänen 2022), Finnish-Swedish forest fictions (Kurikka 2020), and Old Norse literature (Hennig, Lethbridge, and Schulte 2023).[10] While many texts (e.g. Hennig, Jonasson, and Degerman 2018; Furuseth et al. 2020; Barlyng 2022) focus particularly on recent cultural products, often with explicit or even obvious environmentalist agendas and investments in green politics, works like Henning Fjørtoft's (2011) dissertation about Danish systems poet Inger Christensen and Henning H. Wærp's (2018) book-length study of Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun indicate that there is also much to be gained from revisionist ecocritical studies of older canonical figures who do not so readily fit the mold of the environmental writer, and who

9 In 2020, the Danish parliament passed ambitious climate legislation mandating that Denmark must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 70% (compared to the 1990 level) in 2030 and achieve climate neutrality no later than in 2050. Denmark ranks highest among the world's countries on the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), yet Danes' high-consumption lifestyle also means that in 2025 the country reached "Earth overshoot day" on March 19.

10 A more extensive updated list can be found at https://enscan.net/books/.

wrote before environmentalism emerged as a strong political movement.[11] As I discuss in the second chapter of this book, Dinesen had a fondness for human-animal comparisons, and she herself has often been portrayed as "a strange bird" in Danish literature (e.g. Elling 1976, 12; Brundbjerg 2000, 100 [author's translation]). She entered the world of Scandinavian letters late, via the English-speaking world, and were it not for the American Book-of-the-Month Club editor Dorothy Canfield Fisher's energetic endorsement of a collection of risqué and outré tales by an unknown, divorced, childless, middle-aged Danish woman who against all advice insisted on publishing pseudonymously and in a foreign language, "there probably would have been no Isak Dinesen" (Matthis 2014, 8).[12] If Dinesen's 1957 honorary membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters seemed to confirm her strong bond with North American readers, her relationship with the Danish critical establishment and reading public was always somewhat strained, and late in her career she told Johannes Rosendahl that she wanted *Last Tales* to be published in America, England, Sweden, Norway, and Finland but not Denmark (*KBD*, 2:256). My book supplements the important and rapidly growing body of Scandinavian ecocriticism with a study of a major Nordic woman writer with a distinctly cosmopolitan sensibility, a complex, elusive, and divisive figure who drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources and who always resisted narrow identification with a particular nation, region, culture, language, or ideology.

5 Dinesen's Texts

Dinesen debuted with three stories in Danish magazines from 1907 to 1909, and her marionette comedy *Sandhedens Hævn* (*The Revenge of Truth*) was written in 1904, reworked in 1915, and printed in the journal *Tilskueren* (*The Spectator*) in May 1926. After her commercial and critical breakthrough with *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934)/*Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) followed three additional collections of stories, *Winter's Tales*/*Vinter-Eventyr* (1942), *Last Tales*/*Sidste Fortællinger* (1957), and *Anecdotes of Destiny*/*Skæbne-Anekdoter*

11 Hamsun is perhaps the canonical Scandinavian writer who has attracted the most sustained ecocritical attention (see also Mortensen 2009; Hennig 2018; Reed 2020). *Biernes historie* (2015)/*The History of Bees* (2017), the first instalment in Norwegian novelist Maja Lunde's "climate quartet," is the so far bestselling book in the flourishing genre of Scandinavian climate fiction (or "cli-fi"), inspiring critical debate (e.g. Olsen 2022; Daniel 2023) about possible ways to narrativize Anthropocene crisis phenomena like apian colony collapse disorder.

12 Dinesen had a total of five books chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

(1958), as well as two fictionalized memoirs from her years in Kenya, *Out of Africa*/*Den afrikanske Farm* (1937) and *Shadows on the Grass*/*Skygger paa Græsset* (1960). During the World War II German occupation of Denmark, Dinesen under the pseudonym Pierre Andrézel also published a single novel in Danish, *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944), which she later anglicized and published as *The Angelic Avengers* (1946). Several stories were also read aloud in radio broadcasts and published independently in Danish, Swedish, and American magazines, and some of these have been collected, along with early and unpublished work, in the posthumous *Carnival* (1977)/*Karneval* (1975).

In her introduction to *Seven Gothic Tales*, Fisher teased American readers with the "idea that the book is filled with a manycolored [sic] literary fog in which you can make out no recognizable shapes" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 81). Later critics have characterized Dinesen's stories as "smart, worldly anecdotes that make wittily turned points" (Langbaum 1975, 151), as "intricate intertextual puzzles" (Rees 2006, 133), and as "labyrinths, three-dimensional spaces, and multilayered texts embedded with new clues to be discovered upon each rereading" (Brantly 2002, 1). Drawing primarily on nineteenth-century short story traditions and on older literary forms like myth, the fairytale, the fable, the ghost story, the cruel tale, and the oriental tale, they carry echoes of the baroque, gothic, dark romanticism, impressionism, symbolism, decadence, modernism, and even postmodernism. Speaking on the radio in 1959, Dinesen claimed that "I belong to an ancient, wild and useless tribe, perhaps I am one of the last member of it [...] I am a storyteller" (qtd. Hannah 1971, 60), thereby consciously distancing herself from contemporary writers, from inter- and postwar Denmark's prevailing literary trends, and from dominant forms of modern print culture such as the novel. Her tales often bend back upon themselves, featuring a substantial number of real and imaginary painters, singers, poets, writers, and taletellers who reflect on the nature and purpose of literature and art. In "The Cardinal's First Tale," for example, the Catholic Cardinal Salviati contrasts the "novel literature and category of belles-lettres" with the old- fashioned and "not quite human" (*LT*, 23) art of the story, where the overall design of events takes precedence over psychologically realistic depiction of individual characters.

Dinesen's stories freely blend references to events of her own life (her father's suicide, the loss of Mbogani, the death of her lover Denys Finch Hatton, the lukewarm Danish reception of *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*) with inspiration from classical mythology (Homer's *The Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), from Danish and European history (the agricultural reforms, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, the Danish-Prussian wars, the Paris Commune), from canonical literary texts (Lord Byron's poetry, Goethe's *The*

Sorrows of Young Werther, the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen), and also (though this is less well-researched) from indigenous African storytelling traditions.[13] Often written in a mannered, ornate, playful style, polyphonically and frequently unreliably narrated in a Chinese-box system of tales within tales, peppered with foreign (often French) phrases and quotations, and punctuated by gaps, reversals, ellipses, digressions, ambiguities, repetitions, and *mises en abyme*, Dinesen's stories feature male, female, and ambiguously gendered characters of all ages who are actors, artists, strippers, kings, princes, aristocrats, orphans, gypsies, opera divas, ballet dancers, theology students, tea merchants, syphilitics, pirates, priests, nuns, virgins, wet nurses, prostitutes, revolutionaries, and witches. Plots revolve around courtships, conspiracies, betrayals, initiations, transitions, disruptions, epiphanies, turning points, and ménages à trois with references to murder, suicide, piracy, slave trading, seduction, adultery, rape, poisoning, kidnapping, cannibalism, vampirism, supernatural haunting, religious fanaticism, Satanism, haute couture, haute cuisine, all manner of madness, disease, and disablement, and sexual (mis)conduct of every kind. Frequently used motifs include puppetry, theater, mirroring, masquerade, crossdressing, doubling, incest, and the skewed, off-balance mode of life that the ear- and noseless storyteller Mira Jama calls "dreaming":

> "You know, Tembu," said Mira suddenly, after a pause, "that if, in planting a coffee tree, you bend the taproot, that tree will start, after a little time, to put out a multitude of small delicate roots near the surface. That tree will never thrive, nor bear fruit, but it will flower more richly than the others.
>
> Those fine roots are the dreams of the tree. As it puts them out, it need no longer think of its bent taproot. It keeps alive by them – a little, not very long. Or you can say that it dies by them, if you like. For really, dreaming is the well-mannered people's way of committing suicide." (*SGT*, 277)

In Dinesen's stories, tourists, refugees, sailors, outcasts, exiles, prostitutes, transvestites, itinerant storytellers, emancipated slaves, and wandering Jews

13 In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen recalls listening to fantastic stories told by her Somali servants: "Farah and Ismail [...] explained to me how every live creature on the earth has got its replica at the bottom of the sea: horses, lions, women and Giraffe all live down there, and from time to time have been observed by sailors. They also recounted tales of horses which live at the bottom of the rivers of Somaliland, and at full-moon nights come up to the grass-land to copulate with the Somali mares grazing there, and breed foals of wonderful beauty and swiftness" (*OA*, 258).

travel tangled routes in a historical landscape – typically Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century – irrevocably altered by enlightenment secularization, democratic revolution, capitalist economic relations, bourgeois sexual norms, and the disenchanting effects of modern natural science. Criminal conspiracies, indecent imbroglios, fortuitous encounters, and improbable recognitions that play out in castles, manor houses, convents, salons, seaports, brothels, inns, hotels, spas, retirement homes, and casinos thematize and often complicate binary oppositions such as male/female, straight/queer, North/South, wild/tame, Apollonian/Dionysian, Christian/pagan, romantic/classical, Protestant/Catholic, art/life, tragedy/comedy, ethics/aesthetics, and bourgeois/aristocrat. Abundant references to floods, oceans, sea journeys, ships, shipwrecks, and drownings serve the construction of storyworlds where national and cultural boundaries, individual subjectivities, and social, sexual, and familial relationships are fluid, uncertain, and contingent. Much more than a "nonsense" (*KBD*, 1:134; Brundbjerg 2000, 18) literature written for private entertainment, Dinesen's dense, imaginative, highly crafted stories engage in intellectually ambitious conversations with intertexts including the Bible and the Quran, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, the *Arabian Nights*, and the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Maxims and aphorisms coined by narrators and characters – "By thy mask I shall know thee" (*SGT*, 26); "We are, all of us, acting in a marionette comedy" (*SGT*, 199); "Give up this game of being one" (*SGT*, 345); "God and the Devil are one, the majesty co-eternal, not two uncreated but one uncreated" (*OA*, 19); "The true aristocracy and the true proletariat of the world are both in understanding with tragedy" (*OA*, 196); "Man and woman are two locked caskets, of which each contains the key to the other" (*WT*, 303); "A great artist [...] is never poor" (*AD*, 58); "Be eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story" (*LT*, 100) – help adumbrate Dinesen's preoccupation with a wide range of aesthetic, existential, social, historical, sexual, epistemological, philosophical, and theological questions and problems.

In literary criticism, Dinesen exists in almost as many incompatible guises as her perhaps most celebrated heroine, the chameleonic opera prima donna Pellegrina Leoni of "The Dreamers" and "Echoes." Critics have debated but failed to agree precisely in what manner Dinesen's family and social background informs her writing, what coherent *Weltanschauung* (if any) undergirds her texts, what role Africa and Africans play in her works, and which among many possible isms, including primitivism, mysticism, relativism, fatalism, aestheticism, escapism, existentialism, modernism, antimodernism, humanism, and antihumanism, might best characterize her thinking and writing. A key concern and challenge for Dinesen's critics (e.g. Pahuus 1995; 17–21;

Engberg 2006), has been "destiny" and *skæbne*, the roughly equivalent pair of terms that she used to explore how characters respond to intransigent external circumstances and the often cruel and bizarre accidents of life. "Aristocracy," too, has been debated (e.g. Bondebjerg 1984; Hansen 2003) as a privileged term whose complex, often contradictory meanings include but cannot be reduced to questions of class origin.[14] Dinesen's frequent, even obsessive use of biblical allusions and imagery has inspired strikingly divergent pro-Christian (e.g. Stormgaard 2010) and anti-Christian (e.g. Stambaugh 1988) interpretations of her work, just as her play with gendered names, personae, voices, characters, tropes, and literary conventions has long intrigued, bewildered, and divided feminist and postfeminist interpreters (e.g. Gubar 1981; Blackwell 1991; Sabo 2005). She has been associated with sexual perversity (e.g. Schyberg in G. Rostbøll 1980, 225–231), reactionary politics (e.g. Bono 1978), class snobbery (e.g. Westenholz 1987), Nietzschean aristocratism (Riechel 1991), elitism (Richter 1985), and racism (e.g. Ngũgĩ 1980), but also interpreted as a progressive dialectician (e.g. Stecher-Hansen 2014) and reconsidered as a forerunner of postmodern deconstruction (G. Rostbøll 1996, 11–12), a savvy commercial self-promoter within the modern literary marketplace (Matthis 2014), a forward-looking chronicler of deterritorialized relations in the age of liquid modernity and globalized capitalism (Heitmann 2021), and an insubordinate critic of phallogocentric language (Aiken 1990), repressive religion (Bunch 2017), and compulsive heterosexuality (Heede 2001).

6 Boganis and Osceola

Under the pseudonym "Boganis," the Chippewa word for hazelnut, Wilhelm Dinesen between 1886 and 1891 wrote a series of short essays inspired by hunting and fishing trips throughout Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, which were published to considerable acclaim in the daily newspaper *Politiken* and later collected as *Jagtbreve* (*Letters from the Hunt*) (1889) and *Nye jagtbreve* (*New Letters from the Hunt*) (1892). Boganis's popular field notes struck a chord with critics like Georg Brandes and other predominantly urban readers in rapidly industrializing Denmark, and they deserve a prominent place in the still unwritten history of Danish environmental literature. They exemplify a

14 As Anders Westenholz points out, Dinesen descended from high-bourgeois families that "were not and never had been aristocratic" (1987, 92). When Bror Blixen remarried in 1929, Dinesen lost the title of Baroness, although she continued to use it (with his permission) until the end of her life.

homegrown Danish form of nature writing, which Michael Branch defines as a "brand of nature representation [...] written in the speculative personal voice, and presented in the form of the nonfiction essay [that] is frequently pastoral or romantic in its philosophical assumptions, tends to be modern or even ecological in its sensibility, and is often in service to an explicit or implicit preservationist agenda" (2001, 91). In lyrical and melancholic vignettes steeped in the tradition of romantic naturism, the elder Dinesen fuses the roles of hunter, outdoorsman, solitary rambler, cultural critic, and conservationist. He intersperses practical hunting and fishing advice with wistful recollections, humorous anecdotes, philosophical stray thoughts, close observation of animal behavior, and richly detailed, atmospheric evocations of places, landscapes, and biotopes. Offering more than escapist entertainment, Boganis's "Thoureauvian" (Aiken 1990, 27) *Jagtbreve* also explicitly critiques environmentally destructive practices such as overhunting, deforestation, agricultural enclosure, and the draining of wetlands:

> Our Danish storks weren't destroyed by the Mediterranean, but by the *drainpipe*. What are those long red leggings going to be used for when there are neither marshes nor meadows to strut about in, when you can walk around the whole country in dancing shoes without getting your feet wet? What good is that long pointed beak with not so much as a myrtle mound to bore into? There is nothing to tempt a stork in Denmark anymore, so it keeps to its home in North Africa. (Dinesen 1987, 47)

Throughout Boganis's rhapsodies, the near extinction of the American buffalo, whose rapid decline Dinesen had witnessed firsthand during his American travels, serves as a warning that "modern means of transportation and modern weapons will soon destroy all game, if it's not protected" (1987, 65). "The buffalo," Boganis cautions, "has been wiped out in America. The whale will disappear from the Arctic. The rhinoceros and the hippopotamus and the lion will not survive another century. [...] Our population of snipe has been ruined, and many storks have been driven away also by all this draining and reclamation work" (1987, 65). To forestall such gloomy prospects, Boganis recommends that readers adopt an ethos of stewardship inspired by the North American Plains Indians, who hunt with "bow and arrow" rather than "carbine and revolver" (1987, 52), and who kill only what they can use. Danish landscapes, Dinesen reminds his readers, still teem with multitudinous bird, fish, and mammalian species, a richness that many cannot see but that deserves to be cherished and preserved for future generations. There is another, truer Denmark out there, Boganis assures his readers, a world of forests, hills, marshes, moors, meadows,

streams, and beaches, where sensitive individuals can discover a deeper, more authentic satisfaction. Yet "civilization, with its superior instruments for murder, pushes forward," and "with the trapping and hunting equipment now at man's disposal, ruthless exploitation spells total destruction for animal, fish and bird life on land as well as at sea" (1987, 52). Only innovative conservation efforts combined with stricter national and international legislation can prevent ever-accelerating losses of the diverse creatures and environments that give value and meaning to life.

"Green," Jeffrey J. Cohen writes in the introduction to *Prismatic Ecology*,

> has long been the favored color of ecocriticism. A green reading offers an environment- minded analysis of literature and culture, and is typically concerned with how nature is represented within a text and how modes of human inhabitance unfold within an imagined natural world. [...] Green analysis often focuses on the destabilizing encroachment of industrialized society into wild spaces, the restorative and even ecstatic powers of unblemished landscapes, and the companionless dignity of nonhuman creatures. Woodlands, serene waterscapes, sublime vistas, and charismatic megafauna feature prominently. Blending the romantic, the pastoral, and the georgic, green ecologies tend to dwell on the innate plenitude that nature offers, mourning its commodification and disruption. (2013, xx)

In her unpublished and undated essay "Lad Naturen i Fred" ("Leave Nature in Peace"), Dinesen's sister Ellen Dahl applies green thinking to the problems of a twentieth-century nation with an advanced industrial economy and a rapidly growing population:

> The contest between nature and man is no longer equal; we have become too strong and especially too ruthless. [...] In this country, [...] we have so little space around us. We have all the conditions for a glorious nature, but the framework is too small and we too many. In a short time there will not be many spots in Denmark where man has not either cultivated, planted, built on or otherwise influenced nature. Will it be bearable to live in a country where there is nothing untouched but the sky – because even the sea is being destroyed by sewage and oil? Shall we not have lost far more than we have gained, when there is no other nature than that which benevolent people protect, and which in the end is but artificial nature? Will we not come to yearn for the pristine until the point of despair? (qtd. H. Petersen 2017, 121–123 [author's translation])

It is my contention that Boganis's older, more famous daughter's writing was never very green, if we assume that greenness entails a reverential disposition towards the natural world, a nostalgic attachment to nonpopulated spaces, an astute focus on biodiversity, explicit warnings against overdevelopment, care for bioregional conservation, an earth-centered activism, and a strong belief in the referential powers of language.[15] Osceola, as Dinesen called herself in her pre-*Seven Gothic Tales* publications, mostly refused to provide what we have come to expect from those discursive forms, variously identified as "literature of wilderness" (Elder 1981), "green writing" (McKusick 2000), "nature-oriented literature" (Murphy 2000), "literature of place" (Simo 2005), and "ecofiction" (Dwyer 2010), that have traditionally appealed to many ecocritics.[16] Dinesen's fiction's "ingredients," the critic Ingeborg Buhl wrote in 1951, "consist of all life's motley elements, but the choice is made with a fondness for the strange, refined, indeed often something more or less perverse" (*KBD*, 2:429 [author's translation]). With their complexity, multiplicity, polysemy, artificiality, intertextuality, irony, urbanity, opacity, playfulness, self-reflexiveness, irreverence, irresolution, and frequent flights into the fantastic, bizarre, morbid, uncanny, and occult, indeed, Dinesen's tales seem in many ways fundamentally at odds with the rationalism, realism, mimeticism, localism, ruralism, lyricism, earnestness, and moral didacticism often prioritized in the name of green writing, criticism, and activism.

With the possible and notable exceptions of *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*, Dinesen's publications rarely prioritize nonhuman over human concerns, they show little distinct preference for pristine wild landscapes, and they do not typically juxtapose the country and the city in the familiar pastoral manner.[17] In her stories, returning to nature's bosom and ending one's life on a pastoral sheep farm in rural West Jutland, as happens to the clergyman's

15 Following Mark Mussari (2001), we might argue that if one color dominates Dinesen's writing it is not green but blue. In the "blue story" (*WT*, 17) that Charlie Despard tells the sailors in "The Young Man with the Carnation," Lady Helena spends her life in pursuit of a special shade of blue. In Peter's story to Rosa in "Peter and Rosa," a skipper places two "big blue, precious stones" (*WT*, 274) as the eyes of his ship's figurehead.

16 Born Billy Paul, Osceola (1804–1838) was a Native American tribal chief who led the Florida Seminoles in their fight against the US government following the 1830 Indian Removal Act. Dinesen never used the alias after her return from Kenya, but in "The Caryatids: An Unfinished Gothic Tale," Phillippe, who has grown up in the wilds of Canada, fondly recalls his childhood "friend Osceola" (*LT*, 128).

17 Both *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*, however, elaborate on the difference between tame animals, which merely have "respectability," and wild animals, which stand "in a direct relation with God" (*OA*, 386). *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* includes a short excerpt from the opening of *Out of Africa* (Finch and Elder 1990, 375–378).

(pastor's) adopted daughter Alkmene in "Alkmene," generally is not an enviable fate. If green writing tends to be "strongly affirmative, extraverted, and masculine [...] sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty, and 'healthy,'" (Morton 2010, 16), Dinesen's texts often seem to be decadently "inflected or infected by a poetics of illness" (Aiken 1994, 17). The sickness, dysfunction, and disablement that befall so many characters often appear blessings in disguise, allowing experience of realities outside the confines of respectable bourgeois life. Disease is revalued as a dimension of life that can disclose insights that remain inaccessible to the healthy and the wholesome, as in the case of the syphilitic Scottish giant Lady Flora Gordon in "The Cardinal's Third Tale."[18] Written pseudonymously and bilingually, filled with words and phrases in many different languages, and populated by migrants, nomads, and exiles "blown about by many winds" (*SGT*, 272), Dinesen's stories also tend to contest the close identification of person and place, the "sedentarist metaphysics" (Malkki 1992, 31), the valorization of "arborescent" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 17) rootedness, and the "ethic of proximity" (Heise 2008, 28) that have governed influential forms of nature-centered politics and aesthetics. Set against the backdrop of a mobile world increasingly dependent on global travel, transport, and commerce, Dinesen's narratives rarely sit, dwell, or linger in the same places for long, nor do they confine their plots to well-known or spatially proximate locations.[19] The frame story of "The Dreamers," for example, is set on a boat travelling from Lamu to Zanzibar in East Africa, while the main narrative features episodes in Rome, Lucerne, Saumur, Milan, and the Swiss Alps. Another story, "The Invincible Slave-Owners," takes place in and near "a hotel at Baden-Baden" (*WT*, 127), which is perhaps less a proper place than a modern "non-place" (Augé 1995) where people of Danish, Dutch, Russian, Neapolitan, German, and other nationalities fleetingly meet and mingle.

Most importantly, perhaps, Dinesen's writing often seems to problematize green discourse's faith in an original, stable, ontologically secure nature, a real

18 Concerning her own diagnosis, Dinesen wrote to her brother that "[i]f it did not sound so beastly I might say that, the world being as it is, it was worth having syphilis in order to become a 'Baroness'" (*LA*, 281).

19 In her rich and detailed book-length analysis, Annegret Heitmann interprets Dinesen's use of foreign phrases, strange names, and exotic locations as "traces" (2021, 25 [author's translation]) pointing towards an incipient cosmopolitan, transnational, and even globalized understanding of the world. Tracing social identities and relations to cultural encounters and exchanges with strangeness and otherness, "a whole range of words, names, and minor episodes in Blixen's narrated worlds indicate that in modernity there are no more closed spaces, that humans, languages, experiences, goods, currencies, and ideas circulate globally" (2021, 58 [author's translation]).

and whole world out there that exists anterior to and independent of human actions, ideas, conventions, and inscriptions. Echoing Oscar Wilde's claim that "Life imitates Art, that Life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality" (1905, 32), and often taking a position more "nature-skeptical" than "nature-endorsing" (Soper 1995, 34), Dinesen's storytelling habitually accentuates the cultural mediation, the element of imaginative artifice, and the forms of human praxis that go into makings and experiences of "nature" and "the natural." Nature skepticism figures prominently, for example, in the celebrated opening of "Sorrow-Acre," which maps the Danish agrarian landscape beloved by national romantics as a "landscape of power" (Mitchell 2002) that blurs the "Great Divide" (Latour 1993, 3) between nature and culture:

> The low undulating Danish landscape was silent and serene, mysteriously wide-awaken in the hour before sunrise. There was not a cloud in the pale sky, not a shadow along the dim. Pearly fields, hills and woods. The mist was lifting from the valleys and hollows, the air was cool, the grass and the foliage dripping wet with morning-dew. Unwatched by the eyes of man, and undisturbed by his activity, the country breathed a timeless life, to which language was inadequate.
>
> All the same, a human race had lived on this land for a thousand years, had been formed by its soil and weather, and had marked it with its thoughts, so that now no one could tell where the existence of the one ceased and the other began. The thin grey line of a road, winding across the plain and up and down hills, was the fixed materialization of human longing, and of the human notion that it is better to be in one place than another. (*WT*, 29)

The story's young protagonist, Adam, believes the "Nordic scenery" to be "less marked by the hand of man than that of Italy" (*WT*, 37), yet humans have inscribed themselves on Denmark's picturesque countryside and loaded it with meaning in a great variety of historically specific ways, through changes including "[a] big snail, of the kind that [Adam's] grandfather had brought back from France, and which he remembered eating in the house as a child" (*WT*, 35) and a "new French rose garden laid out for the young mistress of the house" (*WT*, 36). This landscape demands to be "read […] like a book," the "irregular mosaic of meadows and cornlands [like] a picture" (*WT*, 29) and "[t]he fields, the hills, and the woods […] as still as a painted landscape" (*WT*, 47). With such aestheticizing language, Dinesen suggests, in Simon Schama's words, that "[l]andscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination

projected onto wood and water and rock" (1995, 61) that have informed individual and collective identities for many generations.[20]

7 Ecological Power

That Dinesen departs from the familiar scripts for environmental writing, however, does not make her stories irrelevant for ecocritics.[21] While they may not address the concerns of nature-endorsing ecocritics directly, Dinesen's texts can be seen to anticipate recent effort by scholars such as Bruno Latour (1993), William Cronon (1996), Timothy Morton (2007), Donna Haraway (2008a), Ursula Heise (2008), Jane Bennett (2010), Stacy Alaimo (2010), Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (2010), Jeffrey J. Cohen (2013), Timothy Clark (2013), Nicole Seymour (2018), and others to develop modes of ecological knowledge and discourse that take serious account of human-nonhuman connectedness while they seek to move beyond the moralizing seriousness, nature/culture dualism, masculinism, heteronormativity, reprocentrism, and faith in the redeeming power of wild nature that undergird much traditional environmental writing.[22] Viewed in this light, Dinesen complicates and

20 In "The Poet," nature similarly imitates art when early dawn is described as the time when "[t]he rich hues of night have withdrawn, […] and all the colors of daytime lie dormant in the landscape like in the paints used for pottery, which are all alike gray clay until they come out in the furnace" (*SGT*, 374). In "The Invincible Slave-Owners," Axel Leth's search for *Waldeinsamkeit* (forest solitude) in a glade outside Baden-Baden makes clear how his familiarity with picturesque and romantic aesthetics mediate his experience of the forest. Entering "a little wooden summer house, built in a romantic style" makes Axel feel "as if he had found his way into a picture, some classic Italian painting that suited him well" (*WT*, 139).

21 In making this observation, I am inspired by Robert Kern, who argues that "ecocriticism becomes most interesting and useful […] when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere" (2000, 11).

22 Seymour advocates a "bad environmentalism" exhibited by works that respond to the absurdities and ironies of contemporary climate debates and politics "often *through* absurdity and irony" (2018, 4) and other related manifestations of an irreverent queer stance including "camp, frivolity, indecorum, ambivalence, and glee" (2018, 23). Such works, she argues, can inspire alternatives to what she views as the off-putting shaming, didacticism, sentimentality, earnestness, nostalgia, apocalyptic fearmongering, and sanctimoniousness that too often characterize mainstream environmental discourse. Seymour's reclaiming of "gaiety" (2018, 24) and other contrarian modes that do not take themselves too seriously resonates with Dinesen's championing of the in her view untranslatable concept of "fun" (e.g. *KBD*, 1:383–384).

critiques romantic and realist nature discourses not because she lacks interest in or concern about the more-than-human world and the place of humans within it. Instead, her reluctance to engage with nature in the accustomed manner of nineteenth- and twentieth- century nature writers bespeaks both a prescient awareness that widely accepted forms of nature discourse are inadequate and often complicit with the instrumental domination of nature and a recognition of the need for languages and forms of writing that are nonnormative, nonutilitarian, and self-critical.

In a May 1954 letter, Dinesen writes to Aage Henriksen that

> [c]oncerning my relation to nature: I can't at all see that there is any boundary between nature and man. But I'm not so stupid that I don't know that others see this boundary clearly, nor that I don't know roughly what they mean by it. [...] They say that nature has no memory – but I have often wished that I had a memory like a tree, which bears every single ring of its being. In general, I am not quite capable of grasping any "dualism." (*KBD*, 2:213 [author's translation])

Reading Dinesen ecocritically requires different tools and calls for other strategies than those useful in reading more straightforward representations of or arguments about nature and the natural. In this book, I characterize Dinesen's writing as having *ecological power* – a term particularly inspired by William Rueckert, who coined the term "ecocriticism" in his 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," and by Hubert Zapf's more recent Rueckert-inspired *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts*.

For Rueckert, the creative literary imagination is the cultural equivalent of the sun, releasing energy in the form of new ideas, new perspectives, and new ways of thinking. Just as the sun invigorates everything in the biological world, so power flows from the pens of poets, creating "creativity and community" (1996, 111):

> A poem is stored energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow. Poems are part of the energy pathways which sustain life.
>
> Poems are a verbal equivalent of fossil fuel (stored energy), but they are a renewable source of energy, coming, as they do, from those ever generative twin matrices, language and imagination. (1996, 108)

According to Zapf, creative literature broadly defined has the potential to play a special role in the "cultural ecology" (2016, 4) of discourses, becoming "a medium of critical reflection and symbolic corrective" (2016, 99) to western

culture's anthropocentric, dualistic, and ecophobic tendencies. Imaginative literature, Zapf argues, both is and is not part of the dominant culture, and it possesses an "ecological potency" (2016, 5) that other, more instrumental and teleological forms of discourse do not. Literature can act "like an ecological force" (2016, 90) *within* western culture, critiquing, correcting, and transforming modern culture's self-destructive addiction to "reckless economic exploitation" (2016, 15):

> Literature has [...] evolved into a kind of discursive heterotopia that operates both inside and outside the discourses of the larger culture, opening up an imaginative space in which dominant developments, beliefs, truth-claims, and models of human life are being critically reflected and symbolically transgressed in counter-discourses to prevailing economic-technoscientific forms of modernization and globalization. Literary texts provide a transformative site of cultural self-reflection and cultural self- exploration, in which the historically marginalized and excluded is semiotically empowered and activated as a source of their artistic creativity, and is thus reconnected to the civilizational reality-system in both deconstructive and reconstructive ways. (2016, 27–28)

Literature lends itself, Zapf claims, to a form of "ecocultural critique" (2016, 12) that has been and continues to be activated in diverse ways by writers in different sociohistorical contexts, making it "a source of ever-renewable creative energy, which can be activated by ever new generations of readers in always changing personal and historical contexts" (2016, 32). As civilizational critique, or what Zapf calls "cultural-critical metadiscourse" (2016, 102), literary texts can help illuminate the humanly and environmentally ruinous consequences of modernity. As "imaginative counter-discourse" (2016, 110) or "counterdiscursive ecopoiesis" (2016, 59), they can tap into forgotten, repressed, or marginalized memories, un- or recover heterodox ways of knowing the world, connect with alternative cultural perspectives and practices, and clear imaginative spaces for different visions of becoming and becoming-with. "[L]iterature seems," Zapf argues "to have developed into a cultural form in which the reconnection between the changing historical world and the awareness of biocentric origins became one of its hallmarks as a specifically complex, holistic, and self-reflexive form of discourse even and especially under the conditions of advanced modernization" (2016, 35).

In Zapf's view, moreover, literature's function as a disruptive "ecological force in cultural discourse" (2016, 35) and a source of "ever-renewable creative energy" (2016, 121) potentially capable of "reshaping the ecocultural imaginary"

(2016, 50) depends little on the faithfulness with which texts transmit natural environments, mediate scientific paradigms, or thematize specific environmental problems or conflicts. A literary text's power to perturb, estrange, and renew is not primarily tied to its mimetic, communicative, or persuasive function, but rather to its "radical strangeness, alienation, and alterity" (2016, 12). Zapf devotes little attention to locodescriptive nature writing, environmental protest literature, green utopianism, or other "well-intentioned" (2016, 21) forms of "eco-literature" (2016, 30), where aesthetic concerns are typically subordinated to "calls for action" (2016, 44). It is, he argues, "artistically complex texts" (2016, 5), "pluri-voiced" (2016, 60) works with a high degree of "polyphonic complexity" (2016, 59), that most fully activate literature's power as "subversive counterforce" (2016, 32):

> [G]aps, uncertainties, and indeterminacies [...] may be seen to resist rather than support unidirectional ecological agency and political engagement. Yet it is these uncertainties and indeterminacies which create a textural space for otherness that alone can break up the sermonizing monologues of missionary (eco-)politics and open the text for the active participation of the reader in the continual co-creation of those relational complexities which constitute ecological awareness and existence. (2016, 60)

Thus, works that seem playful, experimental, opaque, oblique, weird, or queer, lacking the telltale features of the environmental text and perhaps having little explicit thematic bearing on ecopolitical matters, may turn out to have the greatest "artistic potency" (2016, 12) for "radical civilizational critique" (2016, 28) and "cultural self-renewal" (2016, 178) leading towards an earth-centered ethics of care.

My understanding of Dinesen's ecological power both builds upon and departs from what has previously been theorized as her "radical denial" of the "Cartesian attitude to the environment" (Bjørnvig 1982, 184, 199 [author's translation]), her "allegiance [...] with pantheism, a Nietzschean Dionysus, Lucifereian rebellion, and a pre-Christian world serpent" (Stambaugh 1988, 69), her "refusal or subversion of univocal categories" (Aiken 1990, xxi), her use of "estrangement techniques in the construction and deconstruction of heterosexuality" (Heede 2001, 37 [author's translation]), her "heretical stance" vis-à-vis "religious and political dogmatism" (Stecher-Hansen 2014, 39), and her "questioning of unified and closed identity" (Heitmann 2021, 37 [author's translation]). One of Dinesen's favorite texts was Samuel Taylor Coleridge's romantic ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), whose eponymous hero is said to possess "strange powers of speech" (1998, 543), and many critics

have found that strange powers, too, radiate from Dinesen and her works. When the American publishers Harrison Smith and Robert Haas first released *Seven Gothic Tales* upon the unsuspecting world, Fisher's preface highlighted their "bizarre power" and their "tense, fierce, hard, controlled, over-civilized, savage something-or-other, for which I find no name" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 78). According to Aage Henriksen (1988), whose understanding of Dinesen was predicated on his immersion in Kundalini yoga, the Danish storywriter had a profound and intimidating understanding of the ways in which different forms of energy course through the human body and the larger universe. And influenced by Jungian psychoanalysis, Dinesen's great-nephew Anders Westenholz consistently capitalizes the Danish word *Kraft* (Power) in his book *Kraftens horn* (translated as *The Power of Aries*). We can only understand Dinesen's life and writing, Westenholz argues, if we realize that she both possessed and was possessed by a mysterious, demonic, potentially self-destructive Power: "The Power forced her to make a myth of her own life, to experience her destiny as a link in a long chain of mythological repetitions of the same theme: 'God loves an encore'" (1987, 9). In the present study I repurpose this concept, exploring how Dinesen actuates literature's *ecological* power in ways that work towards "systemic self-corrections and [...] potential new beginnings" (Zapf 2016, 115). I analyze, assess, and (re)evaluate Dinesen's stories not as nature literature in the traditional sense, but as sites of creative estrangement and renewal and as an inexhaustible energy source for ecocultural self-scrutiny and self-transformation. Dinesen's not-quite-green, post-green, or more-than-green writing is less affirmative and celebratory, I argue, than critical and exploratory, guided by an impulse less to promote a particular vision of nature than to unsettle the terms in which both culture and nature are understood. "[B]oth deconstructive and reconstructive" (Zapf 2016, 158), her texts build imaginative counterworlds whose very strangeness and otherness can help us unthink ecological sovereignty and open new perspectives necessary for imagining a livable future for human and nonhuman beings.

Though she occasionally reversed the process, Dinesen typically wrote her texts in English and later recomposed them for Danish publication, using a process that she called *boerpløjning* ("Boer ploughing").[23] As is well-known,

23 Dinesen's secretary Clara Selborn explained "Boer ploughing" as a special method whereby every year a new piece of land is included for ploughing, while at the same time the old is plowed through again (Behrendt 2010, 409). Notable exceptions to Dinesen's composition method include "Converse at Night in Copenhagen" and "Copenhagen Season," which were first written in Danish as "Samtale om Natten i København" and "Ib og Adelaide," "Tempests," which Hugh F. Pooley translated into English for *Anecdotes of Destiny* on the basis of "Storme," and "Ehrengard," which Selborn translated into Danish after Dinesen's death.

her stories more than occasionally revisit themes, resume or alter plot lines, or resuscitate characters from her previous tales. It is equally well-documented, moreover, that Dinesen was in constant dialogue with other literatures, constructing some of her best-known stories in response to Danish and world-literary texts that stimulated her admiration or (more commonly) provoked her disagreement. Dinesen's texts contain an almost overwhelming number of allusions to other texts, engaging in complex intertextual conversations that are sometimes, but far from always, explicitly signaled by story titles, locations, character names, direct quotations, or other clues. In 1986, Bernhard Glienke methodically compiled a *Referenzinventar* (inventory of references) of Dinesen's work, calculating that the 3,122 standard pages of her complete works contain nearly 3,500 references to literature (1986, 98–157). In *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, poststructuralist feminist Susan H. Aiken analyzes the "revisionist hermeneutic" (1990, xxiv) and "double-voiced discourse" (1990, 7) with which Dinesen inserts herself into traditions where she as a woman has no proper place. Dinesen, Aiken argues, deploys shifting male pseudonyms and mimics legitimate voices to engender subtle and sophisticated rereadings and undoings of patriarchal culture's authoritative texts and writers, from the Bible to Shakespeare, John Milton to Søren Kierkegaard. Focusing specifically on Dinesen's *agon* with Kierkegaard, Mads Bunch has more recently borrowed a Danish term from Aage Henriksen to characterize Dinesen's tales as *modhistorier* ("countertales"). "[O]ne of Dinesen's major ways of becoming a part of world literature," Bunch observes, "was to deliberately deal with important works from it in her tales, for the most part in a subversive way" (2017, 1).[24]

In this book, I propose that Dinesen's stories also, on a more fundamental level, inscribe ecologically oriented *modhistorier* to western modernity's "dominant developments, beliefs, truth-claims, and models of human life" (Zapf 2016, 27). Transforming our connection with the physical world signifies the conclusion of an era characterized by excessive consumption by a privileged few to the detriment of the many. This transformation necessitates a profound shift in our perspectives on a multitude of fundamental aspects: wealth, power, sexuality, our perception of time and space, our relationship with nature and each other, our assessment of value, the definition of a fulfilling life, and the very idea of what it means to be human. In Timothy Morton's words, "[e]cological thinking […] isn't just to do with sciences of ecology. Ecological thinking is to do with art, philosophy, literature, music, and culture […] and it also has to do with factories, transportation, architecture, and economics.

24 Also inspiring here is Poul Behrendt, who defines the "winter's tale" as an "anti-fairytale" in which "nobody lives happily ever after" (2010, 404 [author's translation]).

Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together" (2010, 4). Ecological thinking, Morton continues, "is the thinking of interconnectedness," a "practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings – animal, vegetable and mineral" (2010, 7). Dinesen's ecological power, as I understand it, pertains less to her work's relatively few and sparse nature descriptions than to her literature's unsettling impact, its creative interventions and interferences, its ability to destabilize familiar cultural perspectives on a wide range of issues, its power to jolt readers out of timeworn cognitive pathways and make them perceive themselves and the world in new ways. Dinesen's oblique, inconclusive, nondidactic, and anti-reverential texts do not preach love of nature and provide no reassuring readymade solutions to pressing environmental issues like climate change, ocean acidification, plastic pollution, and biodiversity loss. Yet her stories activate literature's "ecological potency" (Zapf 2016, 5) by critically engaging with the powerful religious beliefs, deep-rooted philosophical frameworks, authoritative, widespread cultural assumptions, and value-laden metaphors that subtend environmental damage. What Dinesen offers, I suggest, is literary invention that can help renovate essential cultural narratives and "relocate the human" (Latour 1993, 136).

8 "The Sailor-Boy's Tale"

That Dinesen's texts diverge significantly from romantic and realist nature discourses but possess indisputable ecological power can be illustrated by a brief look at "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," which was first published in *Winter's Tales* (1942), where it occupied the opening spot in both Danish- and English-language editions until the editors of the American Book-of-the-Month Club changed the sequence of tales and moved it to fourth place (Behrendt 2011). "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" is a *modhistorie* influenced by a story in Wilhelm Dinesen's *Jagtbreve*, which in turn draws likely inspiration from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a key text for ecocritics that is often read as "a parable of ecological transgression" (McKusick 2000, 30). In a letter concerned with superstition among sailors, Boganis relates what he claims is an authentic experience from a recent Atlantic crossing on the steamer *Geiser*, when a bored passenger defies repeated warnings from sailors and fires his gun first at a seagull and later at a falcon that has come to rest in the ship's rigging:

> Near Sable Island a big falcon settled down on the rigging from the main mast. Our eager sportsman again ran for his gun, but some of us

> passengers and a few sailors shooed the bird away, and it flew out of sight. However, after a while it returned. […] The bird stayed away for an hour, then it returned and settled on the top mast. The light feathers on one of its claws were bloody. The hunter wanted to shoot again, but this time we would not let him. He would have been tied up if he had tried it. For a short while the falcon held its perch unsteadily. Then it fell down dead on the deck. (1987, 69–70)

Boganis's story derives poignancy from the historical fact, which is only alluded to in the text but will have been well-known to readers, that on July 12, 1888, *Geiser* collided with *Thingvalla* while homebound from New York and sank off Sable Island with the loss of 105 lives.

In the opening of Dinesen's story, set in the Mediterranean, a peregrine falcon becomes ensnared in a ship's tackle. While most sailors seem oblivious to the bird's life-and-death struggle, the titular "small […] sailor-boy" (*WT*, 91) Simon risks his life and mounts to the top of a mast to liberate the falcon. The story then skips ahead two years, moving to the Norwegian harbor town of Bodø, just north of the Arctic Circle, where Simon's new ship, the schooner *Hebe*, has come "to buy herrings" (*WT*, 92):

> To the great herring-markets of Bodø ships came together from all corners of the world; here were Swedish, Finnish and Russian boats, a forest of masts, and on shore a turbulent, irregular display of life, with many languages spoken, and mighty fights. On the shore booths had been set up, and the Lapps, small yellow people, noiseless in their movements, with watchful eyes, whom Simon had never seen before, came down to sell bead-embroidered leather-goods. It was April, the sky and the sea were so clear that it was difficult to hold one's eyes up against them – salt, infinitely wide, and filled with bird-shrieks – as if someone were incessantly whetting invisible knives, on all sides, high up in Heaven. (*WT*, 92)

When Simon ventures ashore in Bodø, he goes through what most of the story's critics (e.g. Langbaum 1975, 156–157; Hejlsted 1996; Heede 2001, 125–127; Heitmann 2021, 122–125) consider a rite of passage that introduces him to adulthood and heterosexual masculinity. Meeting the local parson's teenage daughter, Nora, Simon buys an orange and a "small blue silk handkerchief" (*WT*, 96) that he hopes to exchange for a kiss. On his way to his rendezvous, however, he is waylaid by a lusty and aggressive Russian sailor, Ivan, who kisses him, gives him "a gold watchchain" (*WT*, 95), and calls him "my little chicken" (*WT*, 96). Desperate to keep his appointment with Nora, Simon stabs and kills Ivan with his knife, and subsequently he must flee the Russian's vengeful comrades. He

is rescued by Sunniva, "a short, broad old woman, in the clothes of the Lapps" (*WT*, 99), who takes him to her house and disguises him as her son.[25]

In my interpretation, Dinesen's story expands and complicates what can still, in Boganis's version, be read as a relatively straightforward environmental(ist) fable of transgression and punishment. "The Sailor Boy's Tale" resists the moral didacticism typified by the Ancient Mariner's message to the Wedding Guest at the end of Coleridge's poem:

> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all. (1994, 543)

Dinesen's story neither celebrates nature nor condemns crossbow-hunting, herring-fishing, reindeer-husbandry, or other activities whereby humans try to earn a livelihood. With recurring images of violence, stabbing, and bloodshed, the story debunks any naïve notion of a wholly harmonious and loving coexistence within human society or between humans and nonhumans. Precisely located in place and time, "The Sailor Boy's Tale" contains minimal locodescriptive detail that might help readers visualize the town and surroundings of Bodø, a place that Dinesen had read about but never visited in person. Although geographically remote, moreover, the Norwegian harbor, fishing, and border town forms no redeeming antithesis to metropolitan civilization. On the contrary, Bodø is described as a thoroughly modern environment, a multicultural contact zone with a bustling commercial culture offering abundant consumer goods such as "gold watches [...] made from bad metal," "a case of oranges" (*WT*, 93), and "silk handkerchief[s]" (*WT*, 95). Sunniva has relatives who work in the skin trade, and her house is "all filled with reindeer skins and wolf skins, and with reindeer horn, such as the Lapps use to make their carved buttons and knife-handles" (*WT*, 100). When Simon is safe, she pours him a "hot strong, black drink" of coffee in "a cup without a handle to it" (*WT*, 103).

Although "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" contains few features of a conventional green narrative, it powerfully deconstructs one of western culture's most enduring ideas or myths: that of the separate and autonomous human being. Simon and Sunniva, it turns out, have met before:

> "Why have you helped me?" he asked her. "Do you not know?" she answered. "Have you not recognized me yet? But you will remember

25 Here and elsewhere, Dinesen uses the colonial term "Lapp," which many members of the Sámi community now consider derogatory.

> the peregrine falcon with was caught in the tackle-yarn of your boat, the Charlotte, as she sailed in the Mediterranean. That day you climbed up by the shrouds of the top-gallant mast to help her out, in a stiff wind, and with a high sea. That falcon was me. We Lapps often fly in such a manner, to see the world. When I first met you I was on my way to Africa, to see my younger sister and her children. She is a falcon, too, when she chooses. By that time she was living at Takaunga, within an old ruined tower, which down there they call a minaret." She swathed a corner of her skirt round her thumb, and bit at it. "We do not forget," she said. (*WT*, 102)

Sunniva's revelation of human-animal entanglement is anticipated in the story's beginning where Simon intuits a strange kinship with his surroundings, "as if the sea and the sky, the ship, the bird and himself were all one." Watching the ensnared falcon struggle for survival and knowing well that his shipmates will "make fun of him," he is gripped by a "fellow- feeling [...], a sense of common tragedy" (*WT*, 91).

Fantastic, chimerical, hybrid, and shapeshifting creatures including witches, vampires, werewolves, and centaurs appear or are alluded to with great frequency throughout Dinesen's fiction. "Real art," she wrote in 1929, "must always involve some witchcraft" (*LA*, 181). As Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney point out, "'more-than-human' ways of knowing, being and acting have characterised Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and ethology since time immemorial, and today they constitute a significant site of shared identification across the Indigenous world" (2019, 159). Bodø is part of Sápmi, the cultural region in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia that is inhabited by the indigenous seminomadic Sámi people. The Sámi have lived in Sápmi since the last Ice Age and have maintained a deep and enduring connection with the reindeer, an animal that has provided sustenance, livelihood, partnership, a rhythm to life, and spiritual inspiration to the Sámi people. Traditionally, the Sámi have been animists, meaning that their worldview and lifeways are not premised on the Cartesian dualism that drives a wedge between body and spirit, nature and culture, human and animal. According to Elina Helander-Renvall, "[t]he Sámi do not stand apart from nature; instead, they regard themselves as an integral part of it. [...] The Sámi believe that land, animals, and humans, and the spirits that govern them have a connection to each other" (2010, 49–50).

Dinesen could read representations of Sámi culture in popular texts by Norwegian writers like Jonas Lie and Knut Hamsun, but while she certainly reproduces conventional elements of "arctic primitivism," with its emphasis on the "nomadic, ecstatic, [and] magic" (Eglinger 2016), there is considerably

more to "The Sailor-Boy's Story" than this. Sámi magic, shamanism, and therianthropy (human-animal transformation) interested Dinesen, I suggest, because they pose indigenous alternatives to dominant western discourses of human identity based on what she called "the poisonous tradition of dualism" (qtd. Thurman 1982, 173). With a sister at Takaunga, on the coast of Kenya, Sunniva belongs to a cosmopolitan shamanic sorority whose members persist on the margins of a predominantly settled, Christian, male-dominated world. When she says "[t]hat falcon was me" (*WT*, 102), Sunniva asserts an identity that is inherently multiple, mutable, and hybrid. When she symbolically adopts Simon, calling him "my little bird" (*WT*, 103), she implicates him in her own more-than-human mode of life.[26] Speaking "in a high shrill voice, like a bird's" (*WT*, 99), "rubb[ing] her two brown, claw-like fingers against [Simon's] forehead" (*WT*, 102), and "jerk[ing] her head like an angry bird of prey" (*WT*, 101), Sunniva is human *and* falcon, or she is human *because* she is also falcon. Through Sunniva, "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" proposes that we begin to think being as becoming, that we understand existence as coexistence, and that we conceptualize the human not as singular, constant, and autonomous, but as something that always entails a constitutive relationship with the nonhuman. For Sunniva, as Anna L. Tsing puts it, "[h]uman nature is an interspecies relationship" (qtd. in Haraway 2008a, 19).

9 This Book

Judith Thurman's National Book Award-winning biography *Isak Dinesen: Life of a Storyteller* (1982) and Sydney Pollack's Academy Awards-winning film *Out of Africa* (1985) initiated a romantic fascination with Dinesen's life, sometimes bordering on a form of "literary necrophilia" (Rossel 1986), that continues to be nourished by collections of unpublished letters (B. Rostbøll 2018), biographies (Buk-Swienty 2019), cookbooks (Wulff 2020), photo books (Juhl 2017), graphic novels (Panolfo and Risbjerg 2015), plays (Zacho 2022), ballets (Dean 2022), novels (Skowronek 2011; Nielsen 2023), biopics (August 2021), and TV miniseries (Nordahl 2022; August 2023).[27] Tickets are on sale for Hele Danmarks

26 That Sunniva considers Simon her son is made clearer in the Danish version of the story, "Skibsdrengens Fortælling," where she refers to him as "min lille falk" ("my little falcon") (*VE*, 21).

27 The fifth-highest grossing film of 1985, Pollack's *Out of Africa* appeared in the centennial of Dinesen's birth, also inspiring the National Museums of Kenya to acquire her

Musicalteater's *Karen Blixen: The Musical,* which premieres in the spring of 2028, and in recent years Dinesen has inspired a variety of cultivated roses from Poulsen Roser, a line of Christmas ornaments from Rosendahl Design, an assortment of luxury coffees from the Danish supermarket chain Coop, and a collection of jewelry in silver, pearls, and diamonds by Heindorf Jewellery. Yet we should also remember to (re)read her stories, and my book explores how and why doing so in the context of the present moment of socioecological crisis can prove helpful.

Dinesen's pseudonymous, bilingual, polyvocal, border-, gender-, and genre-crossing writing betrays a "systematic preoccupation with multiplicity (Rees 2005, 17) that frustrates any reading strategy dependent on a single authorial name, lineage, cultural tradition, or place of origin. Her work straddles the divisions between Danish, Anglophone, and world literatures, and anyone who writes about her texts is faced with tough decisions about the choice of names, languages, titles, and editions. Using the pen name "Isak Dinesen" rather than "Karen Blixen" appeals to me, not only because it has generally been the custom in English-language criticism, but also because the name Isak, whose root Hebrew meaning is "the one who laughs," hints suggestively at her writing's irreverent tone and counterdiscursive disposition. All but a few of Dinesen's published stories exist in at least two versions written by the author herself, and arguments based on authorial intention could be cited in preference of both earlier, typically English-language versions and later, primarily Danish-language, and often slightly longer and more detailed texts.[28] In this book I have decided, principally for pragmatic reasons, to treat Dinesen as first and foremost an English-language writer, which means that I give primacy to English-language texts even in those cases (like "The Caryatids" and *The Angelic Avengers*) where the Danish text was the first to be published. Since there

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farmhouse on the outskirts of Nairobi and open it as a museum. In Denmark, Rungstedlund opened as the Karen Blixen Museum in 1991.

28 Instead of rendering her own texts word for word, Dinesen practiced a "literary cross-border movement" (Klünder 2000 [author's translation]) whose underlying strategy has been characterized as "amplification" (Kure-Jensen 1993, 317), "danicisation" (G. W. Jones 1998, 46), and "transcreation" (Steponavičiūtė 2011). Moving from source to target language (usually from English to Danish) entailed alterations, substitutions, and additions whose extent and significance vary considerably from collection to collection and from story to story. As explained by Derek Roper (1998), matters are particularly complex in the case of *Winter's Tales/Vinter-Eventyr*, whose eleven stories exist in three rather than two different versions. Because World War II delayed and disrupted Dinesen's communication with her Anglophone publishers, numerous more-than-cosmetic differences still distinguish the British version of *Winter's Tales* used in the Penguin Modern Classics edition from the text used in the American Vintage edition that I refer to in this study.

are unfortunately no standard critical editions of Dinesen's English-language publications, I have determined to use mass-market editions still in print. Whenever significant language variations or alterations compel my attention, I consult the excellent seven-volume series of critically edited and annotated Danish texts published by Gyldendal and Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab (The Danish Society of Language and Literature) from 2007 to 2020. Through most of her life, Dinesen wrote letters and gave interviews in both English and Danish. Some but far from all Danish-language letters and essays have been translated into English, as have some of the most prominent Danish-language critical studies. When authorized translations of Danish texts by Dinesen and others are available, I have used them; when not, I have produced my own translations and marked them as such.

Dinesen was right to protest when critics accused her of writing texts that had no constructive bearing on real-world issues and dilemmas.[29] While Zapf's energistic understanding of literature as "a kind of 'magical' counterforce to the cultural reality system" (2016, 109) guides my overall approach to Dinesen, the analyses that follow take their specific cues from ecocritical time studies, critical animal and plant studies, ecogender studies, queer ecology, and the eco-weird. I use ideas, perspectives, and concepts from various domains within contemporary ecocriticism, including "time ecology," "zoopoeisis," "phytopoeisis," "ecomasculinities," "kinnovation," and "global weirding," to explore different but mutually complementary manifestations or mobilizations of Dinesen's ecological power – to examine, that is, how her texts transcend a narrow concern with beautiful nature to challenge dominant anthropocentric notions, blur conceptual boundaries, and interrogate how we live, interact, and become with other humans and nonhumans. Focusing on individual texts or clusters of texts, each chapter grapples with an aspect of what Dinesen's friend and critic Bent Mohn called "a surplus, an excess, the feeling that more was hidden [in her stories] than was visible on the surface" (qtd. Migel 1967, 239). At the same time, each chapter also intervenes in existing scholarly debates, providing new ways of thinking about issues and problems that have long preoccupied Dinesen's critics, and shifting mostly overlooked elements of Dinesen's work to the forefront of critical discussion. Each chapter, I hope, will bring us closer to a strong understanding of Dinesen as a writer vitally preoccupied with the possibility of renovating the *oikos* and with "the exhilarating prospect of getting out of some

29 Dinesen makes this objection, for example, in a 1958 letter to Johannes Rosendahl: "I myself believe that it is a misunderstanding when again and again I am accused of escapism, of not wanting to 'engage myself,' or of having lived, and still living, in an ivory tower" (*KBD*, 2:386 [author's translation]).

of the old boxes and opening up new ways of thinking about what being human means" (Hayles 1999, 285).

As this project has evolved, the culture wars have intensified, enveloping the choice and study of literary authors and texts in new forms of controversy. Vocal calls to diversify and decolonize the literary canon and demands that long revered writers be held accountable for objectionable words or actions are frequently read as ahistorical and puritanical, prompting counteraccusations of "political correctness," "wokeism," "virtue signaling," and "cancel culture." Dinesen's unembarrassed involvement with big-game hunting and colonial agriculture continues to provoke debate and disagreement, perhaps serving as an uncomfortable reminder that "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin 1968, 256). A northern European white woman from a privileged social background, a self-declared "reactionary" (e.g. *LA*, 138; Brundbjerg 2000, 305) who professed (albeit with some equivocation) that "I am not a feminist" (*DG*, 65) and who boasted (though with some exaggeration) that "I had a farm in Africa" (*OA*, 3), Dinesen produced no shortage of characterizations, statements, opinions, and observations that, whether they are spoken in her own voice or attributed to narrative personae and characters, cannot but appear dated, insensitive, infuriating, or at the very least (in today's parlance) "problematic." The aforementioned "The Sailor Boy's Tale," for example, traffics in what at times appear to be blatant ethnic stereotypes, labelling Sámi people "small yellow people, noiseless in their movement, with watchful eyes" (*WT*, 92–93) while also associating Russian sailors with homosexual violence and Jewish merchants with commercial fraudulence.[30] While I am far from convinced that Dinesen's stories, written between 1907 and 1962 and often involving members of the nineteenth-century "vanishing and decaying aristocracy" (*SGT*, 9), in every way align with twenty-first-century notions of representational inclusivity, social justice, gender equality, intersectionality, and anticoloniality, I share with her most discerning critics the fundamental conviction that her tales refuse to have their meaning and value summed up in a single inflammatory label. Cognizant of Dinesen's histrionic imperfections, I remain inspired by Eve K. Sedgwick's suggestion that critics explore alternatives to the mode of "paranoid reading," promising superior "knowledge in the form of exposure" (2003, 138), that has come to dominate current call-out politics. The inherently hazardous effort to make new and unfamiliar kin, as I discuss in Chapter 4, has emerged

30 In "Skibsdrengens Fortælling," "Lapps" are even called "smaa, gule Mennesker med skæve Øjne og lydløse i alle deres Bevægelser" ("small, yellow people with slanted eyes and silent in all their movements") (*VE*, 13).

as a prominent desideratum in the environmental humanities, and an overly judgmental attitude would deprive us of the opportunity to discover just how powerfully Dinesen's stories, pretentious, cynical, and regressive though they may sometimes seem, speak to vital contemporary concerns. In short, I make no apology for devoting time and attention to texts that I, first inspired by the publishers of the COP15 special edition of "Rungstedlund," believe pose timely questions and flag up promising possibilities for coexistent flourishing on a troubled planet.

Unlike some of Dinesen's most persuasive critics, I allow myself considerable selectivity, prioritizing neither a step-by-step chronological narrative nor an overview of her wholesale oeuvre but opting instead for close engagements with a limited but carefully selected number of power-laden texts, in interpretations whose twists and turns will surely pique some readers but hopefully intrigue and stimulate others. I move across texts from Dinesen's early, middle, and late career, pay scant attention to the unstable distinction between works in fictional and nonfictional genres, and discover elements that interest me in both major and minor, high-canonical and all but forgotten works. This book neither aims for nor achieves the definitiveness, completeness, and closure characteristic of some of the most authoritative monographs on Dinesen's work. Indeed, what I present is perhaps less a single- author study, in the traditional sense, than what I hope will be a recontextualization, a reinvigoration, and an invitation to further debate about Dinesen, her writing, and the role and power of literature in Scandinavia and elsewhere in the twentieth century and beyond. We urgently need to power our societies and imaginations in new ways, and since the 1970s, Denmark has emerged as a frontrunner within the development and implementation of renewable energy solutions. With my analyses, I aspire less to exhaust what there is to say about Dinesen and ecology than to consider some fruitful ways of tapping her stories' ample supply of stored power, "so that it may flow through the human community" (Rueckert 1996, 109).

In the first chapter, "Out of Joint: Time Ecology in 'The Deluge at Norderney' and 'Babette's Feast,'" I use ecocritical time studies to reconsider Dinesen's (non)contemporaneity and (un)timeliness in the contexts of literary modernism's time ecology and of contemporary calls for more diverse and environmentally sensitive approaches to time. More than simply old-fashioned, anachronistic, or out of synch, I propose, Dinesen's writing troubles the modern homogenization and standardization of time that is increasingly recognized as a main driver of ecological crisis. I first show how the opening story of *Seven Gothic Tales*, "The Deluge at Norderney," employs counter-temporal techniques and motifs including anachrony, mythic time, queer temporality,

and more-than-human time in ways that seem to decrease the power of unilinear clock or calendar time. I then examine how Dinesen's probably most renowned and extensively debated story, "Babette's Feast," ruptures the hegemony of *chronos* with a glimpse into a utopian future of shared delight and a temporal expansion towards the temporal boundaries of nonhuman material substances and living beings. Time is of the essence, I argue, and Dinesen's writing implements the temporally transformative qualities of narratives in ways that call for more commentary and should elicit new interest in our own critical times.

The second chapter, "A Tangled World: Humans, Animals, and Plants in *Out of Africa*," complicates Marxist and postcolonial critiques of *Out of Africa* by exploring this text's proto-posthumanist entanglement of humanity, fauna, and flora. In this chapter, I especially embroil myself in the long and ongoing polemic concerning Dinesen's extensive use of zoomorphism (human-animal comparison), which is often denounced as a trope that dehumanizes African characters and renders them inferior to Europeans. While I do not dismiss Dinesen's association with colonialism or discount the relevance of humanist critique, I first argue that *Out of Africa*'s interspecies crossings work less to entrench racial hierarchies than to unsettle the human/animal distinction around which so many of the intellectual, political, and scientific endeavors of the West cohere. I subsequently extend my reading to illustrate how *Out of Africa* also foregrounds plants and their key influence on human culture, society, and identity. If discussions of *Out of Africa* cannot and should not be divorced from its author's class, cultural background, and historical circumstances, I argue, the multitude of both animal and vegetal references and metaphors that riddle the text significantly clarify Dinesen's efforts to destabilize the categories that conventionally demarcate humans from nonhumans.

The discussion in my third chapter, "In Flux: Wet Masculinities in 'Peter and Rosa,' 'The Monkey,' and 'Ehrengard,'" flows from gender-focused discussions of Dinesen's fiction dating back to her first reception by mid-twentieth-century Danish feminists. Here, I put her narratives into conversation with recent materialist ecofeminism and emergent ecomasculinities studies to analyze the interest in male embodiment and masculine ecologization that runs through some of her best-known stories. While many of Dinesen's male characters appear to drift indecisively through life, I explore how three quite different protagonists – Peter Køb ke of "Peter and Rosa," Boris von Schreckenstein of "The Monkey," and Wolfgang Cazotte of "Ehrengard" – confront wetness both outside and within their own bodies. If corporeal fluidity has traditionally been strongly associated with leaky female bodies, I find that Dinesen's stories push back against humanist and more specifically masculinist strategies

of disavowal. Against a dominant ancient and modern narrative of the male body as whole, complete, and self-contained, and frequently strong, abled, and hard to boot, Dinesen's stories demand, and enable, alternate forms of ecomasculinity.

In the fourth chapter, "Unfamiliar Families: Kinship Trouble in *Last Tales*," I connect Dinesen with contemporary ecopolitical debates about unsustainable human population growth and the search for conceptions of family, belonging, and relationship that can led to alternative ways of living more lightly on the planet. This chapter explores two interconnected motifs that I label "gothic celibacy" and "queer breastfeeding" to examine how key stories of *Last Tales* test the boundaries of traditional heterosexual, reproductive, and filiative relationships. In "The Cardinal's First Tale," "The Cardinal's Third Tale," and "The Blank Page," I argue, Dinesen builds upon but moves beyond gothic fiction's traditional anti-Catholicism to show how the "unnatural" or "inhuman" institution of clerical celibacy and the characters who practice it can provide relief from family life and inspiration for alternative forms of identity and group affiliation. Subsequently, I examine how "A Country Tale" and "The Caryatids: An Unfinished Gothic Tale" reference breastfeeding practices that exceed or transgress "natural" motherhood. Instead of idealizing nursing mothers as docile bodies around whom heterofamilial subjects and populations can be (re)produced, breastfeeding in Dinesen's fiction repeatedly turns bizarre, disruptive, and anti-genealogical.

In the fifth and last chapter, "Weird Tales for Strange Times: Ruptures with Reality in 'Eneboerne,' 'The Monkey,' and *The Angelic Avengers*," I call attention to genre issues, using the current scholarly interest in weird fiction as my point of departure to propose a new, ecologically oriented understanding of certain dark, strange, and discomforting texts written by Dinesen throughout her career. The stories that preoccupy me here slip between genres, utilizing aspects of gothic, fantasy, horror, and the supernatural to unsettle deep-rooted convictions about the world and rupture or expand what we generally understand as "normal" reality. Thus, in the first story that Dinesen ever published, "Eneboerne" ("The Hermits") (1907), the ill-fated protagonists encounter a natural environment that seems eerily alive, perhaps conscious, and possibly actively antagonistic towards human beings. "The Monkey" (1934), in turn, stages bizarre, impossible events that reveal strange connections and imperil the fundamental common-sense idea of the human as an autonomous, distinct category. Finally, *The Angelic Avengers* (1944/1946) posits a nebulous voodoo world imbued with depths and horrors that can never be more than partially uncovered by human understanding. I choose to end my inquiry here, because I find that Dinesen's writing in the weird vein orients us towards anxieties and

dilemmas that urgently confront us in the increasingly unstable, unfamiliar, even alien-seeming world of what some call "the Anthropocene" and others label "global weirding."

Finally, in my conclusion I briefly reflect upon the interest in storytelling and in stories' influence on human lives that connects Dinesen tales like "The Poet" and "Tempests" to contemporary scholarship in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities.

CHAPTER 1

Out of Joint: Time Ecology in "The Deluge at Norderney" and "Babette's Feast"

1 Introduction

The environmental crisis is a crisis of space but also a crisis of time. Lewis Mumford identifies the mechanical clock, invented in the fourteenth century, as "the key machine of the modern industrial age" (1934, 14), because it replaced variable hours, which depended on culture, climate, geography, and season, with a single invariable, unchanging, standardized time. For Stephen Kern (1983), time changed decisively with scientific, political and technological developments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating when participants in the Paris International Conference on Time in 1912 established a worldwide homogenized time system centered on Greenwich Mean Time. According to Jonathan Crary (2013), late capitalism has created a 24/7 world of ceaseless production and consumption, where the human body's evolved demands for rest and sleep are under ever-increasing pressure. Western modernity's understanding of time, as linear progression and as abstract, standardized units that can be accounted, regulated, divided, spent, wasted, and commodified, has achieved global hegemony, and this process of temporal standardization has played out very unevenly for different human individuals and groups. Nature's time, however, remains a complex mosaic or kaleidoscope of heterogeneous but connected timescales including planetary "deep time," evolutionary developments, reproduction, gestation, growth and aging times, migratory rhythms, metabolic processes, and circadian, lunar or seasonal cycles. Barbara Adam argues that Western temporality constitutes "a central part of the deep structure of environmental damage wrought by the industrial way of life" (1998, 9), because our human-centered understanding of time threatens to disconnect us from a wide range of polyrhythmic temporalities, ranging from the very fast to the very slow, that refuse to comply with humanmade notions of time, history, and progress. As "clock time, world time, standard time and time zones become naturalized as the norm," Adam argues, "[o]ther temporal principles fade into the background. They become invisible" (2002, 17). Our temporal near- and shortsightedness means, for example, that renewable resources such as freshwater and arable soil are exploited at rates incompatible with their rate of regeneration. Climate change, population growth, urbanization, and

other anthropogenic changes disrupt the circadian and migratory rhythms of animals and produce extinction rates far exceeding evolutionary normality. Poisonous and nonpoisonous chemical substances and waste products are released much more quickly and copiously than the atmosphere and the ocean can absorb them and neutralize their effects.

According to Paul Huebener, "ecocritical time studies" (2020, 24) should involve the critical scrutiny of the cultural narratives that shape how we understand time in human and more-than-human worlds. Investigating a wide range of cultural "clocks," including poems, short stories, novels, artworks, and advertisements, Huebener seeks to comprehend the power of dominant "time socialization stories" (2020, 9) but also to discover alternative "configurations of the temporal imagination" (2020, 23) that can assist us "with the task of rebuilding our knowledge of natural time" (2020, 11) and "relearn the art of clockmaking" (2020, 24) in a world of many interconnected temporalities. "Any old narrative," he writes, "can serve to domesticate time, to construct a cultural model in which time takes on a certain form. Thoughtful works of literature do this as well, but they can also twist the process around by cracking open the case of cultural time, revealing that culture's clocks have always been fragmented, partial, and ideological" (2020, 105).

The impulse to "twist," "crack open," and "question the clock, the supreme icon of modern time" (Huebener 2020, 22), was particularly strong among those artists and writers whom we associate with modernism. Among modernism's important contexts was the late- nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernization, mechanization, and homogenization of time – a process attributable to Taylorist theories of scientific management, wartime mobilization and coordination, the rapid expansion of colonial trade routes, and new technological inventions including wristwatches, assembly lines, telegraphs, telephones, and railway networks (S. Kern 1983, 10–35; Taylor 1989, 456–494; Stevenson 1992, 87–158; Levenson 2005; Barrow 2010). As ever more new realms were conquered by standardized time, however, an increasing number of artists working across a spectrum of media and disciplines reacted against this project by telling time otherwise than in the bourgeois realist novels of the nineteenth century. Modernist antagonism to "the growing hegemony of homogeneous time" (Danius 2002, 10) produced the broken, disordered, malfunctioning, and deformed clocks that litter key modernist texts including F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1926) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929).[1] It also engendered texts like Joseph Conrad's *The*

1 In The *Great Gatsby,* Jay Gatsby knocks over "a defunct mantelpiece clock" (Fitzgerald 2013, 86), catching it just before it hits the ground. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin Compson breaks

Secret Agent (1907), which revolves around an anarchist plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory. Works produced in the first decades of the twentieth century play with the vicissitudes of subjective memory, experiment with fractured chronologies, arrange stilled moments of mystical transcendence, open spaces for atavistic resurgences, spin out utopian and dystopian futures, and reenchant the temporal imagination with flights into the fourth dimension. Indeed, some of the era's most ambitious literary innovations, including H. G. Wells's time machine, Marcel Proust's use of involuntary memory, Virginia Woolf's streams of consciousness, and James Joyce's epiphanies, are clock-breaking and -remaking projects, "time [...] reorderings of a strange and unfamiliar kind" (Taylor 1989, 465) motivated by opposition to the conceptual blinders of universal timekeeping and "the one-damn-thing-after-another of habitual time" (Connor 2005, 263).

In the Old Testament, Isak is the child who arrives too late, long after "[t]he way of women had ceased to be with Sarah" (Gen. 18:11). As obsessed with time as any twentieth-century writer, Dinesen frequently (e.g. *OA*, 218) compared herself to Scheherazade, the cunning vizier's daughter who tells stories to steal time in the *Arabian Nights*, and on more than one occasion she claimed that "I am really 3,000 years old and have dined with Socrates" (e.g. Brundbjerg 2000, 213). "They say I'm a reactionary," Dinesen stated in a 1959 interview with *Life Magazine*: "Perhaps so, for if I were rich I think that slaves would be a great thing to have. And as fast as a horse can go is fast enough for me" (Brundbjerg 2000, 305). Dinesen's writing career coincided with the period when the "ritual of 'clocking-in' and 'clocking-out'" (Stevenson 1998, 117) became central to modern life, as western culture's anthropocentric timepieces appeared in the process of taking over the world. Her writing, however, is one site where modernist counter-temporalities that skew the time of capitalist production, including subjective *durée*, anachronism, atavism, non-synchronicity, epiphany, belatedness, cyclicality, decadence, arrested growth, immaturity, messianic time, slowness, and awareness of nonwestern and nonhuman timescales, become visible.

To borrow Hamlet's words, time is "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2006, 227) in and around Dinesen's narratives, as perhaps best symbolized by the De Coninck sisters' "stopped and dead" (*SGT*, 249) family clock in the *Hamlet*-influenced story "The Supper at Elsinore."[2] Comparing her to Virginia Woolf

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the watch that his father gave him but finds that "[t]he watch ticked on [...], the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better" (Faulkner 1984, 80).

2 Clocks and watches in various states of disrepair appear elsewhere in Dinesen's stories. In "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," for example, defunct watches, having lost their ability to tell time, are reduced to decorative objects: "One evening [Simon] was ashore with land-leave, and walked

and Djuna Barnes, Ellen Rees analyzes Dinesen under the heading of "atavistic modernism," arguing that "her literary project as a whole can be viewed as a kind of exile from the present age" (2005, 17). To read a Dinesen tale, Morten Kyndrup observes, is to experience a paradoxical "clash between times," between "on the one hand the narrative construction which [...] even at the time of publication was emphatically *outdated*, and on the other hand a theme which [...] is tremendously modern" (1994, 333–334). According to Bo H. Jørgensen, Dinesen's stories' constant temporal shifts between experiences, recollections and retrospective accounts create a "labyrinth of interpretation" where one is never "completely sure that everything is being told, or that what one actually hears is the most important thing" (1999, 25 [author's translation]), while for Lasse H. Kjældgaard, Dinesen resists easy literary-historical classification because her stories "mix forms and elements from various periods" (2009a, 697 [author's translation]).

In this chapter, I reconsider Dinesen's untimeliness, situating her as a "time ecologist" (Matz 2018, 20) deeply concerned to "extend the temporal horizons of our gaze" (Nixon 2011, 62), cultivate a sense of "timefulness" (Bjornerud 2018), "defamiliarize human temporal constructions," and "acknowledge the coexistence of other equally real temporalities" (Huebener 2020, 65). According to Paul Ricoeur, "[a]ll fictional narratives are 'tales of time' inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time. However, only a few are 'tales about time' inasmuch as in them it is the very experience of time that is at stake in these structural transformations" (1985, 101). "Tales about time" obviously include canonical experimental texts by modernist writers such as Conrad, Proust, Woolf, and Joyce. In this chapter, I first analyze how another powerful "tale about time" – Dinesen's "The Deluge at Norderney" – weaves together disturbing counter-temporalities as it pushes back against linear time, straight time, and human-centered time. As I interpret the opening text in Dinesen's first published collection, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), my analytical focus moves from the tale's anachronic narrative structure to its use of mythic time, the queer life-stories told by and of the central characters, and finally to the deep-time irruption represented by the story's apocalyptic flood event. As a modernist narrative experiment, a chronopolitical queering of temporal possibilities, and an ecological disaster narrative embedding humans within more-than-human temporal environments, this untimely story combats temporal homogenization in multiple ways.

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up to the booth of a small Russian trader, a Jew who sold gold watches. All the sailors knew that his watches were made from bad metal, and would not go, still they bought them, and paraded them about" (*WT*, 93).

The chapter then segues into a time-ecocritical reading of Dinesen's probably best-known and most widely discussed late story, "Babette's Feast" (1950). While interpretations of "Babette's Feast" often center on the story's use of religious imagery, the story in my reading uses the materiality of food, cooking, and dining to challenge and transform our normal experience and understanding of time. In Dinesen's story, I argue, Babette's ornate dinner, which is repeatedly compared to magic, witchcraft, and alchemy, interrupts chronological flow and changes the quality of time. Countering *chronos* with *kairos*, it produces a special moment that can be understood as a spiritual epiphany, a utopian foreshadowing of collective joyfulness, and an eco-temporal expansion towards the life horizons of nonhuman material substances and living creatures.

2 Anachrony

The version of *Seven Gothic Tales* that was published by Harrison Smith and Robert Haas in the United States in April 1934 opened with "The Deluge at Norderney." In both the British edition, published by Putnam in September 1934, and Dinesen's Danish recomposition, *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger,* published by C. A. Reitzel in September 1935, "The Deluge," whose Danish title became "Syndfloden over Norderney," held the central fourth position.[3] To structure this crucial story, Dinesen chose a Chinese-box-like narrative structure reminiscent both of gothic narratives such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and of foundational texts in world literature including Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (ca. 1349–1353), Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1380–1400), and *One Thousand and One Nights* (ca. ninth century).

Norderney is a real north German island in the Frisian coastal lowlands. The events of the main narrative transpire over a single day and night in "the late summer of 1835" (*SGT*, 2), when a flood triggered by a tremendous 100-year-storm inundates the small titular fishing village, which has recently emerged as a fashionable tourist destination.[4] When night falls, four characters find themselves sequestered on a hayloft overnight, awaiting the resumption of rescue operations at dawn: the Roman Catholic Cardinal Hamilcar de Sehested, the

3 The first story to meet both British and Danish readers was "The Roads Round Pisa."

4 The specific flood is fictional but probably inspired by the *Große Halligflut* (Great Hallig Flood), a devastating storm surge that occurred on the North Sea coast on February 3–5, 1825, in which about 800 people were drowned.

middle-class adolescent Jonathan Mærsk, the aristocratic sixteen-year-old girl Calypso Platen Hallermund, and her godmother, the sixty-year-old spinster Malin Nat-og-Dag. Anticipating "a wait of six or seven hours" (*SGT*, 11), the "derelicts" (*SGT*, 12) are given "a couple of spare tallow candles" (*SGT*, 12), the burning of which measures the story's "pregnant hours" (*SGT*, 70). To shorten the wait, the Cardinal proposes that each character tell a story that expresses their identities, and he leaves it to Miss Malin, a well-known wit and hostess of aristocratic salons, to orchestrate the proceedings:

> It will be soon midnight. Let it be the hour of the falling of the mask. If it be not your mask, or mine, which is to fall, let it be the mask of fate and life. Death we may soon have to face, without any mask. In the meantime we have nothing to do but to remember what life be really like. Come, Madame, and my young brother and sister! As we shall not be able to sleep, and are still comfortably seated here, tell me who you are, and recount to me your stories without restraint. (*SGT*, 27)

A series of embedded narratives follow, punctuated by intermittent returns to the skeletal frame narrative in the hayloft and varying considerably in length, style, structure, and point of view. Miss Malin's initial life story is related by the heterodiegetic narrator, while Jonathan Mærsk narrates his own homodiegetic story at greater length, using the first person. Miss Malin then narrates the events that brought Calypso to Norderney under her own protection. The Cardinal Hamilcar is the subject of no less than three stories: one told at the very beginning by the general narrator, a more oblique pseudo-biblical narrative told by himself, entitled "The Wine of the Tetrarch," and a final brief confessional account told to Miss Malin that completely revises the first narrative and forces readers to modify their view of everything that has happened. In this shocking denouement, the Cardinal reveals that underneath his "blood-stained bandages" (*SGT*, 23) he is in fact Kasparson, the Cardinal's lower-class valet, a former dancer and actor of "bastard blood" (*SGT*, 73) who has killed his master, usurped his identity, and simultaneously bestowed immortality upon him by acting heroically in the flood rescue operations.

In the last line of the story, Miss Malin quotes directly from *Arabian Nights*: "'*A ce moment de sa narration,' she said, 'Scheherazade vit paraître le matin, et, discrète, se tut*'" (*SGT*, 79).[5] Like Scheherazade, Dinesen's characters live under sentence of death, and "The Deluge" combats the deadly ticking of the

5 "'At this moment in her story,' she said, 'Scheherazade saw the morning dawn and fell discreetly silent.'"

clock with the technique that Gérard Genette (1980, 35–47) calls "anachrony." As theorized by Genette, anachronies are temporal oddities or disruptions within the presentation of a narrative, which depart from linear logic. Through anachronic interruptions, Genette suggests, we discover "narrative's capacity for *temporal autonomy*" (1980, 85) – that is, an author or narrator's ability to play God by organizing and narrativizing events in divergence from the order in which they really occurred. The use of anachrony per se does not signify any radical break with tradition, for in fact it is "one of the traditional resources of literary narration" (1980, 36). As suggested by Genette's extensive use of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927), however, it was with the turn to modernism that "tampering with the expected sequence" (Woolf 1935, 122) became a prominent disorienting feature of literary narrative.[6]

"The Deluge" forces readers to register the distinction between story (what happens) and discourse (how what happens is organized) and reflect upon the human agency in shaping time.[7] Each inset narrative ruptures the linear flow of time, removing narratees and readers to other times and places. In the opening pages, the heterodiegetic narrator pursues a series of analeptic (backward-looking) movements, recalling the history of Norderney, providing a sketch of Cardinal Hamilcar's life, and delivering "a brief account of Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag" (*SGT*, 16). The narrator also uses the rarer device of prolepsis, when she foreshadows that the main characters were able to survive the night and tell their stories "until the first light of dawn" (*SGT*, 15), and that after the flooding event "the deluge […] [i]n the annals of the province […] was called the flood of the Cardinal" (*SGT*, 4). The latter anticipation is particularly significant, because it indirectly reveals the characters' destinies: If Kasparson's subterfuge remained undiscovered, we must assume that the characters all drown shortly after the end of the story.

Characteristically, Dinesen's many narrators rarely present events in accordance with the chronological "first narrative" (Genette 1980, 47), instead circling around key moments, stretching passages of time, and repeating some events while condensing and ignoring others. The embedded first- and third-person

6 As Stevenson writes, if "[m]odernist fiction rarely abandons story altogether, or smashes up the clock entirely," it "gives up or amends the kind of vision of life as a series of events and consequences which had conventionally structured the novel in the nineteenth century" (1998, 91).

7 Robert W. Langbaum aptly characterizes how Dinesen's narrative technique forces the reader to be simultaneously "reading backwards and forwards […] always […] weaving the pattern of the story. […] For the past appears not in sequence but through tales which advance the present situation, and we do not let go of one understood episode to move on to another but insert as it were the later episodes into the earlier in order to understand them" (1975, 24–25).

narratives told by Mærsk, Miss Malin, and the Cardinal/Kasparson develop more sustained anachronic divergences from linear storytelling. What Genette calls the "extent" and "reach" (1980, 47) of these anachronies vary considerably, covering periods of different length more or less far removed from the present of the first narrative. Thus, the narrative of Calypso is limited by the protagonist's youth (sixteen years) and by Miss Malin's decision to dwell extensively on a single fateful night in her goddaughter's life that only precedes the night in the hayloft by a few weeks or months. The approximately seventy-year-old Kasparson, by contrast, narrates his entire life in reverse chronological order, reaching beyond adult- and childhood to reveal the circumstances of his own conception:

> My mother was a true daughter of the people, an honest artisan's child, that lovely actress Johanna Handel-Schutz, who made all the classic ideals live upon the stage. She had a melancholy disposition nevertheless. Of my sixteen brothers and sisters, five have committed suicide. But if I tell you who was my father, that will be sure to interest you. When Johanna came to Paris, sixteen years old, to study art, she found favor in the eyes of a great lord.
>
> I am the son of that Duke of Orléans – who shortly after took up with the people in still another way – who insisted on being addressed as a *citoyen*, voted for the death of the King of France, and changed his name to that of Égalité. (*SGT*, 73)

Adding further complexity to this structure, some retrospective stories contain analepses-within-analepses or prolepses-within-analepses. The narrator's sketch of the Cardinal, for example, begins with his recent visit to Norderney and then retraces its steps to recount earlier details from his ecclesiastical career. Mærsk, by contrast, initiates his self-narration by leaping forward to its conclusion: "If you had happened to live in Copenhagen […] you would have heard of me, for there I was, at a time, much talked about. They even gave me a name. They called me Timon of Assens" (*SGT*, 28). Mærsk's narrative also contains several second-level analepses narrated by his "friend" and "clever boy" (*SGT*, 29) Rasmus Petersen, who repeatedly (and perhaps unreliably) recounts previous private meetings with Mærsk's assumed biological father.

Narrative time in "The Deluge" moves in multidirectional swirls, loops, and eddies, rather than in straight lines or arrows. Some analepses, such as Mærsk's and Calypso's, are external to the first narrative, reaching back to times before the main story's beginning to complete missing information about the characters' backgrounds. Kasparson's final confession, by contrast, delivers an

internal analepsis which recalls and completely reinterprets circumstances concerning the Cardinal's death, which have already been treated (albeit elliptically and misleadingly) by the narrative. Most puzzlingly, Kasparson's fable about St. Peter's encounter with Barabbas is carefully placed in time, beginning on "the first Wednesday after Easter" (*SGT*, 61) and retreating, through Barabbas' disjointed analepsis, to cover incidents in the days around the crucifixion of Christ. Both external and heterodiegetic, Kasparson's anachrony narrates events which not only far precede the beginning of the main story, but which also involve a separate storyline involving a completely different cast of characters. This story, indeed, bears no obvious temporal or causal relationship to the first narrative or any of the other interpolated tales.

3 Mythic Time

In addition to such anachronic tampering with story time, Dinesen also flouts linear storytelling when she invokes narrative modes based on mythic rather than sequential time. While linear time stretches unidirectionally from an irrevocable past to an unknown remote future, mythic time-consciousness deemphasizes continuous progression and causality to focus on the cyclical reiteration of timeless archetypes, in a movement that Mircea Eliade (1959) calls "eternal return." Under the "rule of mythic consciousness," Herbert Grabes writes, "the individual and time-bound appears as the repetition of timeless types of character and event. Individual life takes on the quality of a quotation, a ritual celebration of the already prescribed" (1996, 378). Key modernist works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) are beholden to "the pagan conception of time as moving in cycles" (Lawrence 2002, 96); they employ what T. S. Eliot (1975, 178) labels "the mythical method," or they seek what Joseph Frank calls "transformation of the historical imagination into myth – an imagination for which time does not exist" (1963, 60).

In "The Deluge," as Thomas Mann puts it in *The Magic Mountain* (1924), "the there repeats itself constantly in the here, the past in the present" (2018, 343). From the title's use of the biblical term "deluge" (*SGT*, 1) to Miss Malin's final reference to Scheherazade (*SGT*, 79), Dinesen's story borrows images from religious, mythological, and literary sources to create a sense of recursive rather than sequential temporality. Even when the plot of "The Deluge" moves forward in time, in other words, it also seems to move in reverse, curving back towards what has already occurred and will presumably keep occurring again and again. Among several characters whose names reveal their similarity to archetypal figures, Miss Malin takes her name from a French word for the Devil

("le malin"), and "Malin" is also the Swedish equivalent of the Danish "Malen," a shortened form of the biblical "Magdalene" (Brantly 2002, 17), which is also the name of Mærsk's perhaps adulterous mother. Based on a bizarre literal reading of a line from St. Matthew – "whoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (*SGT*, 18) – Miss Malin considers herself "the grand courtesan of her time, if not the great whore of the Revelation" (*SGT*, 21). Her counterpart, Cardinal Hamilcar, descends from seagoing people, like St. Peter, and in "his leisure hours he would go, after the example of St. Peter himself, a long way out on the sea with the fishermen in their boats, to watch their work" (*SGT*, 5) – a scriptural reference that is resumed and developed much later in Kasparson's veiled confession. Kasparson's fate is similarly wrapped up with events that took place thousands of years ago. While his murder of the Cardinal resembles an oedipal parricide, the mock-parable that Kasparson delivers in "The Wine of the Tetrarch" exploits biblical typology to associate his own situation with that of Barabbas, the robber and murderer who took the rightful place of Christ.[8]

Nothing in "The Deluge" is without precedence, and everything is tinged with an unmistakable sense of déjà vu. Throughout the story, characters' experiences in time seem to shift them out of time, as they find their lives merging with mythical moments of "ille tempore" ("that time") (Eliade 1963, 140). Preestablished patterns and categories prove inescapable for Mærsk, who stands to be knighted under the name "De Résurrection" (*SGT*, 33), and who construes his experiences in early nineteenth-century Denmark as a timeless drama of seduction and fall. Through the Mephistophelean temptation of his false "friend," Rasmus Petersen, Mærsk loses a childhood "idyll" of "nothing but innocence and pleasure" (*SGT*, 29). Even as he seeks an elusive father figure, like a modern-day Telemachus, he cycles through the developmental stages, from wasteful expenditure to suicidal depression, of his classical forebear, the misanthrope Timon of Athens, who is known from Plutarch and Shakespeare. Named after the seductive nymph in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Calypso is also by Miss Malin compared to a range of additional mythological females, including Judith (*SGT*, 46), Psyche (*SGT*, 49), and Ceres (*SGT*, 50). When she decides "to chop off her young breasts" (*SGT*, 46), she resolves to repeat, though without knowing it, the self-mutilation practiced by the ancient Amazons. "[I]magining herself to be a great divinity of the sea" (*SGT*, 10), however, Calypso experiences a moment of epiphanic self-recognition when she finds Dionysian alternatives

8 Donald W. Hannah argues, plausibly to my mind, that Kasparson has murdered the Cardinal to sabotage his master's vainglorious Christlike self-sacrifice and thus "save himself from the same fate as confronted Barabbas" (1971, 166).

to the austere reign of her guardian uncle, "an arbiter of taste" and "an Apollo himself" (*SGT*, 49), foreshadowed in a mythological painting:

> [O]n the wall was an enormous old painting which had grown dark with age, but in which the lighter parts, illuminated by her candle, sprang out. It represented a scene out of the life of the nymphs, fauns, and satyrs, with the centaurs, playing in groves and on the flowery plains. It had been brought, many years ago, from Italy by one of the old lords of the house, but it had been thought a very indecent picture even before the time of the present Count, and had been removed from the living-rooms. It was not a well-painted picture, but there were a lot of figures in it. In the foreground three young naked nymphs, silvery as white roses, were holding up branches of trees. (*SGT*, 47)

Calypso is able to transcend the enlightenment view of myth as quaint or dangerous superstition, an illusion to be superseded by reason, when she finds that "[t]he god Dionysus himself [...] looked her, laughingly, straight into the eyes" (*SGT*, 48). Instead, she discovers mythic archetypes as a useful, empowering, even redemptive resource, assisting her active search for meaning and providing an alternative and more life-affirming way of knowing the world: "Had she been afraid of [her uncle] – she, who was the sister of the nymphs and had centaurs for playmates? She was a hundred times as strong as he" (*SGT*, 49).

4 Queer Time

If "The Deluge" experiments modernistically with forms of storytelling developed to "free [...] narrative from bondage to the tick-tack of the clock or the mechanical succession of the calendar" (Stevenson 1998, 95), it also privileges characters who move nonlinearly, strangely, or *queerly* through life. Modern time can be understood as straight time: the time of professional success, historical progress, economic growth, heterosexual reproduction, and patriarchal succession, centered around the pillars of career, marriage, family, property, and nation. Elizabeth Freeman implicates straight time in the orchestrations of "chrononormativity," as "schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate [...] forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege" (2010, 3). Straight time approaches time as an orderly, horizontal sequence of milestones and goals, "a carefully syncopated tempo" (Freeman 2010, XII) of work, leisure, consumption, domesticity, reproduction, and retirement that comes to define the well-lived life. Queer temporalities, by

contrast, offer "points of resistance to this temporal order" and "ways of living aslant to lockstep forms of object choice, coupledom, family, marriage, sociability, and self-preservation" (Freeman 2010, 171). Queer temporalities resist normative institution of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction, and they enable participants to imagine their lives outside the exemplary matrices – "birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam 2005, 2) – of a chrononormative life.[9] Queer time, then, is not exclusively about sexual identity, but about living a life in excess of the logics of labor, production, growth, and progress, while seeking creative approaches to organizing and constructing identity and community.

Early in "The Deluge," Miss Malin takes leave of her female servant, whom she presumes, without citing evidence, to be with child:

> At the last moment Miss Malin's maid cried out that she would not leave her mistress, and the men were already lifting her from the bottom of the boat when her mistress cast upon her the sort of glance by which you judge whether a person is likely to make a satisfactory fourth at a game of cards. "My pussy," she said, "nobody wants you here. Besides, you are probably in the family way, and so must hold onto futurity, my poor girl. Good night, Mariechen." (*SGT*, 12)

With the dismissal of "little Marie," Miss Malin (and with her Dinesen) saves the life of but also expels from the narrative the one character who, if her mistress can be trusted, is likely to organize her life around normative temporalities and live a life governed by her culture's overriding concern with "reproductive futurity" (Edelman 2004, 2). The remaining "motley" (Aiken 1990, 91) quartet (or quintet if we count the Cardinal's ghostly presence) of characters all prefer to follow the beat of alternate temporal cadences or simply, as Kasparson puts it, "to dwell in the past" (*SGT*, 72). What especially bonds the members of this odd pseudo-family, of whom two are orphans and one or possibly two are "bastard[s]" (*SGT*, 27, 73, 75, 78), is their temporal eccentricity, manifested in their inability, failure, or unwillingness to progress chrononormatively along the sanctioned temporal arcs of historical modernization and psychosexual maturation.

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9 According to Halberstam, queer time-orientations surfaced most powerfully in the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, among subcultural communities whose participants reject the emphasis on maturation and longevity in favor of a "stretched-out-adolescence" challenging "the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood" (2005, 153).

The narrator's short biography of Cardinal Hamilcar, for example, introduces him with tropes of aristocratic backwardness, regression, and temporal nonconformity, as a "strange flower" of an "old noble race" whose members, with "no mobility of spirit to change what they had once got into their heads," "had stuck [...] to the ancient Roman Catholic faith of the land" (*SGT*, 5). Inclined to untimely beliefs and atavistic practices even as "a young boy" (*SGT*, 6), the Cardinal is imagined both as a belated saint or martyr – "wherever he went, it was believed of him that he could work miracles" (*SGT*, 7) – and a counter-reformist who has the power to turn back the clock of historical development: "There existed a tale of how the Pope himself, after the young priest had been presented to him, had seen in a dream how this youth had been set apart by providence to bring back the great Protestant countries under the Holy See" (*SGT*, 6).

"[C]lose to sixty," a "maiden lady" and "the last of an illustrious race" (*SGT*, 9), the aptly named Malin Nat-og-Dag ("Night-and-Day") has been vitalized by menopause, the "transfer from the active service of life" that "changes all women at fifty" (*SGT*, 20). In her present "madness" (*SGT*, 21), she flouts all normative standards of appropriate ageing:

> [A]t the time when other women resort to rouge and belladonna, her lenience with human weakness produced in her a heightened color and sweet brilliancy of eye. She was nearer to being a pretty woman than she had ever been before. Like a witch she had always looked, but in her second childhood her appearance had more of the wicked fairy of the children's tales than of the Medusa, the revenging angel with her flaming sword who had held her own against Prince Ernest. She had preserved her elfin leanness and lightness, and as for her skill as a dancer, she might still be the belle of any great ball. (*SGT*, 22)

"Fanatical" (*SGT*, 18) and "[f]antastical" (*SGT*, 17), Miss Malin's life course diverged from the straight path when, at the age of 27, she saw her fiancé killed in the Battle of Jena. Her biological clock has ceased ticking, but her status as an "old maid" (*SGT*, 19), has released a surfeit of energy, making her more committed to the ways of "the vanishing and decaying aristocracy" (*SGT,* 9), more engrossed in the unfashionable pieties preached by "the sect of the Hernhuten" (*SGT*, 17), and more youthfully obsessed with sexual transgression.

The sole "bourgeois" (*SGT*, 14) among the "castaways" (*SGT*, 10), Mærsk grows up amidst the national-romantic "idyll" of "a small seaport town on the island of Funen," as "the son of very respectable people, the skipper Clement Mærsk

and his wife, Magdalena, who owned a pretty house with a garden in the town" (*SGT*, 28). He is poised to follow in his father's footsteps, inherit his captainship in the merchant marine, marry a suitable woman, father a family of his own, and grow into a responsible citizen of the Danish nation and his native provincial town of Assens: "It seemed to me that it was [...] my task to look after the world" (*SGT*, 28). Through the mediation of Rasmus Petersen, however, Mærsk ends up in Copenhagen and embarks on a different career, under the influence of Baron Joachim von Gersdorff, who (according to Petersen) purports to be his biological father:

> Have you heard of this man before, or do you know him? He came of a Russian family, and his wealth was such as is otherwise unknown in Denmark. He was a poet and musician, a diplomat, a seducer of women, even then, when he was an old man. Still, all this was not what caught your mind about the man. But it was this: that he was a man of fashion. Or you might say that fashion itself was only, in Copenhagen at least, the footman of Baron Gersdorff. Whatever he did at once became the thing for everybody to do. Oh, I do not want to describe the man. You will know, I think, what a man of fashion means. I have learned it. Such a man was he. (*SGT*, 30)

In contrast to small-town "respectable" (*SGT*, 28) Skipper Mærsk, the aristocratic, metropolitan, and cosmopolitan "man of fashion" spurns the normative expectation that men spend their time pursuing productive careers, building stable family lives, and contributing to the nation's economic progress. Aging but lustful, the "man of fashion" prefers a protracted adolescence, defined by alternating scientific, aesthetic, and erotic enthusiasms, to an orderly progress through modern life's predetermined stages. With a German name, Russian family connections, and a passion for what Charles Baudelaire called "the fleeting, the ephemeral and the contingent" (qtd. Halberstam 2005, 2), he lives less to build a legacy of lasting value than to indulge his own present curiosities, draw the gaze of others with striking theatrical performances, and even "seduce [...] pretty boys" (*SGT*, 34). Although he believes that he "had been well brought up [...] by the skipper and his wife" (*SGT*, 34), Mærsk fears that he has inescapably become a "man of fashion" himself: "Once you have eaten of the tree of knowledge, and have seen yourself, gardens close themselves to you. You become a person of fashion, even as did Adam and Eve when they began to occupy themselves with their appearance" (*SGT*, 35).

Flights from chrononormativity feature particularly prominently in Miss Malin's story of Calypso, whose character has been shaped by a childhood

spent at Angelshorn, the estate of her uncle, the poet Count August von Platen Hallermund, whom Miss Malin dubs "Seraphina":

> The Count Seraphina had a great predilection for the Middle Ages. His huge castle of Angelshorn dated from that time, and he had taken pains to bring it back inside, as outside, to the times of the Crusades. It was not constructed, no more than was the Count himself, to spread itself much on earth, but the tall towers aspired to heaven, with a flight of jackdaws like a thin smoke around their heads, and the deep vaults seemed to dig themselves down toward the pit. The daylight was let in, between fathom-thick walls, through old stained glass, like cinnamon and blood of oxen, along the sides of the rooms, where, upon faded tapestries, unicorns were killed and the Magians and their retinue carried gold and myrrh to Bethlehem. Here the Count listened to, and himself played, the *viol de gamba* and the *viol d'amore,* and practiced archery. He never read a printed book, but had his authors of the day copied by hand in ultramarine and scarlet letters.
>
> He liked to imagine himself the abbot of a highly exclusive monastery, whereto only fair young monks of brilliant talent and soft manners were admitted. He and his circle of young friends sat down to dinner in old sculptured oak pews, and wore cowls of purple silk. His house was an abbey upon the northern soil, a Mount Athos to which no hen or cow is allowed to come, not even the wild bees, on account of their queen bee. Aye, the Count was more zealous than the monks of Athos, for when he and his seraglio of lovely youths sometimes drank wine out of a skull, to keep present the thought of death and eternity, he took care that it should not be the skull of a lady. (*SGT*, 45–55)

Karl August Georg Maximilian Graf von Platen-Hallermünde (1796–1835) was a German poet and dramatist who was the victim of a vicious homophobic attack by Heinrich Heine. If Miss Malin's account of von Platen's reign at Angelshorn satirizes the nostalgic and anachronistic excesses of nineteenth-century medievalism and gothic revivalism, it also points towards possible queer forms of engagement with the past. Behind Miss Malin's decadent misogynist aesthete, we can glimpse a counter-temporal extremist, who dreams of living in a time-out-of-time, a world with no development, no progress, no growth, and no procreation. As architect of Angelshorn, von Platen wages defiant war on all forms of sociohistorical and technological innovation, while also seeking to erase any sign of heterosexual "repro-time" (Halberstam 2005, 5) among humans and even in the nonhuman realm: "To the mind of Count August the existence of

the brute creation was an enigma and a tragedy, and there were no animals at Angelshorn" (*SGT*, 47). A connoisseur of all things medieval, "Seraphina" does not so much study the Middle Ages with measured scholarly distance as he *lives* the Middle Ages with mystical abandon. By playing medieval instruments, practicing archery, reading hand-copied manuscripts, and "lecturing upon the doctrines and mysteries of ancient and medieval scholastics" (*SGT*, 45), von Platen collapses temporal boundaries and constructs "an expanded present, a temporally multiple now" (Dinshaw 1999, 112). Letting "the times of the Crusades" (*SGT*, 44) break in upon the present, he rebels against the notion that the past can be safely located "before" our present moment, and that the current "now" flows in linear manner from a "then" that no longer exists.

Like the Prioress Cathinka in "The Monkey," Miss Malin derives perverse satisfaction from matchmaking, and two-thirds through the story, she prevails upon the ersatz Cardinal to marry the "youth" and "maiden" (*SGT*, 25) whose stories have just been told:

> "Kneel down, my children," said the old priest.
>
> He stood up, his huge and heavy figure looming over them in the large, half-dark room. At this moment, as the wind had risen a little, they heard the sighing of the waters all around and beneath them.
>
> "I cannot," said the Cardinal very slowly, "here tonight call upon the magnificence of the cathedral, or the presence of a congregation, to sanction this covenant. I have no time to teach or prepare you. You must, therefore, accept my profession to you solely on my authority. You two, I have seen," he went on after a pause, "have had your faith in the cohesion and justice of life shaken. Have faith in me now; I will help you. Have you a ring?"
>
> The young people had no ring, and were much put out by the lack of it, but Miss Malin took off a very magnificent diamond, which she handed to the old man.
>
> "Jonathan," said he, "place this ring on this girl's finger." The boy did so, and the Cardinal placed a hand on the head of each of the kneeling people. "Jonathan," said the Cardinal again, "do you now believe that you are married?"
>
> "Yes," said Jonathan.
>
> "And you, Calypso?" the Cardinal asked the girl. "Yes," she whispered.
>
> "And that you will," said the Cardinal, "from now, love and honor each other until the end of your lives, and even in death and eternity?"
>
> "Yes," they said.
>
> "Then," said the Cardinal, "you are married." (*SGT*, 53)

Among life's signposts of chrononormative success, straight time assigns particular significance to marriage, and the marriage plot drives innumerable novels especially from the nineteenth century. The wedding scene of "The Deluge" might seem to offer a reassuringly familiar climax to the story's strange proceedings, by allowing the two "derelict" (*SGT*, 15) adolescents a reentry into straight time. As all four characters await physical rescue, in other words, marriage could symbolize a release from orphanhood and illegitimacy, opening a possible path towards a respectable future.

Until the wedding, however neither partner has shown concern for each other or displayed any interest in heterosexual relationships. In orchestrating Mærsk and Calypso's union, the "off her head" (*SGT*, 16) Miss Malin seems motivated much less by godmotherly concern than by her obsession with events of her own youth, especially the untimely death of her "chaste young lover" (*SGT*, 21), and by her egomaniacal wish to make people act like marionettes in a play scripted by herself. Most revealingly, of course, the person solemnizing the spurious ceremony, with an aim to reassert "the cohesion [...] of life" (*SGT*, 53), is no ordained "old priest" (*SGT*, 53) but a dissipated teenage "courtesan" (*SGT*, 72), actor, dancer, singer, valet, possible syphilitic, and (as it later appears) murderer. If it seems hopefully reassuring that opposite-sex young people marry, wishing to find new stability and direction in life, there is nothing safe, stable, or predictable about the circumstances of Mærsk and Calypso's wedding or the events and characters who bring it about. As his confession reveals, Kasparson is himself a "bastard" (*SGT*, 73), and his theatrical impersonation of the Cardinal adds yet another episode to an errant life whose course has lacked any temporal cohesion. Rather than re-anchoring characters' chaotic life trajectories in solid matrimonial ground, Kasparson's twisted wedding scene enacts a "grotesque spectacle" (Heede 2001, 59 [author's translation]) that lets readers understand marriage, the cornerstone of normalcy, as itself fundamentally aberrant.

5 Disaster Time

As part of its time-defamiliarizing strategy, "The Deluge" also dramatizes a clash of human and nonhuman timescales, letting human-centered "shallow" time be interrupted, dwarfed, or submerged by planetary "deep time" (Happel 1996). Time markers in the beginning of the story – first "[d]uring the first quarter of the last century" (*SGT*, 1), then "[i]n the late summer of 1835" (*SGT*, 2) and finally "late on Thursday afternoon" (*SGT*, 9) – situate readers ever more precisely on the familiar timescale of the Gregorian calendar. Abundant references to real-life historical events like the 1677 Battle of Køge (*SGT*, 18) and the 1806 Battle of

Jena (*SGT*, 20), important figures like Heinrich Heine (*SGT,* 2), Hans Christian Andersen (*SGT,* 41), and Ludwig van Beethoven (*SGT,* 57), and cultural movements like romanticism (*SGT,* 3), pietism (*SGT,* 23), and medievalism (*SGT,* 55) add further to the story's historicity, by locating the narrative in a recognizable place and time. In the story's historical period, almost five decades after the French Revolution, the once-mighty European aristocracy has definitively ceded power to the ascendant bourgeoisie. In one interlude between narratives, the Cardinal/Kasparson and Miss Malin find common ground in their disdain for the French King Louis Philippe I of France (1830–1848), whose constitutional reign for them betrays the "charlatanry" and "divine swank" (*SGT*, 59) of legitimate kingship:

> King Louis Philippe [...] has all the qualities of a good bourgeois, and none of the vices of a *Grand Seigneur*. He claims no rank except that of the first citizen of his kingdom, and no privileges except on account of his loyalty to the bourgeois code of morals. [...] [H]e claims no divine privileges except by virtue of his virtues. (*SGT,* 59)

Dinesen's writing about the Frisian island resort of Norderney, furthermore, evokes the historically specific phenomenon that Alain Corbin (1995) calls "the discovery of the seaside." During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, new medical, moral, religious and aesthetic discourses combined to reform the image of the coast and make sea bathing a health-giving and fashionable activity. In the opening lines "of The Deluge," Dinesen highlights the novelty of this vogue for beaches, oceans, and coastal spa resorts:

> During the first quarter of the last century, seaside resorts became the fashion, even in those countries of Northern Europe within the minds of whose people the sea had hitherto held the rôle of the devil, the cold and voracious hereditary foe of humanity. The romantic spirit of the age, which delighted in ruins, ghosts, and lunatics, and counted a stormy night on the heath and a deep conflict of the passions a finer treat for the connoisseur than the ease of the salon and the harmony of a philosophic system, reconciled even the most refined individuals to the eternal wildness of the coast scenery and of the open seas. Ladies and gentlemen of fashion abandoned the shade of their parks to come and walk upon the bleak shores and watch the untameable waves. (*SGT*, 1)

At Norderney, postrevolutionary subjectivities, sensibilities, and sociabilities are worked out and negotiated as "young wives walked, their cashmeres

on their arms, to a lonely hollow in the downs, still sun-baked from the long summer day, [...] to gaze straight up at the full moon, high in the pale summer sky." New associations are formed, as "[l]adies with marriageable daughters [...] watched fruitful courtships ripen on the sunny beach" while "[y]oung dandies managed their mounts on the long sands in front of clear eyes" and "[o]ld gentlemen dug themselves down into political and dynastic discussions in the club" (*SGT*, 2). Recoded as a site of leisure and consumption, rather than labor and production, the seafront provides a stage of theatrical display, a scene of sexual dalliance, a resource of wholesome recovery, and a chance to "become one with nature" (*SGT*, 2). Stripped of its fearfulness, the romantic ocean appears less "a terrible and faithless grey monster" than "some kind *maître de plaisir*" (*SGT*, 1).

"The Deluge," however, opens by imagining a shocking moment when, to borrow James Lovelock's (2006) metaphor, Gaia awakens and Earth's changeability reveals itself in a frightening way:

> In the late summer of 1835 a terrible disaster took place at the bath of Norderney. After a three days' storm from the southwest, the wind sprang around to the north. This is a thing that happens only once in a hundred years. The tremendous mass of water driven up by the storm was turned and pressed down in the corner, upon the Westerlands. The sea broke the dikes in two places and washed through them. Cattle and sheep were drowned by the hundred. Farmhouses and barns came down like card castles before the advancing waters, and many human lives were lost even as far as Wilsum and Wredon.
>
> It began with an evening of more than ordinarily heavenly calm, but of stifling air and a strange, luminous, sulphurous dimness. There was no distinguishable line of division between the sky and the sea. The sun went down in a confusion of light, itself a dull red like the target upon the promenade. The waves seemed of a curious substance, like jellyfish washing up on the shore. It was a highly inspiring evening; many things happened at Norderney. That night the people who were not kept awake by the beating of their own hearts woke up, terrified, by a new, swiftly approaching roar. Could their sea sing now in this voice?
>
> In the morning the world was changed, but none knew into what. In this noise nobody could talk, or even think. What the sea was doing you could not tell. Your clothes were already whipped off you before you got in sight of the sand, and the salt foam whirled sky high. Long and towering waves came in behind it, each more powerful than the last. The air was cold and bitter. (*SGT*, 2–3)

According to Robert Frodeman, "[e]arthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and droughts are places where deep time erupts into more familiar temporal rhythms" (2003, 125). Floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other extraordinary "points where human and geologic time intersect" (Frodeman 2003, 214) open a window onto vast geomorphic processes, where there is, as the Scottish geologist James Hutton put it in 1788, "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" (qtd. Ginn et al. 2018, 215). The "flood of the Cardinal" (*SGT*, 4) lets characters glimpse a temporal horizon on which deep time events eclipse the familiar human preoccupation with fashions, seasons, schedules, clocks, and calendars. The disaster discloses *longue durée* dynamisms that govern life on earth, demonstrating how much that we take for permanent – the shape of mountains, the course of rivers and oceans, the composition of the atmosphere – exist only as temporary iterations of a constantly changing terrain. Nature is experienced not a stable, predictable, and welcoming backdrop for human activities, but as something that is inhuman, indifferent, and dynamically and dangerously active:

> A dead darkness had all day been lying upon the wide landscape. As far as the eye reached, what had been an undulating range of land was now nothing but an immense gray plane, alarmingly alive. Nothing seemed to be firm. To the crushed hearts of the men rowing over their cornfields and meadows, this movableness of what had been their foundation and foothold was unbearable, and they turned their eyes away from it. The clouds hung low upon the water. The small boat, moving heavily, seemed to be advancing upon a narrow horizontal course, squeezed in between the mass of weight below and what appeared to be a mass of weight above it. (*SGT*, 9)

The natural world has its own temporal rhythms and cycles, which care little for the ways in which humans organize their time. An island in the East Frisian tide country, Norderney is a place whose character changes with the regular rise and fall of sea level caused by the Earth's rotation in the gravitational fields of the moon and sun. The sea level changes in a rhythmic cycle, and each time the tide changes, and ebb follows flood, the landscape transforms into a "waterscape" (Ritson 2018, 5). North Sea storm surges typically occur in the winter, but the temporally anomalous "flood of the Cardinal" erupts out of season, in "late summer" (*SGT*, 2), overruling both Gregorian calendar time and the rhythms of seasonal activities: "By coming on in summer time, the deluge assumed the character of a terrible, grim joke" (*SGT*, 4). Dinesen's eco-disaster narrative draws attention to an all-but-invisible background temporality, as

characters find themselves stunned, fascinated, and ejected from the course of normal time. The North Sea exerts its superior agency when it "washes" over the habitations of "terror-stricken people" (*SGT*, 4). Human bodies become things among other things, borne along and hurtled about like animals, ships, furniture, and household "bits of wreckage" (*SGT*, 11):

> The farmers were awakened by the plaintive bellowing of their animals. Swinging their feet out of bed, in the dark, they put them down in a foot of cold, muddy water. It was salt. It was the same water which rolled, out to the west, a hundred fathoms deep, and washed the white feet of the cliffs of Dover. The North Sea had come to visit them. It was rising quickly. In an hour the movables of the low farmhouses were floating on the water, knocking against the walls. As the dawn came, the people, from the roofs of their houses, watched the land around them change. Trees and bushes were growing in a moving gray ground, and thick yellow foam was washing over the stretches of their ripening corn, the harvest of which they had been discussing on the last days before the storm. (*SGT*, 4)

Catapulted into geological time, Dinesen's characters experience aqueous flux as the planet's normal state, while the dikes, harbors, channels and watercourses designed to contain the water during periods of calm appear mere blips on the temporal screen.

As the title's reference to the biblical deluge suggest, most characters in "The Deluge" perceive the flood as a unique, incomprehensible event, a break with all temporal reason and regularity. Dinesen's narrator, however, points out that such a flood, although "a thing that happens only once in a hundred years" (*SGT*, 2), will recur with regular intervals:

> There had been such floods before. A few old people could still recount to the young how they had once been snatched from their beds and hurled upon rafts by their pale mothers, and had seen, from the collapsing houses, the cattle struggle and go under in dark water; and how breadwinners had perished and households had been ruined and lost. The sea did such things from time to time. (*SGT*, 4)

"The Deluge," I suggest, fulfils a function like these "few old people," continually reminding readers of other temporal perspectives, alternative clocks, different modes of keeping time. According to Michel Serres, moderns have become "short term" people, who no longer "live out in the weather" and have "unlearned how to think in accordance with its rhythms and its scope" (1992,

29). Playing on the double meaning of the French word *temps* (both "time" and "weather"), Serres posits not only "a material, technological, and industrial pollution, which exposes weather to conceivable risks," but also a "second pollution, invisible, which puts time in danger, a cultural pollution that we have inflicted on long-term thoughts, those guardians of the Earth, of humanity, and of things themselves" (1992, 31). Fighting Serres' "second pollution," Dinesen's story about a freak weather event explores crooked, queer, and nonhuman counter-temporalities that push back against modernity's dream of one uniform, hegemonic, human-controlled world time. As part of her time ecology, Dinesen exhorts her readers to look beyond linear, straight, and anthropocentrically foreshortened progress narratives to reacquaint ourselves with the multiple, irregular, and differently scaled periodicities and rhythmicities of humans and the Earth.

6 Food and Time

"Write about food," advised Geoffrey Gorer when Dinesen, following a 1949 trip to Venice, inquired about topics that would help her enter the lucrative business of American mass-market magazine publication: "Americans are obsessed with food" (qtd. Thurman 1982, 329).[10] At the time, Denmark was slowly emerging from the World War II era of food shortage and rationing, while the severely undernourished Dinesen suffered from an eating disorder ambiguously related to her 1915 syphilis diagnosis and subsequent treatment with mercury (Weisman 1995). Write about food Dinesen did in the story "Babette's Feast," which is "quite likely [her] best-known tale" (Brantly 2017, 2), but she also concerned herself with time. Written to be "played on a lighter instrument" (Dinesen, qtd. Brantly 2017, 1) and rejected by both *Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*, "Babette's Feast" first appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal* in June 1950 and later as the second story in *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1958), the final collection to appear during Dinesen's lifetime. Many years later, it served as the basis

10 A culinary metaphor was used to characterize Dinesen's writing already by Dorothy Canfield Fisher in the original introduction to the American *Seven Gothic Tales*: "The person who has set his teeth into a kind of fruit new to him, is usually as eager as he is unable to tell you how it tastes. It is not enough for him to be munching away on it with relish. No, he must twist his tongue trying to get its strange new flavor into words, which never yet had any power to capture colors or tastes. 'It's not like a peach,' you hear him say, biting out another mouthful from the oddly colored and oddly shaped thing, and chewing thoughtfully, 'nor yet like a pear. Perhaps like a dead-ripe pineapple. Yet only if it had always been watered with fine old wine. Grown out of doors in Siberia, too, for all it has that southern tang. Nothing hothouse about it'" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 76–77).

of Gabriel Axel's 1987 film adaptation, which became the first Danish film to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and helped spawn the modern food film genre.

"Babette's Feast" foregrounds its temporal preoccupation through references to specific historical dates, events, phenomena, and figures, and with a tightly organized chronological structure. The first sentences, uttered by an anonymous extradiegetic narrator, establish distance between the time of enunciation (the temporal situation of the narrator) and the enunciated time (the time recounted as the lives of the characters), which are divided by "sixty-five years" (*AD*, 21). Although the precise date is never made explicit, we gather from temporal clues that the narrator narrates in 1948, and that the main story transpires over some months in 1883. At this time, Martine and Philippa, celibate, unmarried, cohabiting middle-aged sisters in the small North Norwegian coastal town of Berlevaag, are preparing to celebrate the centennial of their dead father, the charismatic "Dean" (*AD*, 21) who founded and led the isolated evangelical Protestant community to which they belong. Narrative analepses inform us that both sisters enjoyed youthful abortive romances with worldly outsiders. "In the year of 1854, when Martine was eighteen and Philippa seventeen" (*AD*, 23), Martine was unsuccessfully courted by a young officer, Lorens Loewenhielm, who had been sent to Berlevaag to atone for a dissolute city life. "A year later" (*AD*, 25), in 1855, the artistically gifted Philippa was kissed by, but then rejected, her music teacher, the French opera singer, Achille Papin.[11] Moving "back in time" (*AD*, 22), Dinesen also interweaves her fictional characters' lives with the real-life events of the Paris Commune, when a working-class government seized power over Paris for little more than two months (March 18 to May 28, 1871). French communards established progressive and secularist policies including the separation of church and state, self-policing, the remission of rent, the abolition of child labor, and the right of employees to take over an enterprise deserted by its owner. The national French army defeated the Commune at the end of May during *la semaine sanglante* ("the blood-soaked week") beginning on May 21, killing or executing between 10,000 and 15,000 communards. Immediately following the suppression, "on a rainy June night of 1871" (*AD*, 29), Martine and Philippa receive a letter from Papin, besieging them to help "save the life of a Frenchwoman":

> *The bearer of this letter, Madame Babette Hersant, like my beautiful Empress herself, has had to flee from Paris. Civil war has raged in our streets. French*

11 Ironically, it is less than certain whether the histrionic Papin, whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, kisses Philippa because he has designs on her or is merely caught up in his operatic role as Mozart's Don Giovanni.

> *hands have shed French blood. The noble Communards, standing up for the Rights of Man, have been crushed and annihilated. Madame Hersant's husband and son, both eminent ladies' hairdressers, have been shot. She herself was arrested as a Pétroleuse – (which word is used here for women who set fire to houses with petroleum)– and has narrowly escaped the bloodstained hands of General Galliffet. She has lost all she possessed and dares not remain in France.* (*AD, 29*)

Soon Babette arrives at Berlevaag, "haggard and wild-eyed like a hunted animal" (*AD*, 31). Informed by Papin that "Babette can cook" (*AD*, 30), the kind and pious sisters employ her as a "French maid-of-all-work" (*AD*, 21) and in this position she works for a seemingly uneventful "twelve years" (*AD*, 31), until the night of the titular feast.[12]

If "Babette's Feast" follows a carefully and in many ways conventionally organized timeline, however, it also takes considerable anachronistic liberties while building towards a climax on the Dean's centennial. When she wins 10,000 francs on a lottery ticket, Babette proposes to prepare "a real French dinner" (*AD*, 37) in celebration of the Dean's birthday. Suspicious at first, Martine and Philippa reluctantly accept, hoping that the celebration will help subdue the "discord and dissension" (*AD*, 34) that has been plaguing the aging congregation. The feast involves eleven local diners as well as Martine's former admirer, now General Loewenhielm, a *bon vivant* who has spent time in Paris and acquired a familiarity with haute cuisine, and who is now briefly revisiting Berlevaag. During the culminating feast, the epicurean Loewenhielm experiences a moment of déjà vu that makes him realize, though he never reveals, who Babette truly is:

> General Loewenhielm stopped eating and sat immovable. Once more he was carried back to that dinner in Paris of which he had thought in the sledge. An incredibly recherché and palatable dish had been served there; he had asked its name from his fellow diner, Colonel Galliffet, and the Colonel had smilingly told him that it was named "Cailles en Sarcophage." He had further told him that the dish had been invented by the chef of the very café in which they were dining, a person known all over Paris

12 It is worth noting that in "Babettes Gæstebud," fourteen rather than twelve years have passed since Babette's arrival in the sisters' house (*SA*, 34, 37, 38, 40). This moves the time of enunciation forward to 1950 and relocates the dinner in 1885, the year of Dinesen's own birth.

> as the greatest culinary genius of the age, and – most surprisingly – a woman! "And indeed," said Colonel Galliffet, "this woman is now turning a dinner at the Café Anglais into a kind of love affair – into a love affair of the noble and romantic category in which one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite or satiety! I have, before now, fought a duel for the sake of a fair lady. For no woman in all Paris, my young friend, would I more willingly shed my blood!" General Loewenhielm turned to his neighbor on the left and said to him: "But this is Cailles en Sarcophage!" (*AD*, 50–51)

Gaston Galliffet (1830–1909) was a French officer who took part in the repression of the 1871 rebellion and was known as the *le fusilleur de la Commune* ("the Commune's executioner"). Later, Babette confirms Loewenhielm's surmise that she "was once cook at the Café Anglais" (*AD*, 56), an actual elegant Paris restaurant located at the corner of Boulevard des Italiens and Rue de Marivaux, which operated from 1802 to 1913. Yet in a review of Gabriel Axel's 1987 film, Robert Courtine (1988), culinary critic of *Le Monde*, labels the feast's main course, *cailles en sarcophage* ("quails in coffins"), a figment of the author's imagination and a gastronomic absurdity, since quail stuffed with foie gras and truffles and baked in a pastry shell would be severely overcooked. Courtine instead cites a later recipe, *ortolans en sacophage* ("ortolans in coffins") from Ali Bab's *Gastonomique practique* (1907). But the greatest breach of historical veracity, Courtine objects, is to make Babette, played in the film by Stéphane Audran, a celebrity chef at a Parisian gourmet restaurant. In the male-dominated world of nineteenth-century French gastronomy, he argues, no woman could possibly have risen to hold such a position.

7 *Chronos*

As Susan Brantly (2017) observes, critics of "Babette's Feast" typically base their analyses on the multiple interwoven contrasts and oppositions – between North and South, Norway and France, Protestantism and Catholicism, Apollo and Dionysus, masculinity and femininity, the ethical and the aesthetic life, asceticism and sensuousness, denial and affirmation, etc. – that appear to structure the narrative. My interpretation of the story, in turn, centers on the story's juxtaposition of divergent temporal modes and possibilities.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* (χρόνος) and *kairos* (καιρός). Often personified as an elderly bearded man ("Father Time"), *chronos*

refers to chronological or sequential time as set to the abstract metronomic beat of clocks, schedules, timetables, and calendars. To think in terms of *chronos* is to approach time as quantifiable, numerable, and measurable material, as a linear, nonrecurring succession of moments moving inexorably out of the determinate past toward the determined future, as a finite number of seconds, hours, days, weeks, months, and years, or a scarce resource that can be spent wisely or unwisely. While nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial capitalism organized work and life around strict "time-discipline" (Thompson 1967), modernity's chronological regime is deeply rooted in pre- and early-modern Europe. The Bible posits a unique beginning to time, and Christian timekeeping emphasizes a linear sequence of events moving from creation through fall to Exodus and exile, followed by crucifixion and resurrection, and finally culminating in apocalyptic redemption. The Protestant Reformation revitalized early Christians' belief that they lived at the end of time as described in the Book of Revelation, and Puritans greatly diminished the number and significance of recurring holidays and festivals capable of warping the ordinary passing of time. Though *chronos* is often associated with industrial culture and developments like the introduction of Frederick Winslow Taylor's principles of scientific time management, Max Weber holds that Protestant religious communities had an intense relationship to chronological time long before the invention of such things as train tables and assembly lines. Thus, Weber observes that Protestants pioneered an economic, utilitarian, disenchanted approach to time, encouraging a regular, predictable order to life's moments while condemning "waste of time [as] the first and in principle the deadliest of sins" (1950, 157). With its constant admonition to plan time, save time, and finally, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, accept that "time is money" (qtd. Weber 1950, 48), Protestant culture sacralized forms of disciplined conduct that are reflected in the unwavering beat of the mechanical clock and the methodical routine of the daily schedule.

By setting her story in a pietistic "small Norwegian town," Dinesen evokes not only a particular landscape, with a "fjord" and "tall mountains" (*AD*, 21), but also a specific "timescape," which Adam defines as a "cluster of temporal features" (2004, 143). Celibate and childless, dressed "demurely in gray or black" and addressing "one another Brother and Sister," the members of Berlevaag's "pious ecclesiastic party or sect" (*AD*, 21) lead lives strongly reminiscent of medieval monasticism. The "Dean and [...] prophet" who founded the congregation eclipsed any feminine principle (strikingly, his wife is nowhere mentioned in the story), and "fathered" the community's temporal universe, when he named his daughters after two sixteenth-century male religious reformers, "Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melancthon" (*AD*, 21).

Working in the manner of the Benedictine monks and the Protestant church fathers, the "long [...] dead" (*AD*, 21) Dean forged a powerful "Puritan" (*AD*, 22) ethos of self-restraint, organization, punctuality, and frugality. His patriarchal authority still compels the dwindling and aging "flock" (*AD*, 34) to regulate their lives, keep orderly hours, and focus their lives on useful and charitable acts that will help ensure them a place in "the New Jerusalem toward which they were longing" (*AD*, 21). Using the narrative technique of ellipsis (Genette 1980, 43), Dinesen passes over large swathes of time with phrases like "a year later" (*AD*, 25) and "fifteen years later" (*AD*, 29), only pausing over Martine and Philippa's flirtations with Loewenhielm and Papin in 1854–1855 and Babette's arrival in Berlevaag in 1871. These events, we understand, constitute exceptional moments punctuating the regular, uniform, and dull rhythms of Berlevaag's "good Lutheran life" (*AD*, 31–32), with its endlessly repetitive prayer meetings, Sunday sermons, and meals of "split cod and ale-and-bread-soup" (*AD*, 32). They alone interrupt the tick-tock rhythm of what Frank Kermode calls "passing time," "waiting time," and "one damn thing after another" time (1968, 45–46).

In the main "time of this tale" (*AD*, 31), the Dean's "disciples were [...] becoming somewhat querulous and quarrelsome, so that sad little schisms would arise in the congregation," (*AD*, 21). Without the Dean's commanding example, the aging parishioners of the "Berlevaag Brotherhood" (*AD*, 41) have lost sight of the present and begun to dwell upon the past:

> The sins of old Brothers and Sisters came, with late piercing repentance like a toothache, and the sins of others against them came back with bitter resentment, like a poisoning of the blood.
>
> There were in the congregation two old women who before their conversion had spread slander upon each other, and thereby to each other ruined a marriage and an inheritance. Today they could not remember happenings of yesterday or a week ago, but they remembered this forty-year-old wrong and kept going through the ancient accounts; they scowled at each other. There was an old Brother who suddenly called to mind how another Brother, forty-five years ago, had cheated him in a deal; he could have wished to dismiss the matter from his mind, but it stuck there like a deep-seated, festering splinter. There was a gray, honest skipper and a furrowed, pious widow, who in their young days, while she was the wife of another man, had been sweethearts. Of late each had begun to grieve, while shifting the burden of guilt from his own shoulders to those of the other and back again, and to worry about the possible terrible consequences, through all eternity, to himself, brought upon him by

> one who had pretended to hold him dear. They grew pale at the meetings in the yellow house and avoided each other's eyes. (*AD*, 34–35)

The planning of the birthday feast for the precise 100th anniversary of the Dean's birth, on "the fifteenth of December" (*AD*, 34, 37), reasserts the utmost significance of timely scheduling, regularity, and consistency. Like the birth and death of Christ, the occurrences of the Dean's life represent unique events on a one-directional timeline that will culminate in the second coming and the salvation of the faithful. By dining together in the Dean's honor, on the precise centennial of his birth, Marine and Philippa hope to recollect their father's exact and disciplined manner of life and restore some structure to the temporal world of the "old Brothers and Sisters" (*AD*, 43). A century has passed since the Dean's birth, but by keeping strict and accurate time, his daughters will ensure that his will continue to be done.

8 *Kairos*

At the culminating birthday dinner party, Babette serves a four-course meal of turtle soup, blinis Demidoff (wheat pancakes with caviar), and *cailles en sarcophage* (quail in puff pastry or truffle shells) followed by grapes, peaches, and fresh figs. Carefully prepared over three months, the sumptuous birthday banquet is perhaps the most famous single moment in Dinesen's writing and certainly one of world literature's most celebrated literary meals, whose significance has been masticated by food writers (e.g. Wulff 2019, 207–265), philosophers (e.g. Kramer 2008), cultural historians (e.g. Ferguson 2004, 187–201) theologians (e.g. Podles 1992), and literary critics (e.g. Elf 2009). Indeed, such is the popularity of "Babette's Feast," especially following Axel's Oscar-winning film, that separate schools of interpretation have formed around it. Following the feast, Philippa engages Babette in a final dialogue:

> But Philippa's heart was melting in her bosom. It seemed that an unforgettable evening was to be finished off with an unforgettable proof of human loyalty and self-sacrifice.
>
> "Dear Babette," she said softly, "you ought not to have given away all you had for our sake."
>
> Babette gave her mistress a deep glance, a strange glance. Was there not pity, even scorn, at the bottom of it?
>
> "For your sake?" she replied. "No. For my own."
>
> She rose from the chopping block and stood up before the two sisters.

> "I am a great artist!" she said.
>
> She waited a moment and then repeated: "I am a great artist, Mesdames."
>
> Again for a long time there was a deep silence in the kitchen.
>
> Then Martine said: "So you will be poor now all your life, Babette?"
>
> "Poor?" said Babette. She smiled as if to herself. "No, I shall never be poor. I told you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing." (*AD*, 57–58)

Viewing Babette as a "great artist," who expends her energies to enrich the world as the aesthetically gifted but timid Philippa never dared, enables understandings of the story as a late-career retrospective reflection on Dinesen's own authorial project (e.g. Aiken 1990, 81), a miniature-sized *künstlerroman* espousing a romantic conception of high art (e.g. Vazsonyi 1999), or as an antipatriarchal manifesto of feminist fabulation (e.g. Barr 1990). Other critical debates center on the story's extensive, ambiguous, and contentious use of religious and specifically Christian language and imagery. Babette is compared to the biblical "dark Martha" (*AD*, 33), but also to a "witch" (*AD*, 42) and to the pagan priestess "Pythia upon her tripod" (*AD*, 33). Critics interpret the story's twelve chapters and the fact that Babette sacrifices her winnings to host twelve diners at her sacramental feast both literally, as piously reimagining the central liturgical ritual of Eucharistic communion (e.g. Mullins 2009), and ironically, as a subversive Nietzschean rejoinder to all forms of otherworldly religious asceticism (e.g. Hansen 2003, 61–97).

My eco-temporal interpretation instead hinges on the way in which Babette's feast interrupts the mere flux of time, exchanging *chronos* with *kairos*. Compared with *chronos*, *kairos* is vaguer, more complex, and more context-dependent, lacking a precise equivalent in English. If *chronos* denotes time that can be situated on a timeline and easily quantified in terms of duration, *kairos* designates time rife with a singular quality, "a special time at which something of peculiar significance occurs" (J. Smith 1969, 9). *Kairos* is the right moment, turning point, opening, discontinuity, or breach, when opportunities present themselves and certain actions become possible that would not be possible at other times. When *kairos* happens or how *kairos* is measured in minutes, hours, or days matters less than the way in which certain energies converge to force a moment of crisis or decision. However abbreviated or fleeting, *kairos* is time "filled with significance" (Kermode 1968, 45), surpassing "mere successiveness" to establish "a significant relation between the moment and a remote origin and end, a concord of past, present, and future" (Kermode 1968, 47).

Babette's feast does more than fill her diners' empty stomachs and lift their somber moods. It also lets them experience time itself as qualitatively transformed:

> Of what happened later in the evening nothing definite can here be stated. None of the guests later on had any clear remembrance of it. They only knew that the rooms had been filled with a heavenly light, as if a number of small halos had blended into one glorious radiance. Taciturn old people received the gift of tongues; ears that for years had been almost deaf were opened to it. Time itself had merged into eternity. Long after midnight the windows of the house shone like gold, and golden song flowed out into the winter air.
>
> The two old women who had once slandered each other now in their hearts went back a long way, past the evil period in which they had been stuck, to those days of their early girlhood when together they had been preparing for confirmation and hand in hand had filled the roads round Berlevaag with singing. A Brother in the congregation gave another a knock in the ribs, like a rough caress between boys, and cried out: "You cheated me on that timber, you old scoundrel!" The Brother thus addressed almost collapsed in a heavenly burst of laughter, but tears ran from his eyes. "Yes, I did so, beloved Brother," he answered. "I did so." Skipper Halvorsen and Madam Oppegaarden suddenly found themselves close together in a corner and gave one another that long, long kiss, for which the secret uncertain love affair of their youth had never left them time.
>
> The old Dean's flock were humble people. When later in life they thought of this evening it never occurred to any of them that they might have been exalted by their own merit. They realized that the infinite grace of which General Loewenhielm had spoken had been allotted to them, and they did not even wonder at the fact, for it had been but the fulfillment of an ever-present hope. The vain illusions of this earth had dissolved before their eyes like smoke, and they had seen the universe as it really is. They had been given one hour of the millennium. (*AD*, 53)

Babette's gift to the Berlevaag diners consists in letting them experience another kind of time – a kairotic instance that they register, in the story's religiously loaded language, as "heavenly light," "glorious radiance," "eternity," "infinite grace," and "one hour of the millennium." The dinner, in other words, brings about a moment that appears not as merely as another occurrence on a universal timeline, but as uniquely meaningful both in relation to the past

and to the future.[13] The dinner brings the past back into the present in manner that gives hope for the future. What has happened before happens again, differently, opening new possibilities. The parishioners are accustomed to dining together, but on this occasion, they meet not over split cod and ale-and-bread-soup but over turtle soup and *cailles en sarcophage*. "*Usually* in Berlevaag people did not speak much while they were eating," Dinesen writes, "[b]ut somehow *this evening* tongues had been loosened" (*AD*, 49 [emphasis added]). Already on his way to Berlevaag, General Loewenhielm loses track of time, sensing the uncanny presence of his former self, a "handsome, slim figure" with a "haughty arrogant smile" (*AD*, 44–45), and during the meal, he is "carried back" (*AD*, 50) to the Paris dinner twenty-five years ago. Loewenhielm's bitter parting from Martine – "'I am going away forever!" he cried. "I shall never, never see you again!'" (*AD*, 24) – has always plagued him, but now he is able to assure her, after an absence of "thirty years" (*AD*, 44), that "I have been with you every day of my life" and "I shall be with you every day that is left to me. Every evening I shall sit down [...] to dine with you, just like tonight" (*AD*, 54). Other characters who have been borne along by the course of events experience a similar indeterminacy, as they not merely remember but relive previous moments in their lives in ways that enable them to move forward. Parishioners who have grown "fewer in number every year, whiter or balder and harder of hearing" (*AD*, 21) find themselves rejuvenated, "gamboling like little lambs," and experiencing a "kind of celestial second childhood" (AD, 54). The dinner's time-disturbing effects linger even until the next day, when "many good citizens of the town did not realize that daybreak had come, but slept on till late in the afternoon" (*AD*, 55).

9 Revolutionary Time

"Babette's Feast" is paradigmatic of how Dinesen's stories set different modes of time in motion. In Selboe's words, Babette's meal "marks a transition between before and after, a *now* that takes up the 'movements' of the past but in its inversion of the past inscribes the possibility of change, or something else, briefly: of the *new*" (1996, 11 [author's translation). The dinner's "mystical high" (Thurman 1982, 329) elicits a kairotic cessation or transformation of quotidian time of the type that critics have often, following James Joyce, characterized

13 Using Søren Kierkegaard's category *øjeblikket* ("the moment"), Selboe writes that "the meal marks [...] a break with time as empty and homogenous" (1996, 111 [author's translation]).

with the term "epiphany."[14] Babette's "beatific orgy" (Langbaum 1975, 253), however, also lends itself to more political interpretations (e.g. Goodwin 1990; Wegner 2020). In 1883, Norway was still a colony, and General Loewenhielm's name and military title identify him as connected to the Swedish colonial élite. Dinesen, moreover, was intimately familiar with the history of the Paris Commune, especially because her father, Wilhelm Dinesen, chronicled his firsthand experiences of the uprising and subsequent reprisals in his 1873 book *Paris under Kommunen* (*Paris during the Commune*) (Dinesen 1968). Whereas Axel's film mutes the story's political context in various ways, for example by moving the action from Norway to the Danish West Coast, Dinesen's original narrative emphasizes Babette's complex identity as woman, cook, and artist but also as unrepentant working-class revolutionary in a mass movement "crushed and annihilated" (*AD*, 29) by the brutal repression exerted by the French upper class and the military forces led by same General Gallifet who was also, paradoxically, a habitual diner at the Café Anglais.[15] Papin's introduction of Babette as "a Pétroleuse" (*AD*, 29), a term commonly used by antirevolutionaries to demonize female communards, is echoed later in the story, when "Babette took a step forward" and "[t]here was something formidable in the move, like a wave rising" (*AD*, 9). Martine and Philippa wonder whether "[p]erhaps after all [Babette] had indeed been a Pétroleuse" (*AD*, 34). "Had she," they ask themselves "stepped forth like this, in 1871, to plant a red flag on a barricade?" (*AD*, 37–38). Their misgivings are confirmed when, at the very end of the story, Babette reveals that "I was a Communard. Thanks be to God, I was a Communard! And those people whom I named, Mesdames, were evil and cruel. They let the people of Paris starve; they oppressed and wronged the poor. Thanks be to God, I stood upon a barricade; I loaded the gun for my menfolk!" (*AD*, 58).

Babette brings France to Norway, poring over recipes in her "heavy black book" (*AD*, 33) and spending her entire windfall of 10,000 francs on goods that her nephew "was to bring her from France" (*AD*, 39). She also imports

14 In James Joyce's *Stephen Hero*, an early version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus defines the epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in memorable phrase of the mind," believing that it is "for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (Joyce 1960, 216).

15 I disagree with Mary Elizabeth Podles, who argues that that Axel's elision of any reference to Babette's role as a Communard *pétroleuse* improves the story, because "it distances Babette's story from the political and particular and gives it a greater universality by focusing it on the relation of art and grace in Babette's story" (1992, 554).

the specific time of the Commune, which Alain Badiou calls "the striking and totally unforeseeable beginning of a rupture" (2006, 277). We can understand Babette's dinner as not just a quasi-religious moment of "infinite grace" (*AD*, 54), in other words, but also as a counter-temporal reactivation of the Commune's revolutionary sense of time. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin associates revolutionary time with "time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" in contrast with the "homogenous, empty time" of Protestant Christianity, bourgeois industrialism, and Hegelian Marxism (1968, 261), and he notes how clocktowers were shot at by French revolutionaries during the July uprising of 1830 (1968, 262). In Benjamin's famous image, the angel of history has "[h]is face [...] turned toward the past," which means that he can perceive no orderly progression towards a preordained goal as "the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (1968, 257). "Progress" happens not gradually and predictably but in sudden bursts and flashes, for history "is shot through with chips of messianic time" (1968, 263), extraordinary breaks, gaps, and intrusions when past and present suddenly coalesce and unforeseen new possibilities flare up, and when the prospect of another, better life on earth can be apprehended in the here-and-now. A revolutionary historian or artist should neither focus on faithful recollections of the past nor trust in the inevitable progressive course of history, Benjamin suggests, but rather work to seize the utopian image as it flashes by, "blasting" it "out of the homogenous course of history" (1968, 263).

Dinesen's story engages with radical and even revolutionary ideas of time in ways that complicate her own and others' assessments of her work as "reactionary" (e.g. *LA*, 138) and make us wonder about her preference for staid outlets like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. The story allows us to view Babette as a Benjaminian artist, who uses her imagination to set light to the sparks of hope buried in the past.[16] Babette's feast, we might argue, releases the Berlevaag parishioners from ceaseless chronotic flow and allows them to foretaste an unrealized future, an "elsewhen" of joyous collectivity that both recollects previous moments like the Paris Commune and foreshadows future concretizations of the utopian "tiger's leap" (Benjamin

16 Phillip E. Wegner interprets the story along political lines, writing that "the dinner is itself to be understood as another repeating: a repeating not only of [Babette's] work as an artist, but also of the radically original experience of the production and consumption of art briefly realized in the Commune" (2020, 159). See also Goodwin, who reads the tale in a feminist utopian tradition, as "a hopeful commentary on failed utopian expectations" (1990, 13).

1968, 261) into the future. It brings time as we know it to a standstill, charges it with energy, and gives community a chance to be reborn:

> The guests from the yellow house wavered on their feet, staggered, sat down abruptly or fell forward on their knees and hands and were covered with snow, as if they had indeed had their sins washed white as wool, and in this regained innocent attire were gamboling like little lambs. It was, to each of them, blissful to have become as a small child; it was also a blessed joke to watch old Brothers and Sisters, who had been taking themselves so seriously, in this kind of celestial second childhood. They stumbled and got up, walked on or stood still, bodily as well as spiritually hand in hand, at moments performing the great chain of a beatified *lanciers*. (*AD*, 54–55)

Suitably, Dinesen uses a French loan word, "*convives*" (*AD*, 50), to characterize how Babette's meal affects isolated men and women who "grew lighter in weight and lighter of heart the more they ate and drank" (*AD*, 57–58). The *OED* defines a "convive" as "[o]ne who feasts with others; a fellow-banqueter, table-companion, mess-mate." Yet the word's root meaning (living with, sharing a life with) indicates how Berlevaag's parishioners, in a state of transient ecstasy and intoxication, briefly glimpse the possibility of a restructured sociality. In the language used by Benjamin, the meal's "profane illumination" (1978, 179) causes the meaningless flux of "homogeneous, empty time" to be "blast[ed] open" by "time filled by the presence of the now" (1968, 261) – the "messianic" (Benjamin 1968, 263) time of laughter, fulfillment, and playfulness.

10 Turtle Time

The release of Axel's *Babette's Feast* in 1987 coincided with the emergence of the Slow Food movement.[17] Originating in Italy and growing from grassroots protest against the spread of fast food and the attendant lifestyle of fast living, Slow Food connects gastronomic, temporal, biological, and environmental forms of diversity through the Latin adage *festina lente* (make haste slowly). Organized into autonomous chapters called "convivia," Slow Food advocates work to protect local foodways and strengthen sustainable farming methods.

17 In the book *Terrafutura*, Slow Food's founder, Carlo Petrini, discusses *Babette's Feast* with the Roman Catholic Pope Francis. As it turns out, both men count the Danish film among their personal favorites (Petrini 2020, 119–120).

Slow Food "begin[s] at the table" (Petrini 2001, 19) but encompasses other adjacent domains including travel, education, finance, and urban development to explore temporalities other than those associated with speed, productivity, progress, and accumulation. More than a form of romantic escapism or a fastidious middle-class aesthetic, as Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig point out, Slow Food "involves the conscious negotiation of different temporalities, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively" (2006, 3). The snail, which serves as the movement's logo, "is a reminder of different temporalities which coexist alongside fast-food restaurants" (2006, 56).

If Babette is a revolutionary artist, she is also a time ecologist, defying what General Loewenhielm in his dinner speech calls "our human [...] shortsightedness" (*AD*, 52).[18] If time contracts or condenses to a charged *Jetzt* during Babette's "French dinner" (*AD*, 39), it also expands to facilitate contact with the different temporalities of nonhuman entities. At the crossroads of gastronomy, politics, and ecology, Babette's slowly prepared meal marks a clock-breaking, achronic event that situates both diners and readers within a wider range of nonhuman timescales, rhythms, cycles, and tempos, in a world that is always already "time-full" (Adam 1998, 219). "The kitchen," writes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "runs on multiple clocks [...] that produce wine, vinegar, pickles, olives, cheese, bread, sauces, and roasts over years, months, days, minutes, and split seconds" (2007, 76–77). The material things that humans consume for nourishment and enjoyment gestate, grow, mature, ripen, flourish, age, and decay with different rhythms, paces, and velocities. Animals follow a seasonal reproduction cycle that varies from species to species. Plants will only grow during certain times of the year, in processes determined by geography, climate, weather, and other conditions. The foodstuffs and beverages with which Babette regales her twelve diners may be viewed as multiple clocks foregrounding human involvement with and dependence on the complex rhythmicity of nature. The caviar included in the made-up dish of blinis Demidoff, for example, is extracted when female specimens of the Caspian Sea sturgeon – a bottom-feeding, migratory, slowly-reproducing, prehistoric-looking fish whose evolution dates to the Triassic period some 200 million years ago – swim up rivers to spawn around the autumn and spring equinoxes. When salted, sealed, and tinned, the sturgeon eggs gradually absorb the salt and swell up, becoming perfectly round and expelling the air. Before they can be "entombed" in pastry

18 In "Babettes Gæstebud," Dinesen elaborates on this theme of temporal myopia, revising Loewenhielm's sentence – "'Man, my friends,' said General Loewenhielm, 'is frail and foolish'" (*AD*, 52) – as "'Vi Mennesker, mine Venner,' fortsatte Generalen, 'er kortsynede'" ("'We humans,' the general continued, 'are shortsighted'") (*SA*, 52).

shells, quails are midsized birds of the pheasant family that migrate across surprising distances from northern Europe to North Africa. Quails and other game birds such as thrushes, buntings, and larks have been used in pies since the Middle Ages and made popular dishes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "Quails are at their best in autumn when they have gorged themselves on grapes," François Brocard comments, and "[e]ating them on 15 December might be little late but not that late, given the time to ship them alive in a cage from France to Jutland" (2006, 82).

If "every story *knows* something about time," as Mark Currie argues (qtd. Huebener 2020, 9), "Babette's Feast" knows that human meal-time is bound up with a multitude of other times.[19] Shocking the teetotaling villagers, Babette pairs her dishes with three choice alcoholic drinks: an Amontillado sherry to balance the turtle soup, a Veuve Cliquot 1860 champagne to match the "blinis Demidoff," and a Clos Vougeot 1846 burgundy red wine to accompany the *cailles en sarcophage*. Martine is surprised to learn that "wines could have names to them" (*AD*, 42), but just as importantly, in a story filled with references to dates and years, two of the three beverages also have ages. Dinesen understood that wine's connection with time is profound, and that viticulture involves several complex temporal processes.[20] Grapevine plants (*vitis vinifera*) must grow for years before grapes can be collected in in an annual autumn harvest. Processing and fermentation initiate another temporal process, and when bottled and cellared the "young" bottle of wine reaches a point of "maturity" and then declines, lapsing into old age and "death," like any living thing. Wine is a product of time that can also withstand the fleeting nature of time, connecting drinkers to other historical periods. If Babette's wines recall the wedding at Cana, the Last Supper, and Kasparson's story about the wine of the tetrarch, then, they also resonate with the story's emphasis on temporal diversity. Like the other items on her menu, her aged vintages enfold diners and readers

19 Here I gesture towards the Danish word for meal, *måltid,* literally "meal-time."

20 Paul Cohen argues that "wine lives its life out not in one, but many different temporalities. Thanks to the multifaceted modalities of its production and consumption, wine entertains a relationship with time that is perhaps richer and more variegated than for any other foodstuff" (2009, 57). In "The Dreamers," Dinesen lets Baron Guildenstern refer to *botrytis cinerea*, a beneficial yeast infection used in the production of certain wines: "We have heard much of wine growing since we came here, and have learned, too, how, to obtain perfection in the special white wine of this district, they leave the grapes on the vines longer than for other wines. In this way they dry up a little, become over-ripe and very sweet. Furthermore, they develop a peculiar condition which is called in French *pourriture noble*, and in German, *Edelfaule*, and which gives the flavor to the wine" (*SGT*, 306).

within a multiplicity of more-than-human temporalities that underpin and enable human existence, revealing that "the times of nature are determining our lives" (Adam et al. 1997, 73).

"Babette's Feast," Steven Kramer observes, "raises a host of moral questions, from eating exotic foods of unknown origin that are shipped long distances, to lavish consumption and even eating rare, sentient creatures" (2008, 151–152). The feature of Babette's gastronomy that most intrigues me here, rather than its Francophilia, costliness, elitism, or carnocentrism, is its powerful manifestation of human lives' inextricable involvement with more-than-human rhythms and timescales. To produce her hors d'oeuvre, Babette imports a live sea turtle that particularly perturbs Martine:

> Late in the evening she opened the door to a ring, and was once more faced with the wheelbarrow, this time with a red-haired sailor-boy behind it, as if the old man had by this time been worn out. The youth grinned at her as he lifted a big, undefinable object from the barrow. In the light of the lamp it looked like some greenish-black stone, but when set down on the kitchen floor it suddenly shot out a snake-like head and moved it slightly from side to side. Martine had seen pictures of tortoises, and had even as a child owned a pet tortoise, but this thing was monstrous in size and terrible to behold. She backed out of the kitchen without a word. She dared not tell her sister what she had seen.
>
> She dared not tell her sister what she had seen. She passed an almost sleepless night; she thought of her father and felt that on his very birthday she and her sister were lending his house to a witches' sabbath. When at last she fell asleep she had a terrible dream, in which she saw Babette poisoning the old Brothers and Sisters, Philippa and herself. (*AD*, 40)[21]

The capture, live transportation, butchering, and quartering of rare sentient creatures obviously violates every contemporary environmental sensibility, but human consumption of turtles stretches back to prehistoric times.[22] Like other elements in the "Babette's Feast," Martine's encounter with the turtle

21 In the Danish version of the story, Dinesen adds an additional sentence to the first of these paragraphs: "I Mørket voksede Utrygheden om hende og Skildpadden selv, hun følte at hun maatte have nogen at tale om den med" ("In the darkness the discomfort grew around her and the turtle itself, she felt that she needed someone with whom she could talk about it") (*SA*, 42).

22 In 1883 and even in 1950, most cookbooks contained one or several recipes for the dish, often requiring turtle meat, garlic onions, and assorted vegetables such as celery and tomatoes (Wulff 2019, 241).

has been subject to divergent interpretations, as some critics (e.g. Stambaugh 1988, 81) accentuate the scene's religious connotations, while others (e.g. Barr 1990, 24) dwell on the animal's bizarre and surreal qualities. Turtles and tortoises appear elsewhere in Dinesen's fiction, perhaps most memorably in "The Monkey," where Closter Seven is home to "a tortoise which was supposed to be more than a hundred years old" (*SGT*, 109). Moreover, the Danish version of the story, "Babettes Gæstebud," amplifies the role of the turtle and connects it with time. In the Danish story, the passage "Martine bethought herself of the turtle. It had not appeared at all, and now seemed very vague and far away; it was quite possible that it had been nothing but a nightmare" (*AD*, 56) is rewritten as "Langt borte fra, *som fra en helt svunden Tid*, dukkede Skildpadden op i Martine's Erindring. Men den havde jo ikke vist sig side, det var muligt, det var troligt, at den ikke havde være andet end en old Drøm" ("From far away, *as from a completely vanished time*, the turtle reappeared in Martine's memory. But it had not appeared subsequently, it was possible, it was believable that it had been nothing more than a bad dream" (*SA*, 55 [emphasis added]). In my understanding, Babette's turtle symbolizes a temporal otherness that defies the power of singular human timekeeping systems. Turtles, after all, are proverbially slow-moving and long-lived creatures, and some species have the potential to reach ages far surpassing the natural lifespan of humans.[23] In evolutionary terms, turtles are also among the world's most ancient animals, whose ancestors survived several mass extinction events and once shared the planet with dinosaurs. Even as its head darts out rapidly, the turtle in Dinesen's story seems to belong to the mineral kingdom, as an antediluvian avatar of "glacial time" (Urry 2000, 157). Like the snail used as an emblem by the Slow Food movement, the primeval turtle reminds us that alien life forms with other temporalities and rhythms coinhabit the planet with us. More poignantly than any other element in the story, it makes visible our involvement with and dependence upon creatures that move through life at radically different speeds and paces, in a world of shared multitemporal existence.

11 Conclusion

In her public lecture "Sorte og Hvide i Afrika" ("Blacks and Whites in Africa") (1938), Dinesen looks back on her seventeen years in Kenya, characterizing

23 The oldest turtle in recorded history is Tu'I Malila, a radiated tortoise from Madagascar which was believed to have been a gift from Captain James Cook to the royal family of Tonga, and which died in 1966 at the presumed age of 188 (Pryke 2021, 32).

the main difference between European settlers and indigenous Africans as differences in time. "In my opinion," she writes, "speed is the greatest difficulty in the relationship between blacks and whites. For the last 100 years we have accelerated our speed immensely, and for us it is almost insufferable to reduce it to a level that suits them" (*SGE*, 160 [author's translation]). Like so many of Dinesen's narratives, *Out of Africa* not only commemorates a different time but also concerns itself with conflictual understandings of and alternative ways of being in time. Devoting considerable attention to "an old German cuckoo-clock that hung in the dining- room," Dinesen evokes both the power of colonial timekeeping technologies and the resilience of African time-resistance strategies:

> A clock was entirely an object of luxury in the African Highlands. All the year round you could tell, from the position of the sun, what the time was, and as you had no dealings with railways, and could arrange your life on the farm according to your own wishes, it became a matter of no importance. But this was a very fine clock. In the midst of a cluster of pink roses, at every full hour, a cuckoo here flung up its little door and threw itself forward to announce the hour in a clear insolent voice. Its apparition was every time a fresh delight to the young people of the farm. From the position of the sun, they judged accurately when the moment for the midday call was due, and by a quarter to twelve I could see them approaching the house from all sides, at the tail of their goats, which they dared not leave behind. [...]
>
> They left their flocks on the lawn and came in noiselessly on their bare feet; the bigger ones were about ten years and the youngest two years. They behaved very well, and kept up a sort of self-made ceremonial for their visits, which came to this: that they could move about freely in the house so long as they did not touch anything, nor sit down, nor speak unless spoken to. As the cuckoo rushed out on them, a great movement of ecstasy and suppressed laughter ran through the group. (*OA*, 44–45)

Dinesen characterizes her Kenyan farmhouse as a refuge for "wayfarers and wanderers of the world" (*OA*, 195), welcoming a diversity of people who find themselves mistimed with the dominant rhythms and tempos of "our Industrial Age" (*OA*, 208). For Dinesen's closest associates, she writes, "it was not a society that had thrown them out, and not any place in the whole world either, but time had done it, they did not belong to their century. [...] In the present epoch they had no home, but had to wander here and there, and in the course of time they also came to the farm" (*OA*, 206). Chief among these "outcasts" or

"exiles" (*OA*, 206) from modern time, Dinesen's English "friend" (*OA*, 101) Denys Finch Hatton plays a prominent role but makes an elusive presence in the book. A professional hunter and safari guide who seems to belong to "an earlier England" (*OA*, 206), Finch Hatton "would have cut a figure in any age" but "did not quite fit" in "his own age" (*OA*, 208). Finch Hatton's nomadic wanderings in and aerial flights over the African landscape follow animal migrations and seasonal processes of change, in contrast to the chrononormative lives of the petty-bourgeois British colonists. Finch Hatton, Dinesen writes, could read nature's multifarious clocks "better than any other white man" in "the African Highlands": He "watched and followed [...] their soil and seasons, the vegetation and the wild animals, the winds and smells [...] the changes of weather in them, their people, clouds, the stars at night" (*OA*, 341–342). Erratic in his movements, with little interest in home, work, career, marriage, or reproduction, Finch Hatton comes and goes as he pleases, rarely keeps appointments, is usually absent when needed, has a habit of showing up unannounced when least expected, and repeatedly entices Dinesen's persona to untimely adventures "as if the future did not exist" (*OA*, 329). Having caught "the rhythm of Africa" (*OA*, 15), Finch Hatton marches to a different beat; like the lions with whom he feels mystically connected or the indigenous Africans "whose ideas of time were different from those of the white people" (*OA*, 310), he is "on friendly terms with time" (*OA*, 235).

For many early reviewers of Dinesen's stories, the Danish storywriter challenged both spatial and temporal codes of understanding. Critics wondered, in other words, not only who Isak Dinesen was and where he/she originated, but also what time he/she properly belonged to. Jenny Ballou of the *New York Herald Tribune*, for example, finds that *Seven Gothic Tales* stands "outside our century," unassignable to any of the "literary schools," while William Soskin of the *New York American* calls it "a book about living ghosts, ageless and ancient and frighteningly contemporary" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 89, 95). Richardt Gandtrup of *Aarhus Stiftstidende* believes that Dinesen, isolated from the modern Danish welfare state by her long African sojourn, has "shaped her tales under the impression of a vanished human and artistic vision" (G. Rostbøll 180, 233 [author's translation]). Hans Brix, in turn, borrows Dinesen's own image of overripeness (used in "The Dreamers") to characterize texts that seem to defy the normal cycles of growth and decay: "To our nose the leaves of this book emit an unusual, exciting aroma of noble rot: *La purriture noble*. *Edelfaule*!" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 169 [author's translation]). Later scholars similarly reflect upon her work's seeming incompatibility with any established literary ism and its remoteness from the characteristic forms, styles, and thematic preoccupations of inter- and post-war literature. Christian Elling, for example, writes

that "Karen Blixen's relation to her period's Danish literature is insular. [...] Her work shoots up suddenly like a coral reef from unknown depths" (1976, 25 [author's translation]). For Selboe, Dinesen's writing revolves around "the timeless and non-contemporary" (2008, 16), staging clashes between elements from different periods to convey to the reader the feeling "that she is reading something very old – and something brand new" (2008, 27).

In this chapter, I have analyzed Dinesen's out-of-synchness not as eccentricity, anomaly, or pathology but as part of an "imaginative counter-discourse" (Zapf 2016, 110) with significant ecological potential for a relentlessly sped-up, short-term, and progress-oriented world. Furthermore, I have argued that Dinesen's search for alternative time-telling strategies that can disrupt industrial modernity's construction of a singular, universal, monolithic clock resonate with the larger historical phenomenon of modernism, with queer critiques of chrononormativity, with mounting cultural recalcitrance in relation to pressures for increasing movement, speed, and productivity, and with our ever-deepening uncertainties about life in the Anthropocene. The recognition that modernity's and capitalism's timescales clash with the timescales that govern life and earth has motivated environmental thinkers to call for novel clockmaking strategies that can recognize heterochronic complexity and interconnectivity. Erin Fitz-Henry, for example, posits a "growing interdisciplinary consensus about the imperative of thinking more carefully about the timescales within which to understand the depths of the current environmental crisis" (2017, 2). Similarly, Adam et al. call for "time ecology," a mode of thinking that stresses the necessity of expanding our temporal repertoire to include a multiplicity of human and more-than-human temporalities:

> Time ecology focuses on the multiple forms of time: rhythms and time markers; variable time frames and time scales; *Eigenzeiten* which means the embedded specific to an organism or system; *kairos*, the right time for action, and *chronos* which refers to the passage of time; the timing of events and their duration, sequence, beginning and end; the speed and intensity at which (trans)actions are conducted; the commodified time of economic exchange and production as well as the generative time of care, nurturing and reproduction. It recognizes that a sensitivity to time in its diverse forms is a precondition to taking account of it in decisions and policies that affect the environment across time and space. (1997, 75)

Unless we rebuild our awareness of time, we cannot hope to muster the energy for timely action in response to threats like climate change, deforestation, mass extinction, ocean acidification, and coral bleaching. Huebener believes

that literature and other cultural forms can play a role in this attunement process, for "[b]y breaking open the clocks of cultural time, literature, just maybe, can escape from them, creating a more nuanced and humble perspective on the environmental processes on which humans depend" (2020, 105). Jesse Matz connects the time ecology of twentieth-century modernist texts to a wider range of cultural initiatives including the Slow Food movement and the Long Now Foundation that aim to redress "temporal crisis" (2018, 10), "cultivate a better temporal environment," and "enhance the temporal manifold" (2018, 38). In "The Deluge at Norderney," Miss Malin is shown at one moment "nimbly put[ting] back the conversation a little, as one sets back a clock" (*SGT*, 24), while towards the end, Kasparson regains energy "as if he had [...] pushed back ten years of his age" (*SGT*, 55). Looking "like a corpse of twenty-four hours" (*SGT*, 55), Miss Malin claims the power to reorganize time, when she tells Calypso and Mærsk that "[o]ne kiss will make it out for the birth of twins, and at dawn you shall celebrate your golden wedding" (*OA*, 65). Dinesen, I have argued, practices similar forms of clock-disturbing and time-tampering throughout her writing. When read as "tales of time" (Ricoeur 1985, 101), both "The Deluge" and "Babette's Feast" question familiar short-sighted frames of progress, linearity, regularity, and productivity, compelling characters and readers to orient themselves in fictional worlds that throb with other beats, cadences, and periodicities than those of anthropocentric technological modernity. By foregrounding the interplay between different slow and fast, straight and queer, deep and shallow, human and more-than-human temporalities, such texts can help foster the enhanced "critical literacy of time" (Huebener 2020, 24) essential to correcting the course of a civilization increasingly addicted to economistic short-termism and unsustainable acceleration. If changing our ideas about time could be key to ushering in a very different kind of economy and society, I find that Dinesen's untimeliness makes her a timely writer for our own troubled times.

CHAPTER 2

A Tangled World: Humans, Animals, and Plants in *Out of Africa*

1 Introduction

Dinesen compared humans and animals constantly, even obsessively, throughout her tales set in Denmark, Norway, Germany, France, Italy, Persia, China, and elsewhere. Human-animal comparisons are used extensively in one of Dinesen's earliest texts, the 1926 English-language story "Carnival," which grew from the marionette comedy "La Valse Mauve" (1910). Here Camelia raises her shoulders "like a partridge basking in the sun" (*CV*, 148), Annelise (dressed up as Johannes from Søren Kierkegaard's *The Seducer's Diary*) has a face freckled "like a panther kitten" (*CV*, 87), the world-famous painter Rosendahl is "like an old monkey" (*CV*, 102–103), and the black would-be robber Zamor, whose real name appears to be Rubinstein, dries his mouth in a manner "not at all unlike a hyena which has drunk at the ford" (*CV*, 106). In the late story "Copenhagen Season," which was published in *Last Tales* (1957), the trope is used with great frequency. Here, to mention only a few examples, society girls appear like "young she-bears fresh from the lair" (*LT*, 249) or "like cygnets in the wake of heavier mother swans" (*LT*, 269), while "old gentlemen" resemble "mammoths and plesiosauri, and old ladies [are] like the dodo" (*LT*, 252). The seven Angel siblings of Ballegaard not only descend from "a long line of big Jutland horse-dealers" (*LT*, 25) but are themselves characterized in terms of animal breeding and husbandry, as a "brood" or "litter" (*LT*, 263) of "wild animals" (*LT*, 261) resulting from a "blood mixture [...] particularly true to breed" (*LT,* 260). The hero, Ib Angel, has "all the looks of a gentle wild animal with big soft paws" (*LT*, 268), a laughter resembling "the cooing of a wood pigeon" (*LT*, 302), and a sense of smell "keen like the sense of smell of a rare, trained dog" (*LT*, 310). To the heroine, Adelaide von Galen, he says that "you are a serpent" (*LT*, 283) while she repeatedly retorts that "you are a fish" (*LT*, 284, 285).

Human-animal comparisons are used in texts that Dinesen valued highly, such as "The Dreaming Child," where Jens appears to Jakob like "a small, gentle, wild animal" (*AD*, 165), but the same feature appears in works that she claimed to disparage, such as the novel *The Angelic Avengers*, where, to mention but a few examples, Mr. Tabbernor is "big and heavy as an elephant" (*AA*, 24) and Olympia is "as big and heavy as a hippo" (*AA*, 36), while the gangster Pedro

Smith likens himself to Reverend Pennhallow's "faithful and humble dog" (*AA*, 183) and Zosine compares her own and Lucan's situation to that of "two little canary birds in a neat little cage" (*AA*, 175). Animalization is employed to characterize heroic figures like Calypso von Platen Hallermund in "The Deluge at Norderney," who is like "a dangerous animal, ready to spring" (*SGT*, 52), and Babette Hersant in "Babette's Feast," who arrives in Berlevaag "haggard and wild-eyed like a hunted animal" (*AD*, 31), but also less likable characters like Ivan of "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," who is "a giant, as big as a bear" (*WT*, 95) and a "hairy animal" (*WT*, 97), and Councilor Mathiesen of "The Poet," who moves towards his death like "an old snake which has been run over on the road, but still wriggles on" (*SGT*, 514). Animal features are lent equally to young female characters like Athena Hopballehus of "The Monkey," who has "a pair of eyes for a young lioness or eagle" (*SGT*, 161), draws herself up "as a snake does when it is ready to strike" (*SGT,* 152), stands on "one leg, like a big stork" (*SGT,* 162), fights "[l]ike a young she bear" (*SGT*, 154), and has a "lioness's roar deep within her voice" (*SGT*, 159), and to older male characters such as her father, the Count of Hopballehus, who scrutinizes Boris von Schreckenstein "like an old man gorilla" (*SGT*, 155). The figure is used by about virtually every kind of character in virtually every type of story by virtually every type of narrator, even by one of Dinesen's few first-person narrators, Vilhelm of "Alkmene," for whom the eponymous heroine appears "like a kid with the roe" (*WT*, 201), "a small cute dog" (*WT*, 201), and "a fish that leaps in a brook" (*WT*, 202).[1]

Nowhere have human-animal comparisons proved more contentious, however, than in critical debates about *Out of Africa* (1937). In discussions of this text, Dinesen's use of this trope is routinely critiqued as a racist practice that dehumanizes Africans in ways that reveal her complicity with colonial and neocolonial ideology. In this chapter I will neither seek to deny that language is embroiled in history, nor will I dispute that specific rhetorical figures have sociopolitical resonances that make them far from innocent. It is unquestionable that Dinesen, as the manager of a 6000–acre coffee farm in today's Kenya (then British East Africa) over a seventeen-year period (1914–1931), was implicated in European colonialism as "witness, participant, and accuser" (Kjældgaard

1 In "Copenhagen Season," Dinesen appears to mock her own fondness for human-animal comparisons. In this story Professor Sivertsen, a painter "of European fame" (*LT*, 270) but with "a little pink full-moon face [...] most of all like the posterior of an infant" (*LT*, 271) shocks his well-bred listeners by likening their human noses to those of animals: "'There are here,' the artist unconcernedly continued, 'muzzles of antelopes and gazelles and snouts of panthers and foxes. And as to beaks, my dear, as to beaks! There are eagles' beaks and cockatoos,' small strong owls' beaks almost hidden in the soft fullness of the cheeks, pelicans' beaks with provident pouches beneath them, and long beaks of gentle, inquisitive snipes'" (*LT*, 272).

2009b, 135 [author's translation]). It is indisputable, too, that approximations of animals and people have been deployed in stereotyping individuals, in stigmatizing certain national or ethnic groups, in denying certain lower-status groups equal rights, independence, or access to goods, and even in justifying mistreatment, dispossession, war, and genocide. In the history of colonialism, traditional beliefs in a divinely ordained hierarchical chain of being were bolstered by misinterpretations of evolutionary science, enabling Europeans to represent and treat non-Europeans as lower-ranking creatures (Elder, Wolch and Emel 1998). The argument in this chapter is in no way designed to exonerate perpetrators of racist dehumanization or to downplay the violence that their actions involve.

What motivates the following discussion, however, is my desire for a fuller understanding of Dinesen's anthropomorphisms and zoomorphisms and what they might mean when understood both in the specific context of her multifaceted "imaginative counter-discourse" (Zapf 2016, 102) and in the larger framework of the ongoing "nonhuman turn" (Grusin 2015) within the academic humanities and western societies more generally. A proliferation of works within cognitive ethology and other related disciplines (e.g. Masson and McCarthy 1995; Bekoff 2002; Balcombe 2010) complicate traditional understandings by showing that different animals to varying degrees share many features that we think of as exclusively human, including intelligence, humor, self-consciousness, the capacity to learn and transmit language and the ability to experience love, sorrow, empathy, joy, and also (though this is more controversial) a sense of moral right and wrong. At the same time, key thinkers in animal studies and critical posthumanism including Jacques Derrida (2002), Donna Haraway (2003), Giorgio Agamben (2004), and Cary Wolfe (2010) have deconstructed the terms "human" and "animal" and stressed "naturecultural" (Haraway 2003, 63) interconnectedness, hybridization, and entanglement. Many humans find themselves increasingly uncertain about our own humanity, increasingly obliged to conceptualize other creatures' animality differently, and increasingly conscious of the extent to which we co-evolved along, depend upon, and share our lives and world with members of other species. As Pieter Vermeulen puts it, "[h]uman life in the Anthropocene discovers that what is believed to be its human history has now to be remembered differently – as always entangled with non-human life" (2017, 186).

While I neither discount Dinesen's association with colonialism nor dismiss humanist critique as irrelevant, in this chapter I place her in the tradition of "zoopoetics" (Derrida 2002, 364) alongside "poets and prophets" (Derrida 2002, 383) like Jonathan Swift and Franz Kafka and in the company of "those men and women who admit taking upon themselves the address of an animal" (Derrida 2002, 383). Furthermore, I consider her insistent troubling of

the human/animal divide, around which so many of the intellectual, political, and scientific endeavors of the West cohere, a prominent manifestation of her ecological power. Consciously deployed rhetorical devices, I argue, Dinesen's human-animal morphings blur the previously assumed clear delineations between the human and the nonhuman and lay the basis for a posthumanist ethics and politics of connectedness and entanglement.

I begin by briefly reconsidering Kenyan postcolonial novelist and critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's influential 1980 speech and essay "A Tremendous Service in Rectifying the Harm Done to Africa," which ignited the dehumanization polemic, and by characterizing the little-known response that it prompted from Danish poet and critic Thorkild Bjørnvig. A fuller examination of *Out of Africa's* interspecies crossings, I then show, makes Dinesen appear less a racist preserver of social hierarchies and more a zoopoetic critic of entrenched human/animal distinctions, for whom "what is 'proper' to mankind" is "to be inhabited by the inhuman" (Lyotard 1991, 2). Dinesen's category-confounding tropes and images accumulate, complicate, and compound each other's effects, I argue, not to safeguard the vaunted humanity of the white subject over against subaltern animalized Africans but rather to revision the human/animal distinction itself as always already "thoroughly breached" (Haraway 2004, 10). To extend the scope of my reading, I subsequently introduce elements from human-plant studies and critical plant studies that help me read *Out of Africa* as a "phytopoetic" (Jacobs 2019) text that also brings plants and their key influence on human culture, society, and identity to consciousness in challenging ways. What Paul Ricoeur (1970, 356) calls "the hermeneutics of suspicion" dominate many recent interpretations of *Out of Africa*, which is widely perceived as a text that speaks of and to the nonhuman merely to embellish its Eurocentric and reactionary vision. Yet while *Out of Africa* cannot and should not be divorced from its historical circumstances, I argue that the text's acute sensitivity to the dynamic vitalism of the animal and vegetal worlds pushes it well beyond pastoral ideology.

2 Ngũgĩ and Bjørnvig

One of *Out of Africa*'s dominant rhetorical tropes is anthropomorphism, which is the imputation of human characteristics, qualities, or capabilities to animals:

> In the Ngong Forest I have also seen, on a narrow path through thick growth, in the middle of a very hot day, the Giant Forest Hog, a rare person to meet. He came suddenly past me, with his wife and three young

> pigs, at a great speed, the whole family looking like uniform, bigger and smaller figures cut out in dark paper, against the sunlit green behind them. It was a glorious sight, like a reflection in a forest pool, like a thing that had happened a thousand years ago. (*OA*, 62)

Even more conspicuous, however, and far more controversial, is the use of reverse anthropomorphism, or zoomorphism, a figure that appears in those countless instances when human characters are given animal names, features, or characteristics:

> Upon that day, Kaninu and his son arrived a long time before the Police Officer. Kaninu presented Kabero to me in a jovial manner, but at heart he was a little frightened of his recovered son. He had reason to be so, for the Masai Reserve had had from the farm a small lamb, and now gave us back a young leopard. Kabero must have had Masai blood in him, the habits and discipline of Masai life could not in themselves have worked the metamorphosis. Here he stood, a Masai from head to foot. (*OA*, 129)

How to read such human/animal blurring has become a (if not *the*) most controversial topic in recent Dinesen criticism. Speaking at the Danish Royal Library's 75th anniversary in 1980, the Kenyan writer and critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o caused a stir when he launched a seemingly scandalous accusation of Dinesen, then and now Denmark's most renowned twentieth-century writer. Ngũgĩ lays into Dinesen, indicting her with "racism [...] persuasively put forward as love," and labelling *Out of Africa* "one of the most dangerous books ever written about Africa" (1980, 133).[2] Exhibit A in Ngũgĩ's case is Dinesen's use of animal images and comparisons to characterize certain African characters, such as her Kikuyu cook Kamante, who is at one point (*OA*, 37) likened to a dog:

> In the same book, *Out of Africa*, she writes a great deal about her cook; Kamante. But he is described in terms of a pet dog. I quote: "Kamante could have no idea as to how a dish of ours ought to taste and he was in spite of his conversation and his connection with civilization at heart an arrant Kikuyu rooted in the traditions of his tribe and in his faith in them as the only way of living worthy of a human being. He did at times taste the food he cooked, but with a distrustful face like a witch who takes a

2 Kikuyu traditionally use patronyms instead of surnames, and therefore Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is referred to by the given name Ngũgĩ instead of Thiong'o or wa Thiong'o.

> sip out of her cauldron. He stuck to the maize-cob of his fathers, even here his intelligence sometimes failed him and he came and offered me a Kikuyu delicacy, a roasted sweet potato, or a lump of sheep's fat, even as a civilized dog who has lived for a long time with people will place a bone on the floor before you as a present." So to Karen Blixen, Kamante is comparable to a civilised dog that has lived long with human beings, Europeans of course. (Ngũgĩ 1980, 65)

Using the combative tone characteristic of first-generation postcolonial critics, Ngũgĩ in Salman Rushdie's phrase here and elsewhere "writes back" (qtd. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 32) to the imperial center of social and cultural power that Dinesen (fairly or unfairly) comes to embody. Ngũgĩ's charge is clearly reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's 1975 all-out attack on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and behind Achebe stands the empowering presence of Frantz Fanon.[3] In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that colonialism constructs its "Manichean world" (1963, 41) when "it dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal" (1963, 42). The use of human-animal comparison has been a central and enduring component of colonial discourse and a strategy by which subordinate peoples have been rendered subhuman. Therefore, Fanon insists, the possibility of "decolonization" hinges upon the strength with which the oppressed renounce their animal status and claim a human one. The "new men" envisioned by Fanon will revolt against the colonial discourse that has kept them in chains. Ironically, they will "roar every time they hear themselves called an animal by the other. For they know they are not animals" (1963, 43). Following this precept, Ngũgĩ repeatedly and bluntly labels Dinesen "another writer in the racist tradition" who "in all her descriptions of [...] African characters resorts to animal imagery" (1981a, 17), and he demands that "Danish people face up to the content in her work and not just see the beauty of the prose" (1981b, 112). In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, for example, Ngũgĩ writes that Dinesen "[a]s if in compensation for unfulfilled desires and longings [...] turned Kenya into a vast erotic dreamland in which her several white lovers appeared as young

3 Achebe originally labelled Conrad "a bloody racist," but he later softened the phrase to "a thoroughgoing racist" (2006, 343). Another possible influence is English-Zimbabwean novelist and critic Doris Lessing, who remarks in a review of *Out of Africa* that Dinesen "never saw that her 6,000 acres were not hers, and that it was not enough to call the Kikuyu squatters (similarly, masters, servants, lions, kings, chameleons) even if she did count herself a squatter with them" (1975, 151).

gods and her Kenyan servants as usable curs and other animals" (1981c, 35). In a later interview, he once again explains his resentment by asserting that Dinesen "loved [Africans] the same way that people love their animals" (Jussawalla 1991, 152).

Published soon after Ngũgĩ's pioneering polemic, Kenyan-born postcolonial critic Abdul JanMohammed's *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* provides a much more balanced and carefully historicized assessment of Dinesen's place in colonial history and literature. Comparing her favorably with British colonial writers like Joyce Cary, JanMohammed considers Dinesen "a major exception to the [...] pattern of conquest and irresponsible exploitation" whose "sense of obligation and [...] genuine affection for the Africans are overwhelmingly evident in her sentiments and actions" (1983, 57). Numerous Dinesen scholars (e.g. Thisted 2004; Brantly 2013: Kjældgaard 2009b; Oxfeldt 2010, 106–142; Stecher-Hansen 2014, 155–219,) have subsequently intervened in the debate, offering further nuance and complexity.[4] However, it is Ngũgĩ's more uncompromising charges – that *Out of Africa* is a "racist" text and that for Dinesen "[t]he African is an animal" (1981c, 35) – that have resonated most strongly among postcolonial critics (e.g. Granqvist 1984, 193–196; Nixon 1986; Knipp 1990, 6–8; C. M. Shaw 1995, 21–24; S. Lewis 2003, 111–128; K. H. Petersen 2008; Shadle 2015, 45–47; Barrett 2017, 241–242). In many cases, claims that Dinesen "dehumanizes Africans" (Knipp 1990, 7) or practices "deliberate dehumanization" (Vera 2001, 115) are simply taken for granted and seem to require little argument.

My response to the controversy is anticipated and informed by Thorkild Bjørnvig's little-known and never-translated 1982 reply "Afrikansk efterspil" ("African Coda"), which was published in *Bogens verden* (*The World of Books*), the same librarians' journal that first carried Ngũgĩ's original address. An ecopoet and ecocritic *avant la lettre*, Bjørnvig was no apologist for conservative neocolonialism. On the contrary, his many essays and *miljødigte* (environmental poems) published in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s demonstrate his awareness of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011) and his concern with wide-ranging issues

4 There is an equally protracted and somewhat parallel controversy surrounding Dinesen's brief account of the June 1923 Jasper Abraham murder trial in the chapter "Kitosh's Story" (*OA*, 267–271). While bracketing this complex debate, I will briefly note that I concur with Kirsten Thisted's assessment that Dinesen considers the colonial court's use of "the wish-to-die-theory" (*OA*, 271) a "horrible load of nonsense" (Thisted 2004, 111 [author's translation]).

affecting both the Global North and the Global South.[5] Bjørnvig was also no uncritical follower of Dinesen, with whom he had a well-documented intense and conflictual relationship ending in an abrupt 1954 break (Bjørnvig 1983). In his brief reply, Bjørnvig reads Ngũgĩ's critique as testimony to the global spread and power of "the Cartesian attitude towards the environment" (1982, 362 [author's translation]). He acknowledges the legitimacy and necessity of responses to "the lengthy and extensive bloody and humiliating violations of the native African population by members of the white race" (1982, 363 [author's translation]). In the specific case, however, he regrets that Ngũgĩ has not read more deeply into Dinesen's writings, or even into *Out of Africa,* since doing so might have nuanced his understanding and helped him see beyond the invidious comparison of Kamante to a "civilized dog" (*OA*, 37). Most astutely, Bjørnvig questions the efficacy of combatting European hegemony with Cartesian dualism, the very conceptual tool that has undergirded colonialism as well as other repressive regimes:

> But *how*, one may ask, how can he be so decisively wrong? He can do this because his attitude towards animals is not that of the African before the Europeans, but an unconscious Cartesianism: for him, the definitive dividing line is between the animals and the humans. To him, it looks as if Karen Blixen draws the dividing line between the white people on one side – and the Africans and the animals on the other. Offended and resentful, he now wants to drag the Africans across the dividing line to the white people, and away from the animal world. (1982, 363 [author's translation])

Bjørnvig is aware but only briefly admits that animalization has indeed been deployed to perpetrate racism for centuries. He also somewhat problematically assumes that a different, more authentic, non-Cartesian "African" mentality existed "before the Europeans." His response, however, foreshadows comments by later posthumanist critics of postcolonialism (e.g. Armstrong 2002; Chagani 2016), who caution that the very act of discovering and condemning instances of animalization entails an implicit acceptance of human superiority over and separation from nonhumans, and that this maneuver risks perpetuating representational and physical violence against animals and foreclosing the possibility of thinking humanity and animality differently. While rightly protesting the

5 In his poem "Muroroa" from *Epimetheus* (1990), for example, Bjørnvig writes of France's nuclear tests in Polynesia as "the trivial and necrophiliac endgame of colonization" (1998, 447 [author's translation]).

wrongs committed against humans, in other words, Ngũgĩ can himself be criticized for preserving and even entrenching notions of humanity and animality that can always be activated in an array of ways to justify violence against many different beings deemed "animal." The risk, as later scholars have put it, is that "if we allow the human/animal distinction to remain intact [...] then the machinery of speciesism and animalization will be available to use against various subjugated groups, animal or human, as history well shows" (Cole et al. 2011, 103). Ngũgĩ critiques Dinesen from the vantage point of an unexamined humanism and anthropocentrism, hoping thereby to expand the ambit of the human, widen the boundaries of politico-ethical considerability, and augment the status of Africans, who have been unjustly denied membership in the human community. He does not, however, instigate a deeper questioning of the exceptionalist othering that pits humans against animals in the first place, exposing members of the latter, historically and culturally contingent category to violence and exploitation. Most regrettably, for Bjørnvig, he never recognizes how profoundly this very questioning informs and impels Dinesen's writing in *Out of Africa* and elsewhere.

3 Human Animals

Among many generic designations that could be used, including memoir, autobiography, quasi-novel, autofiction, guestbook, travelogue, mythopoeia, tragedy, and elegy, *Out of Africa* is also a literary bestiary of sorts, depicting animals such as elephants, lions, giraffes, baboons, leopards, oxen, dogs, iguanas, snakes, chickens, grasshoppers, deerhounds, wildebeests, hyenas, wild dogs, storks, fleas and ants, to mention but a few. While some of these animal characters are mentioned only in passing, others are named, individualized, brought into the narrative, and to varying degrees given human characteristics.

One of *Out of Africa*'s most striking character sketches is the portrait of the bushbuck gazelle kid Lulu, who is rescued and adopted by Dinesen, becoming one of two eponymous protagonists in the first section "Kamante and Lulu":

> [N]obody could be of a gentler demeanour than Lulu was when she came and lay down, in the manner of a perfect lady who demurely gathers her skirts about her and will be in no one's way. She drank the milk with a polite, pernickety mien, as if she had been pressed by an overkind hostess. She insisted on being scratched behind the ears, in a pretty forbearing way, like a young wife who pertly permits her husband a caress.

> When Lulu grew up and stood in the flower of her young loveliness she was a slim delicately rounded doe, from her nose to her toes unbelievably beautiful. She looked like a minutely painted illustration to Heine's song of the wise and gentle gazelles by the flow of the river Ganges. [...] But Lulu was not really gentle, she had the so-called devil in her. She had, to the highest degree, the feminine trait of appearing to be exclusively on the defensive, concentrated on guarding the integrity of her being, when she was really, with every force in her, bent upon the offensive. (*OA*, 67–68)

In writing about Lulu, Dinesen might seem to produce a flagrant instance of "the pathetic fallacy," the term coined by English Victorian critic John Ruskin to censure the "falseness in all our impressions of external things" (1965, 63) that poets and artists produce when they endow nonhuman beings and phenomena with features and qualities that only humans truly possess. Dinesen, we might argue, mirrors herself in Lulu and molds her into an animal surrogate or doppelganger. As Dinesen discovers a deep sense of belonging in an unfamiliar world, Lulu finds a welcoming home among creatures wholly unlike herself. As Dinesen matures during her African years, so Lulu evolves from a "real shameless young coquette" (*OA*, 68) into a "young wife" and "married daughter of the house" with her own "baby" (*OA*, 69) and "husband" (*OA*, 71). Dinesen breaks bourgeois convention when she takes up with Denys Finch Hatton and assumes responsibility for the running of the coffee farm. Analogously, Lulu is pictured as moody, strong, and independent-minded, gambling all on a great love affair with her "*bwana*" (*OA*, 69) in the bush, but later reappearing at the head of a "forest matriarchy" (*OA*, 74). Dinesen even invests Lulu with qualities characteristic of the aristocratic class with which she associates herself. Thus, Lulu becomes a "young Chinese lady of the old school" (*OA*, 66), a "perfect lady" (*OA*, 67), or "young princess in exile" showing "no more meanness that King Louis Philippe" (*OA*, 71), and manifesting certain essentially noble qualities – beauty, elegance, capriciousness, indifference to risk – that make it an "honour to meet her" (*OA*, 72).

I want to suggest, however, that the main force of Dinesen's playful anthropomorphisms, here and throughout the text, is to complicate the biologistic, reductionistic, and deterministic language in which we normally represent animals by suggesting that animals (like people) have *individual agency*. The notion of animal agency is controversial and troubling for many humans, who are comfortable assuming that nonhuman animals will always act in ways that are predictable and mechanistic. Charles Darwin famously argued that the difference between humans and other animals was "one of degree and not of

kind," insisting that "the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, &c, of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals" (2009, 105). Yet agency has consistently been keyed to high-level cognitive functions – free will, self-awareness, creativity, moral sensibility, consciousness of death or some other faculty – that supposedly only humans possess, and thus it has often been assumed that animals do not show any real kind of agency because their actions are merely instinctive or mechanical.

Dinesen, however, invites us to think of Lulu as an animal with a biography and not merely a biology, a character who performs actions that are experientially meaningful and actively authored, rather than simply acting out predictable species-typical forms of behavior in response to stimuli. More than a generic member of her species, *tragelaphus sylvaticu*, Lulu is a specific, unique, and irreplaceable creature who can never be explained by reference to generalizing categories, and whose complex behavior exhibits a range of emotions including anger, impatience, kindness, and compassion. Lulu exists in the text as an individual creature with a strong interest in her own wellbeing, a distinct and idiosyncratic character, and the capacity to affect both her own life and the lives of those around her. To Dinesen, Lulu is "headstrong already as a child" (*OA*, 65), "a superior, independent being" (*OA*, 71), "furious" with "moods [...] beyond control or computation" and with "the so-called devil in her":

> Sometimes she walked away from the house for hours, or for a whole afternoon. Sometimes when the spirit came upon her and her discontent with her surroundings reached a climax, she would perform [...] on the lawn in front of the house, a war-dance, which looked like a brief zigzagged prayer to Satan. (*OA*, 68)

The repeated references to the Devil help establish Lulu as a center of power, a vital, volatile and in some ways troubling presence on the farm, who does what she does not to please anybody else but "for the satisfaction of her own heart" (*OA*, 68), and who "obtained for herself a commanding position in the house and was treated with respect by all" (*OA*, 65). Thus, when Lulu leaves the compound for the bush, the narrator represents her not as blindly following a biologically determined mating instinct, but rather as enacting a deep-rooted willfulness and a defiant love of freedom that have been part of her character from the very beginning. Similarly, when the "married" Lulu returns to the compound with her "husband" (*OA*, 69) and "baby" (*OA*, 72), Dinesen insists that she is not simply tapping into a well- known food source but rather making a generous peace-offering. Here as elsewhere, Dinesen seems to use

anthropomorphism consciously and knowingly to goad (or provoke) her readers into thinking of animals as complex, cognitively able creatures that (like humans) have individualized modes of existences and take active roles in shaping their own lives.

At the same time, by imaginatively figuring Lulu in certain human roles and situations – "a perfect lady who demurely gathers her skirts about her," "a young wife who pertly permits her husband a caress" (*OA*, 67), "the married daughter of the house on a visit" (*OA*, 72) – Dinesen situates the deer as a social agent willing and able to form and maintain multiple connections and relationships. Animals do not merely exist in the world but help make the world that exists, and far from being solitary and isolated, Lulu enjoys shifting and complex relations both with members of her own species (her mate and kid) and with other non-bushbuck members of the household (Dinesen, Kamante, the children on the farm and the Scottish deerhounds who resent her "commanding position"). As the chapter title ("Kamante and Lulu") suggests, Lulu plays an active role, along with other animals and with key human agents (Dinesen, Kamante, Denys Finch Hatton, Kinanjui, Farrah Aden and many others), in shaping the coffee farm into a distinct multispecies *oikos*: "Lulu came in form the wild world to show that we were on good terms with it, and she made my house one with the African landscape, so that nobody could tell where the one stopped and the other began" (*OA*, 73).

The portrait of Lulu is matched by many other strongly anthropomorphic segments, such as the brief sketch of the pony Poor-box, who "proved himself the most intelligent being on the farm" (*OA*, 202–203), the chapter devoted to the deerhound Pania (*OA*, 275–276), whom Dinesen endows with a human-like capacity for humor and laughter, and the story of the male-female pair of lions who pay homage to Finch Hatton's memory by visiting his grave (*OA*, 345–346).[6] *Out of Africa* implicitly questions what Dinesen calls "man's

6 Anthropomorphism is used to humorous effect in "The Diver," where Dinesen lets an old female cowfish with horn-rimmed spectacles parody the Book of Genesis, where God creates man "in his own image" and grants him "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26–28): "'The fish,' [the cowfish] proclaims, 'amongst all creatures is the one most carefully and accurately made in the image of the Lord. All things work together for the good of her, and from this we may conclude that she is called according to his purpose.' […] 'Man can move but in one plane, and is tied to the earth. Still the earth supports him only by the narrow space under the soles of his two feet; he must bear his own weight and sigh beneath it.' […] 'We fish are upheld and supported on all sides. We lean confidently and harmoniously upon our element. We move in all dimensions, and whatever course we take, the mighty waters out of reverence for our virtue change shape accordingly'" (*AD*, 15).

superiority over the dumb world" (*OA*, 288) by imagining nonhuman creatures not as passive and inert but as vital, dynamic, and even disruptive: "Swimming birds have purposeful flight [...] they are on a journey, going from one place to another;" "crested cranes, which come on to the newly rolled and planted maize-land, to steal the maize out of ground, make up for the robbery by being birds of good omen;" "storks have a gay time in Africa;" "the grasshoppers came again; for two or three months we had continued attacks of them on the farm" (*OA*, 186, 272, 273, 314). Anthropomorphized animals in *Out of Africa* are more than blank screens on which Dinesen projects her own feelings. Rather, anthropomorphism is a strategic device that Dinesen employs to investigate how animals live in the world, representing action as performed by, rather than simply happening to, animals. To Dinesen, agency is a continuum, not limited to the complex and intentional acts of rational men and women but distributed to less self-conscious actors such as deer.

4 Animal Humans

Let me now address the more explosive issue of Dinesen's zoomorphic comparisons of humans to animals. Focusing especially on her now notorious likening of Kamante to a "civilized dog," Ngũgĩ reads Dinesen's animalization of African characters as "crude zoomorphism" (Garrard 2012, 209), a politically offensive gesture that nostalgically or vindictively repeats the violent dehumanization imposed upon Africans under European colonial rule. Language that blurs the human/animal distinction is anathema to him because it ostensibly leaves white colonists in sole possession of all the qualities that distinguish the proper human subject – intelligence, language, intentionality, psychological complexity – while once again imprisoning non-Europeans in a position of less-than-human passiveness, unconsciousness, and speechlessness.

Yet the myriad "boundary pollutions" (Haraway 2004, 37) of *Out of Africa* defy any such simple schematization. At various points in the narrative, African characters are compared to animals including ostriches (*OA,* 10), camels (*OA*, 10) ants, spurfowl, fishes (*OA,* 18), bats (*OA,* 39), frogs (*OA,* 45), chickens (*OA,* 88), fawns (*OA*. 89), badgers (*OA,*99), dogs (*OA*, 102), oxen (*OA*, 106), bulls (*OA*, 111), mules (*OA,* 121), lions (*OA,* 126, 180), ostriches (*OA*, 128) leopards (*OA,* 129), cobras (*OA,* 130), gazelles (*OA,* 136), birds of prey (*OA*, 143), sheep (*OA*, 144, 319, 366), crocodiles (*OA,* 161), doves (*OA,* 170), elephants (*OA*, 172, 362), wolves (*OA,* 174), falcons (*OA*, 180), and giraffes (*OA*, 369). Meanwhile, European characters, of whom there are significantly fewer, appear as albatrosses (*OA*, 53), carrion-birds, sea-birds (*OA,* 55), lions (*OA,* 67, 260), fish, giraffes,

bulls, elephants (*OA,* 101), serpents (*OA,* 102), wolves, hyenas (*OA,* 181), goats (*OA*, 191), birds (*OA*, 234), sparrows, and storks (*OA,* 293).[7] The Swedish "vagabond" (*OA*, 190) actor Emmanuelson appears a "lonely figure" like "a hunted animal" (*OA,* 191). A minor character neither black nor white, the unnamed Indian high priest who visits Choleim Hussein, "seemed to take an interest in birds" and was "like a bird himself" (*OA,* 168). Dinesen's friend and ally, the Kikuyu leader Kinanjui, is figured with reference to his "impressive" (*OA,* 140) elephantine body, while another of the narrative's most privileged characters, the English aristocrat Berkeley Cole, is compared no less than six times to an ordinary domestic cat (*OA,* 207, 208, 216). Characters are not only yoked to animals by the narrator but also practice such yoking in relation to each other and themselves. Young Somali women, for example, compare their ethnic group's principle of marital exogamy to "that of a stud-farm of purebreds" (*OA*, 173), while Kikuyu children mockingly imitate the injured Kamante's resemblance to "a stork with a broken wing" (*OA*, 60). Africans both give their teams of oxen "the proper names of white men" (*OA*, 252) and like to "name white men after animals" (*OA*, 101), and hereby,

> a person who has for many years been known by the name of an animal in the end comes to feel familiar with and related to the animal: he recognizes himself in it. [...]
>
> Once in the London Zoo, I saw again an old retired Government Official, whom in Africa I had known as *Bwâna Tembu* – Mr. Elephant. He was standing, all by himself, before the Elephant-house, sunk in deep contemplation of the Elephants. Perhaps he would go there often. His Native servants would have thought it in the order of things that he should be there, but probably no one in all London, except I who was there only for a few days, would have quite understood him. (*OA,* 101)

Humans in *Out of Africa* exist in a never-ending process of becoming-animal, as "both men and beasts" (OA, 101), and few characters escape this

7 In the spring of 1937, Dinesen rewrote *Out of Africa* as *Den afrikanske Farm* (*The African Farm*) and interestingly the Danish text includes several additional and revised animalizations. For example, "the old men of the farm" (*OA*, 92) who gather for the *kyama* (council) following the shooting accident become "en Flok skaldede Gribbe" ("a wake of bald vultures") (*DAF*, 88), and Kaninu is characterizes as "den gamle Ræv" ("the old fox") (*DAF*, 121). Kinanjui's "rodent manner" (*OA*, 323) when faced with a thunderstorm becomes the fear of "en Kanin, der ser sig om efter sit Hul" ("a rabbit looking around for its burrow") (*DAF*, 278).

process of self-estrangement. No human figure, regardless of race, class, nation, gender, or age, seems entirely safe in his or her humanity. Even Dinesen and Finch Hatton, when they soar about the plains in the latter character's Moth airplane, disturb a herd of wild cattle like "bird[s] of the air" (*OA*, 234).[8]

Pace Ngũgĩ and others, I observe that Dinesen generally avoids telltale racist comparisons of non-European people to insects, vermin, or apes.[9] When she applies animalization to a wide range of both African and European characters, including her best friends in both groups, she resists rather than corroborates the vulgar misunderstanding of racial relations in evolutionary terms. In my interpretation, the species-mixing language characteristic of Dinesen's "generic hybrid" (Heitmann 2021, 67 [author's translation]) is much less about race, authority, and hierarchy than it is about shared embodiment, vulnerability, and suffering. Zoomorphism's sway is not to shore up certain kinds of power but to reveal a fundamental *lack* of power that can make humans recognize their kinship with each other and with nonhumans.

In an essay that has become particularly seminal within animal and posthumanist studies, Jacques Derrida takes up Jeremy Bentham's 1823 question about animals' capacity for suffering, thereby emphasizing the passivity that is, according to Derrida, fundamentally connected to the notion of vulnerability. Questioning humanist models of subjectivity premised on rights and capabilities, Derrida argues for a different understanding of the relation between human beings and other living things, concentrating on the precarious existence of the animal and the embodied "finitude that we share with animals" and that limits our own sovereignty and autonomy. The capacity to suffer, Derrida suggests, is a strange kind of "possibility without power," less a possession than a being-possessed, which is equally definitive of animality *and* humanity (2002, 396). The affective experience of shared suffering opens the possibility of grounding an alternative ethics in embodied vulnerability and empathy, rather than in human "power over all the other living beings" (2002, 386).

Anat Pick uses the terms "creature," "creaturely," and "creatureliness" to think of corporeal suffering as not only part of the human condition but "an expression of something *in*human as well" (2011, 5). Within the western world, Pick notes, animals are often viewed as nothing more than "pure necessity, material

8 The Danish version of the text strengthens this human-animal comparison: "Hjorden [...] kunde ikke skjule sig for Himlens Fugle, og det var os" ("The herd [...] could not hide from the birds of the sky, and they were us") (*DAF*, 200).

9 In "The Monkey," of course, it is a white aristocratic woman, the Prioress Cahtinka, whose identity proves inseparable from that of her "little gray monkey [...] from Zanzibar" (*SGT*, 137).

bodies pitted against human mindfulness and soulfulness" (2011, 4). To read or write "through a creaturely prism" (2011, 5), however, is to foreground the vulnerability that comes with embodiment and that human beings share with nonhuman ones. Pick particularly wants to explore "whether and how dehumanization can be reclaimed as, at least partly, positive" (2011, 6).[10] Thinkers, writers, and filmmakers with a stake in the creaturely, she argues, abandon ideas of human uniqueness and sovereignty to "explore the regions deemed animal (even vegetative) that lurk within the human itself" (2011, 6). Such "grappling with what is inhuman in us" (2011, 6) can chasten fantasies of grandeur and serve ends that are not only ecological, fostering relations between and across human and nonhuman lives, but "inherently ethical" (2011, 3) as well.

In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen covers years (1914–1931) that were punctuated by long bouts of illness, frequent hospitalizations, and surprisingly extensive periods (June, 1915 to December 1916, August 1919 to December 1920, May 1925 to February 1926, May 1929 to January 1930) when she left the farm to visit family and have her syphilis treated by French and Danish doctors who administered injections of mercury, bismuth, and salvarsan (arsenic).[11] *Out of Africa* has been characterized as "elegiac" (S. Lewis 2003, 34) and as having "loss" as its "psychic reference point" (Thurman 1982, 314), and although Dinesen writes little of her own specific infirmity, the book is riddled with pained, distressed, afflicted, and incapacitated bodies. The first character to be discussed at any length, the wounded Kamante, has "legs [...] covered with deep running sores from the thigh to the heel" (*OA*, 21) and eyes "dim like the eyes of a dead person," looking "as if he could not have more than a few weeks to live" (*OA*, 22). Beginning with the appearance of the "half-dead" (*OA*, 24) Kamante, stunted and isolated by "his long illness" (*OA,* 30), Dinesen's narrative pauses over a shooting accident in which one young boy is killed, another badly disfigured,

10 In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett makes a similar claim about the often despised trope of anthropomorphism. "A touch of anthropomorphism," she writes, "can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontological distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations. In revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up parallels between material forms in 'nature' and those in 'culture,' anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphism" (2010, 99).

11 It seems certain that Dinesen's Swedish husband infected her with syphilis in their first year of marriage, but the cause(s) of the symptoms that plagued her throughout her life, including abdominal pain, headaches, fever, diarrhea, anemia, vomiting, and weight loss, remain contested. Judith Thurman (1982, 136–137) accepts Dinesen's own physician Mogens Fog's (1978) diagnosis of *taber dorsalis* (syphilis in the third, chronic stage), while Kaare Weisman (1995) believes that Dinesen's health was ruined not by syphilis by her doctors' prolonged heavy-metal therapies. A third medical doctor, Linda Donelson, argues that Dinesen suffered from depression and panic attacks possibly "aggravated by amphetamines, which she took liberally in her later years" (1995, 354).

and three others wounded. It then proceeds through a litany of calamities – drought, disease, an earthquake, a fatal flogging, a murder, a case of death by poisoning, an airplane crash, a swarm of grasshoppers – while lamenting the deaths of many important human characters (Finch Hatton, Cole, Kinanjui, the cook Esa) and culminating in Dinesen's bankruptcy, the splitting-apart of her household, the selling of her farm to real estate developers, and the symbolic death of her final departure from Africa. Dinesen plays doctor or "quack" (*OA,* 22) to the farm's numerous sick and wounded, with "generally between two and a dozen sick people up by my house" on mornings:

> My patients waited on a paved terrace outside my house. Here they squatted, – the old skeletons of men with tearing coughs and running eyes, the young slim smooth brawlers with black eyes and bruised mouths, and the mothers with their feverish children, like little dry flowers, hanging upon their necks. I often had bad burns to treat, for the Kikuyu at night sleep round the fires in their huts, and the piles of burning wood or charcoal may collapse and slide down on them. (*OA,* 23)

The shadows of illness, injury, accident, physical decay, and death hang over *Out of Africa*, as characters perish from stabs, burns, gunshots, heart failures, animal attacks, work accidents, or mechanical mishaps or succumb to the plague, sleeping sickness, smallpox, malaria, gangrene, and the Spanish Flu. When she first meets Kamante, Dinesen's narrator expects "to see the vultures, which are never far away from death on the plan, high up in the pale burning air over his head" (*OA*, 22). Once corpselike himself, Kamante later surpasses his fear of cadavers, helping Dinesen "carry three dead people between us, in the course of our life on the farm" (*OA*, 53). One of these, the young Kikuyu girl Wamboi, is "run over by a bullock cart outside my house and killed," her "small dark had" crushed by the wheels (*OA*, 97–98). Kinanjui dies from an infected leg "terrible to look at, so swollen that you could not distinguish the place of the knee, and in the lamplight I could see that it was streaked all the way from the hip to the foot with black and yellow streaks" (*OA*, 323).[12] To write about her closest neighbors, the nomadic, hunting, and cattle-herding Masai, Dinesen adopts the trope of "the vanishing Indian" that her father, Wilhelm Dinesen, used to characterize native North Americans. In *Letters from the Hunt*, Boganis laments the plight of the Plains Indians, whose material and

12 *Shadows on the Grass* lists further diseases including meningitis, typhoid fever, and parasitic infections (*OA*, 421), adding case stories such as that of an "old squatter woman staggering up to the house wailing and blind" after an attack by a spitting cobra, her "tongue and gums [...] swollen to suffocation and [...] deadly pale blue" (*OA*, 424).

cultural dependence on the near-extinct buffalo he believes makes them likely to "die out" (1987, 90). In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen predicts a similarly "tragic fate" (*OA*, 126) for the Masai, "the strange dying nation" (*OA*, 106) who of all indigenous groups appear to her least willing or able to adapt to Westernization. In a well-known paragraph, she pays tribute to the beauty of the traditionally dressed Masai *morani* (male warriors), whose life of strenuous training and diet of "milk and blood" give them their characteristic "swollen smooth faces, full necks and broad rounded shoulders, and the surprising narrowness of their waist and hips, the leanness and spareness of the thigh and knee and the long, straight, sinewy leg" (*OA*, 130). The striking "virility" and "*chic*" (*OA*, 129) of the *morani* mislead, however, for when game animals are reserved for privileged white hunters (such as Dinesen herself), the Masai lose their lifegiving connection with wildlife and nature. When native land (such as Dinesen's own) is enclosed and privatized for agricultural profit, the Masai lose not only their traditional livelihood but, Dinesen argues, their will to live. Therefore, "the Masai women have no children" (*OA*, 106) and therefore "[t]hey all bear us all a grudge, which will be wiped out only when the tribe is wiped out itself" (*OA*, 122).

One character who dies while residing on Dinesen's farm, leaving his corpse for her to bury, is the character known as Old Knudsen:

> He was a countryman of mine, an old blind Dane by the name of Knudsen. […] He was a singular figure to have on a highland farm: so much a creature of the Sea that it was as if we had had an old clipped albatross with us. He was all broken by the hardships of life, and by disease and drink, bent and crooked, with the curious colouring of redhaired people gone white, as if he had in reality strewn ashes upon his head, or as if he was marked by his own element and had been salted. (*OA,* 53)
>
> Old Knudsen, the Dane, had come to the farm, sick and blind, and stayed there for the time it took him to die, a lonely animal. He walked along the roads all bent over his misery; for long periods he was without speech, for he had no strength left over from the hard task of carrying it, or, when he spoke, his voice, like the voice of the wolf or hyena, was in itself a wail. (*OA,* 181).

In *Out of Africa*, the "old white man" (*OA*, 53) with his "frail sunken breast" (*OA*, 55) appears first in "Kamante and Lulu" and later in the chapter "Old Knudsen."[13]

13 As Tom Buk-Swienty explains (2019, 458–465), Old Knudsen is based on Peter Aarup, who stayed on Mbogani for three months and died of alcohol-related heart failure there in early April 1924.

While Old Knudsen is said to have been an incessant talker, *Out of Africa* only lets him speak directly once, when he confesses his "misery and anguish" in "a small hoarse voice": "'I am very sick'" (*OA*, 57). What is conspicuous in the passages about the albatross-, vulture-, wolf-, or hyena-like Old Knudsen, and indeed consistently throughout *Out of Africa*, is how Dinesen uses zoomorphism to puncture the illusion of human sovereignty and power and render *all* humans subject to creaturely weakness, risk, and exposure. Thus, while some animal comparisons (e.g. *OA*, 136, 174) lend human characters a festive vitality, it is nevertheless striking how often Dinesen's figural language works to implicate humans in creatural facticity. The Masai, for example, are characterized collectively as "fighters who had been stopped fighting, a dying lion with his claws clipped, a castrated nation" (*OA*, 126). With his "deep running sores from the thigh to the heel" (*OA,* 21), the "half-dead" (*OA,* 24) Kamante appears "like a sick animal" (*OA,* 21) and has "a good hand with sick animals" (*OA*, 60), while the slowly dying Berkeley Cole's disease is "formidable as is the sickness of a cat" (*OA,* 208). The boy Wanyangerri, who loses half his face in the shooting accident and suffers excruciating pain, moves his arms like "the wings of a chicken [...] after it has had its head cut off" (*OA*, 88). A deaf and dumb Kikuyu boy, Karomenya, is given "the look of a small black Native bull-calf" (*OA,* 295), and when Dinesen's cook Esa lies dying, "[h]is face [...] much changed, and froth, mixed with blood, [running] out from the corners of his pale-blue mouth," he looks at her with "dark, animal-like eyes" (*OA,* 279). No less importantly, the community leader Kinanjui, who ends up dying from a "poisoned leg" (*OA,* 323), likewise puts Dinesen in mind of a maimed and paralyzed animal:

> He was lying on the ground in the shade of the kitchen, with no expression whatever in his face, with blue lips and fingers, dead-cold. It was like having shot an Elephant: by an act of yours a mighty and majestic creature, which has walked the earth, and held his own opinions of everything, is walking it no more. He looked degraded as well, for the Kikuyu had poured water over him, and had taken off him his big cloak of monkey-skin. Naked he was like an animal when you have cut from it the trophy, for the sake of which you have killed it. (*OA,* 138)

In *Out of Africa*, moments of human vulnerability are regularly described through analogies to animals. Dinesen observes that "[w]hen Natives name white men after animals – the fish, the giraffe, the fat bull – their minds run upon the lines of the old fables" (*OA,* 101). *Out of Africa* is itself a kind of fable or fairy tale that lets humans inhabit nonhuman bodies, but its moral is less like that of a story by La Fontaine, Hans Christian Andersen, or Rudyard Kipling

than it is reminiscent of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes: "Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals" (3:19). Neither African nor European humans in *Out of Africa* ever fully coincide with themselves, for to be embodied and mortal is to partake of a fundamental and inescapable creatureliness.[14]

Like Ngũgĩ, then, I find that Dinesen's "humanimal" (Taylor and Signal 2011) characterizations yield troubling and potentially "dangerous" (Ngũgĩ 1980, 133) insights. But what lends *Out of Africa* its discomfiting power, in my understanding, is less its tendency to enforce restrictive hierarchies and reassert unjust power imbalances than the way in which it challenges fixity, invites ontological overlapping, and valorizes relationship, hybridization, and multispecies kinship. In *Out of Africa*, animals are removed from their position as inert and featureless objects, and humans cease being the isolated omnipotent masters of destiny that Descartes would have them be. Anthropomorphism works to endow animals with capacity for meaningful action, but zoomorphism points to a corresponding animal "impropriety" (Derrida 2002, 372) or "not-being-able" (Derrida 2002, 396) that is at the heart of what it means to be human. *Out of Africa* creates "animal people" (Heede 2001, 224–226 [author's translation]) not to denigrate African characters but to remind Dinesen's human readers that they, like other creatures, are naked, improper, and vulnerable to wounding, hunger, decay, and death.[15]

5 Plant Writing

Shifting focus from animals to plants, from "zoopoetics" (Derrida 2002, 363) to "phytopoetics," which Joela Jacobs defines as writing that "highlights the power of plants" (2019, 13), strengthens the case for viewing *Out of Africa* as a book

14 Dinesen returns to this type of creaturely language throughout her writing. In a May 1955 letter to Aage Henriksen following a long period of especially severe illness, for example, she interrupts her Danish text to write, in English, that she feels "as weak as a cat" (*KBD*, 2:289).

15 Heede (2001, 18) draws attention to a remarkable letter to Dinesen in which Otto Casparsson, the Swedish itinerant who inspired both Emmanuelson of *Out of Africa* and Kasparson of "The Deluge at Norderney," responds to *Out of Africa* and appears to anticipate a posthumanist interpretation of the text: "The Baroness classifies man as the most interesting phenomenon in nature's wonderful network but without the absolute priority that she considers herself entitled to. A more unusual view of things, a bit hurtful before you get used to it, though in its stylish objectivity perhaps truer than the generally accepted one" (*KBD*, 1:260 [author's translation]).

devoted to interrogating foundational anthropocentric premises of modern western culture. While animals have long been central to critical discussions of *Out of Africa*, few readers pause to register or consider that greenery sprouts on virtually every page. Already in the book's opening paragraphs, Dinesen draws her readers' attention to vegetal life:

> The trees had a light delicate foliage, the structure of which was different from that of the trees in Europe; it did not grow in bows or cupolas, but in horizontal layers, and the formation gave to the tall solitary trees a likeness to the palms, or a heroic and romantic air like fullrigged ships with their sails clewed up, and to the edge of a wood a strange appearance as if the whole wood were faintly vibrating. Upon the grass of the great plains the crooked bare old thorn-trees were scattered, and the grass was spiced like thyme and bog-myrtle; in some places the scent was so strong, that it smarted in the nostrils. All the flowers that you found on the plains, or upon the creepers and liana in the native forest, were diminutive like flowers of the downs, – only just in the beginning of the long rains a number of big, massive heavy-scented lilies sprang out on the plains. (*OA*, 3–4)

In the chapters that follow, Dinesen proceeds to "herborize" (*OA*, 116) an immense variety of African plant species and plant communities, from "flowers, vegetables and herbs" (*OA*, 315) to many diverse kinds of trees (thorn, mimosa, bamboo, acacia, olive, Cape-chestnut, mango, eucalyptus, grevillea, and many others). The Kenyan highlands comprise distinct types of landscape that each have distinct types of vegetation. There are the "park-like" savannahs and plains, where one finds "a mosaic of little square maize-fields, banana-groves and grassland," "thorn-thickets" and a "bamboo-grove" (*OA*, 5–6). There are the lush "Virgin Forest[s]" of the "Ngong Forest Reserve" (*OA*, 61), where

> [t]he air [...] was cool like water, and filled with the scent of plants, and in the beginning of the long rains when the creepers flowered, you rode through sphere after sphere of fragrance. One kind of African Daphne of the woods, which flowers with a small cream-coloured sticky blossom, had an overwhelming sweet perfume, like lilac,and wild lily of the valley. Here and there, hollow tree-stems were hung up in ropes of hide on a branch; the Kikuyu hung them there to make the bees build in them, and to get honey. (*OA*, 61–62)

At lower altitudes, one finds the "dry, moon-like landscape of the African low country," where "the cactus grows" along with "woods of the might,

wide-branching Mimosa-trees, with thorns like spikes" (*OA*, 5–6). Then, too, there are agricultural areas with "maize and wheat and fruit-farms" (*OA*, 312) and "shambas" (native gardens), where cultivated plants are made to grow. These include not only the "shining young coffee-plants" (*OA*, 6) with its "reddened [ripe] berries" (*OA*, 8), but also "beans ripen[ing] in the fields," "sweet potatoes, that have a vinelike leaf and spread over the ground like a dense entangled mat," and "many varieties of big yellow and green speckled pumpkins" (*OA*, 9). Flax appeals both to sight and touch, as "[a] sky-blue flowering flax-field is a marvelously pretty sight, – like a piece of Heaven on earth and there can be no more gratifying kind of goods to be turning out than the flax fibre, tough and glossy, and slightly greasy to the touch" (*OA*, 308). Dinesen devotes one section to Ingrid Lindström, a neighboring female farmer who successfully transitions from "castor-oil bushes, and soya-beans" into other crops: "[A]fter she had slaved for twelve years at her market-gardening [...] she saved her farm for her family and herself by planting pyrethrum, which is sent to France and is there used in making perfumes" (*OA*, 308). *Out of Africa* dwells on the forms of greenery that Europeans most prize and desire to see grow, such as the delphinium and the peony, which releases "a profusion of fresh sweet scent" and sprouts "a great number of dark carmoisin curvilinear shoots, and later a lot of delicate leaves and rounded buds" (*OA*, 199). However, Dinesen also includes references to "the bold native weeds" that "grow up thick in the fields," such as "the black-jack, which has long scabrous seed-vessels that hang on to your clothes and stockings" (*OA*, 7).

The traditional term for nature-oriented literature is "pastoral," and *African Pastoral* was among the tentative book titles proposed by the American publisher Robert Haas but rejected by Dinesen in the course of their negotiations during the summer and autumn of 1937 (Juhl 1984, 65–67).[16] Robert W. Langbaum characterizes *Out of Africa* as "an authentic pastoral, perhaps the best prose pastoral of our time" (1975, 119), while more recent critical writings on *Out of Africa* have crystallized an influential interpretation that gives "pastoral" a distinctly pejorative inflection, using the term to expose Dinesen's complicity with colonial exploitation, Eurocentric hegemony, and social conservatism. Writing about a safari during World War I, Dinesen recalls a transcendent moment when "[t]he grass was me, and the air, the distant invisible mountains were me, the tired oxen were me. I breathed with the slight night-wind in the thorn-trees" (*OA*, 261).[17] Such protestations of more-than-human belonging

16 In Sweden, however, the book appeared on Albert Bonniers Förlag as *Afrikansk Pastoral* (1937).

17 Preceding these sentences, in the Danish version, appears the sentence "Verden var eet med mig" ("The world was one with me") (*DAF*, 226).

and connectedness, it is argued repeatedly, serve merely to create a false sense of harmony and to repeat the classic pastoral "trick" of "imply[ing] a beautiful relation between rich and poor" (Empson 1974, 111). Borrowing from William Empson, Raymond Williams, and other ideology critics, Dinesen's critics accumulate negative adjectives – "discomfiting," "disquieting" (Nixon 1986, 219, 222); "paternalist," "neo-feudal," "archaic" (Kennedy 1987: 42, 45, 48); "nostalgic," "oppressive," "mythic" (Knipp 1990, 6, 8); "anachronistic," "extratemporal," "extrasocial," "exploitative" (S. Lewis 2003, 35, 118, 126); "escapist," "narcissistic," "self-aggrandizing", and "mystical" (Irlam 2015, 2, 5, 7) – around *Out of Africa*. They reductively frame Dinesen, once known as an independent woman farmer with an iconoclastic lifestyle, fraught relations with British colonial authorities, and bold "pro-native" (Brundbjerg 2000, 165) views, as a "Danish aristocrat" (Knipp 1990, 3), an outright apologist for "colonial modernity" (Irlam 2015, 13), and a modern a writer "in line with the wider tradition of European pastoral" (S. Lewis 2003, 127).

By reducing Dinesen's phytophilia (love of plants) to ideological theater, such antipastoral interpretations partake of the very "plant-blindness," defined as "the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs" (Wandersee and Schussler 1999, 82) that Dinesen sets out to interrogate. To interpret *Out of Africa* phytopoetically, by contrast, is to read it as a plant-person's text and a site of interspecies entanglement, where different voices and agencies come together. The text both channels the vital power of plants and reflects upon the facts and shapes of human-plant interinvolvement. Plants inscribe themselves on the form of *Out of Africa*, on the social world that it narrates, and on the human characters that it depicts.

In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen repeatedly suggests that nonhuman creatures have expressive capacities, and that human communications reverberate with a multiplicity of more-than-human voices. At one point, she remarks that "when [Finch Hatton] came back to the farm, it gave out what was in it; it spoke, – as the coffee-plantations speak, when with the first showers of the rainy season they flower, dripping wet, a cloud of chalk" (*OA*, 217). Dinesen also connects her own literature to plants, when she attributes her interest in writing to worry about her coffee plants during a period of drought: "I had to collect my energy on something, if I were not to be whirled away with the dust on the farm-roads, or the smoke on the plain. I began in the evenings to write stories, fairy-tales and romances, that would take my mind a long way off, to other countries and times" (*OA*, 42–43).

As critics (e.g. Brantly 2002, 91–92) have noted, *Out of Africa* lacks the linearity common to most autobiographies and the strong, central, enterprising persona characteristic of colonial literature. Susan H. Aiken finds *Out of Africa*

"discontinuous, fragmentary, and associative rather than linear, geometric, and stable" (1990, 217) and argues that the text resists generic classification:

> Situated between the discourses of history and myth, fact and fiction, prose and poetry; partaking generically of forms as diverse as pastoral elegy, classical tragedy, autobiography, memoir, and travel tale; compounded of narrative, philosophical speculation, aphorism, parabolic reflection, and song, *Out of Africa* eludes all single, unitary classifications. (1990, 229)

Dinesen's text deliberately defies rational order to proceed by association, whimsy, and fancy. It moves achronologically and digressively, beginning with a panoramic introduction to the landscape and inhabitants of Ngong, exemplified by the Kikuyu boy Kamante and the bushbuck kid Lulu. The second chapter concerns the shooting accident and the protracted and intricate negotiations that it triggered. The third chapter accentuates the portrayal of charismatic "wayfarers and wanderers of the world, [...] sailors, explorers and vagabonds" (*OA*, 195) like Old Knudsen, Emmanuelson, Cole, and Finch Hatton. The fragmentary fourth chapter is composed of short philosophical deliberations, dream sequences, historical vignettes, and character sketches interspersed with critical reflections on modern society. The fifth chapter revolves around the deaths of Kinanjui and Finch Hatton and the subsequent loss of the farm.

We can read *Out of Africa*'s apparent "structure(lessness)" (Aiken 1990, 217) as a phytopoetic experiment or an arabesque textualization of botanical life.[18] Dinesen writes of "the wildness and irregularity of the country," the European "yearning" for "geometrical figures," and the desire to convert land into "a piece of ground laid out according to rule" (*OA*, 7). At another moment, she likens the experience of riding through an ancient equatorial forest to an absorption into a "green world":

> An African Native Forest is a mysterious region. You ride into the depths of an old tapestry, in places faded and in others darkened with age, but marvellously rich in green shades. You cannot see the sky at all in there, but the sunlight plays in many strange ways, falling through the foliage. The grey fungus, like long drooping beards, on the trees, and the creepers

18 Jacob Bøggild (2012) has suggestively compared the intricate arrangement of *Out of Africa* to the arabesque, an ornamental design of interlaced vegetal patterns originally found in ancient Islamic art.

> hanging down everywhere, give a secretive, recondite air to the Native forest. (*OA*, 61)

Out of Africa itself is expressly designed as a literary manifestation of such free organic development. The natural world is filled with inscriptions, and *Out of Africa*'s meandering and sinuous "capriccio" (Aiken 1990, 272) is reminiscent of, and reinscribes, the proliferating organic webs and riotous vegetal shapes and patterns found in the African landscape. Thus, if *Out of Africa* lacks generic consistency and regular plot structure, this is not due to writerly confusion or ineptitude. Rather, the text tries to make textually present the tangled forms found in the African forests and fields. Dinesen weaves "a dense entangled mat" (*OA*, 9) a vinelike ecopoiesis where different themes, problems, characters, and storylines intertwine to form serpentine arabesque convolutions. Her text exists in a state of becoming, sending forth leaves, branches, and roots in different directions.

6 Plant Worlds

Out of Africa's narrative explicitly foregrounds some of the many ways in which plants impinge upon human life-worlds and co-orchestrate specific social beliefs and practices. Dinesen touches on the socially productive, world-making power of plants, for example, when she relates the ritualistic distribution of snuff – "*tombacco* the Natives say" (*OA*, 32) – on Sunday mornings and the social gatherings of European expatriates sipping "exquisite vintages" of "rare burgundy" (*OA*, 191). She also devotes an entire chapter to *ngomas*, or "big Native dances," which can go on for several days and attract "up to fifteen hundred or two thousand guests" (*OA*, 154). While Dinesen welcomes and enjoys these festivities, the British colonial authorities frown upon the sexually charged gatherings of large native groups. *Ngomas*, Dinesen points out, take place in the autumn, "after the maize-harvesting" (*OA*, 157) and they derive much of their Dionysian power from "tembu, a deadly drink fabricated from sugar cane" (*OA*, 154).

Coffee is shaped by, but it also shapes, the social worlds in which it lives:

> Coffee-growing is a long job. It does not all come out as you imagine, when, yourself young and hopeful, in the streaming rain, you carry the boxes of your shining young coffee-plants from the nurseries, and, with the whole number of farm-hands in the field, watch the plants set in the regular rows of holes in the wet ground where they are to grow, and then

> have them thickly shaded against the sun, with branches broken from the bush, since obscurity is the privilege of young things. (*OA*, 7)

Although plants pertain to the natural kingdom, many plants have been altered in their distribution, reproduction, and morphology by the methods that people have used to develop and manage them. Therefore, many cultivated plant resources represent cultural as well as biological organisms that highlight the intimate connection between people and their local environments. Coffee plants for commercial use were (and are) domesticated culvitars that have been selected and bred for specific characteristics valuable to humans. Although they are living things, they are also plant artifacts that would not thrive or reproduce without human assistance and habitat maintenance. Coffee farmers transplant plants from their native habitat to new environments, trying to secure optimal growing conditions:

> To bring the coffee on we tried to manure the fields. [...] When the squatters of the farm heard of the project they came forward to help me, and brought out, from their cattle and goat bomas, the manure of decades. It was delicate peaty stuff that was easy to handle. We ploughed up a furrow between the rows of coffee-trees, with the small new ploughs with a single ox to them that we had bought in Nairobi, and, since we could not get a cart into the fields, the women of the farm carried the manure in sacks on their backs, and spread it in the furrow, a sack to the tree, so that we could lead back the oxen and ploughs, and cover it up. (*OA*, 308–309)

Planters try to secure a higher yield by selecting the hardiest and most productive plants, knowing well that "[s]ome of the trees have been badly planted with their tap-roots bent; they will die just as they begin to flower." Domestication promises "coming bounties" (*OA*, 5–6), but it also entails increased exposure of plants to weeds, cold spells, parasites, droughts, grasshoppers, and "bad coffee-diseases like thrips and antestia" (*OA*, 308).

If humans alter and manipulate plants with various techniques and technologies, however, plants also co-shape the experiences and life-worlds of the people who work with them, and who get tied up in relationships of "coevolution" (Pollan 2001, 4–5). Coffee, in other words, inscribes itself not only on the physical landscape, but also on people's daily lives, rituals, behaviors, and interactions. Humans grow coffee because they enjoy the aroma and taste of roasted coffee beans, but coffee in turn enlists humans in their care and propagation. Coffee coproduces a particular social milieu with a particular way of life and a particular rhythm centered on the seasonal activities of planting,

pruning, weeding, harvesting, and drying. The reality of living as a coffee farmer or picker is directly related to the materiality of the crop that is grown. People who walk through "the flowering and dripping coffee-fields" (*OA*, 263) will be ensnarled by "the black-jack, which has long scabrous seed-vessels that hang on to your clothes and stockings" (*OA*, 7). Similarly, people who become involved in coffee farming will find themselves entangled in a complex multi-species relationship, for "a coffee-plantation is a thing that gets hold of you and does not let you go" (*OA*, 7).

7 Plant People

In *Out of Africa*, plants are both outside and inside, adjacent to but also part of human existence. Coffee-growing, Dinesen writes, engenders a specific kind of plant-person: a woman dressed in the planter's uniform of "old khaki coats and trousers" (*OA*, 357), who scans the sky for signs of "the long rains" (*OA*, 4), who lives in fear of seeing "the coffee-trees drooped and the leaves turned yellow" (*OA*, 308), who is "constantly thinking and talking of planting, pruning or picking coffee," and who "lie[s] at night and meditate[s] upon improvements to [her] coffee-factor[y]" (*OA*, 7). Plants imprint themselves upon human lives, human bodies, and the human character. Plants help make us the humans we are, and indeed it is difficult to see how we are or could ever truly be separate from plants.[19]

Dinesen uses many defamiliarizing figures and tropes that seem to posit a constitutive vegetal component at the heart of both the animal and the human being. Camels, for example, are figured as "haughty, hardened products of the desert, beyond all earthly sufferings, like cactus" (*OA*, 12). Monkeys sit in trees "like fruits on the branches" (*OA*, 62), while a tower of giraffes is said to move with a "queer, inimitable, vegetative gracefulness, as if it were not a herd of animals but a family of rare, long-stemmed, speckled gigantic flowers slowly advancing" (*OA*, 14–15). "A male bushbuck [...] at the outskirt of the forest" appears "immovable like a tree-stem" (*OA*, 71).

Dinesen is fascinated by the human body's biodegradability and compostability, and she repeatedly imagines herself dead and become sustenance for

19 A kindred plant-person is Jonathan Mærsk's mother Magdalena in "The Deluge at Norderney," who "kept no company with the other skippers' wives, and never went to other people's houses. Her father had been assistant to the great Swedish botanist, Linné, and to her the flowers, and what happened to them, and the bees, and their hives and works, seemed more important than anything which had to do with human beings" (*SGT*, 37).

animals and plants, "made one with Nature and [...] a common component of a landscape" (*OA*, 326). She characteristically represents sick, dead, and dying human bodies in terms of vegetal characteristics, as when she figures "mothers with their feverish children, like little dry flowers, hanging upon their necks" (*OA*, 23). She also writes of human "skulls, which look like some kind of dusky nuts" (*OA*, 132), and she narrates how "when we had the Spanish flu on the farm [...] I would find a brown smooth skull in the long grass of the forest, like a nut dropped down under a tree, or on the plain" (*OA*, 326). She describes the mortally ill Kinanjui "look[ing] like a huge dark wooden figure roughly cut with a knife" (*OA*, 323). Such imagery represents our inescapable intertwinement with nature, suggesting that despite our language, reason, and cultural achievements there is an element of the "vegetative" that "lurk[s] within the human self" (Pick 2011, 6). In the natural cycle of life, humans are destined to undergo a metamorphosis, transforming into organic matter, and serving as essential elements for the growth and flourishing of plant life.

Yet even when people are alive and well, Dinesen's writing often depicts them in ways that make the human and the vegetal seem already indissociably entangled. We see this when she imagines an "infant [...] swaddled like an acorn" (*OA*, 180) and young girls looking "like large flowers on the grass" or resembling "dolls of dark wood" (*OA*, 155). We notice a similar effect in the two sections devoted to her Kikuyu cook, Esa:

> Esa was my cook, but he did not like to cook, he wanted to be a gardener. Plants were the only things for which he had preserved a real live interest. [...] I had promised him that he should go back to his garden-work, but I kept him off from month to month. Esa on his own had dammed in a bit of ground by the river, and planted it as a surprise to me. But as he had been alone at it, and was not a strong man, the dam was not solid enough, and in the long rains it went away altogether. (*OA*, 277)

In *Out of Africa*, humans live off plants, depend on plants, take after plants, and in some instances almost seem to *become* plants. More clearly than any other character in the text, Esa represents a vision of the human person not as pure, separate, or unified being, but as an assemblage of human, animal, and vegetal characteristics. Esa has been influenced by his work "plant[ing] vegetables and flowers" (*OA*, 279) even to the point where plant features have come to seem dominant traits in his own character. Dinesen also notes she was afraid that "he might imperceptibly die on me, like a plant that has its roots cut through" (*OA*, 277). Her fears prove justified when Esa's young wife poisons him with a

"native poison similar to strychnine" (*OA*, 279), a plant-derived alkaloid with a molecular structure similar to caffeine.

8 Conclusion

Finch Hatton called Dinesen "Titania," nicknaming her after the comic Shakespearean heroine of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–1596) who, as Hannah Arendt (1968, 103) reminds us, falls in love with a man with a donkey's head. Dinesen herself often uses a fantastic creature, the centaur, to explore her understanding of hybridity as a quintessential condition of human existence. Half-human, half-horse centaurs emerged in classical Greek culture, where they were typically associated with aggressive male sexuality and uncontrollable bodily appetites. In a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (ca. 8 CE) that was often reproduced in classical and Renaissance art, drunken centaurs interrupt the wedding of the Lapith King Pirithious. When they attempt to abduct and rape the bride and the female guests, the centaurs are pursued and defeated by Greek warriors (Ovid 1955, 274–282). Wild, lustful, and bestial, centaurs proved eminently useful in the construction of a humanist culture. Their animalistic passion provided instructive negative mirror images to the reason and moderation that characterized the virtuous male citizen of the *polis*. The centaurs' defeat at human hands in the bloody battle subsequently known as "the centauromachy" symbolized the ultimate victory of civilization over barbarism.

Dinesen, however, reads the centaur against the grain, using it instead to underscore the inseparability of human and nonhuman bodies and lives. In her long review of H. C. Branner's popular novel *Rytteren* (*The Riding Master*) (1949), for example, she interprets the novel's dead protagonist, Hubert, as a "centaur" who "harmoniously united the nature of man and beast" (*DG* 162). Dinesen's own stories include many scenes and episodes where humans and horses form indissociable centauric units that contest the notion of a separate, autonomous personhood preexisting more-than-human entanglement. In these instances, acts of human living and riding with (rather than on) horses become forms of "knotted being" (Haraway 2008a, 16) where "humans are always forever mixed and thus too have what could be described as a capacity for horseness" (Game 2001, 1). In "Copenhagen Season," for example, the "brood" (*LT*, 263) of seven Angel siblings "had inherited a particular relationship with horses, and on horseback would evoke the idea of centaur even to people without a classic education" (*LT*, 262). In *The Angelic Avengers*, Zosine Tabbernor, who is herself an accomplished equestrian used to riding

bareback, encounters Baron Thésée de Valfonds, disguised as a groom, for the first time:

> Zosine gazed at him, the sun was still in her eyes. She was a little dizzy after her fall, and at the moment could not quite distinguish between the man and the horse. Was it a young groom of Joliet, or Mazeppa himself, with the beautiful, limpid eyes and the vibrating nostrils who stood and talked to her?
>
> "I have once," she said, "seen pictures of centaurs, creatures half man and half horse. How glorious it must be to be a centaur."
>
> "Aye, there may still be a few of them left in the woods of Joliet," said the young man, "and they would certainly welcome you in their brotherhood." (*AA*, 109–110)

And in "Ehrengard," it is the aristocratic female protagonist Ehrengard von Schreckenstein, a "fearless horsewoman" (*AD,* 239) imbued with "the hunting instincts of her breed" (*AD*, 267), who merges symbiotically with her mount, "a fine and fiery black horse named Wotan" (*AD*, 239): "She drew in her breath deeply, and ran on, with raised head and distended nostrils, a young female centaur playing along the grass fields" (*AD*, 267).

Among other movie tie-in products, Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (1985) spawned the Sierra Club publication *Isak Dinesen's Africa* (1985), a glossy coffee table book interspersing excerpts from Dinesen's Kenyan memoirs and letters with gorgeous nature photography by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, Peter Beard, Frank Conner, and others. In the book's preface, Diana Landau, then executive editor of Sierra Club Books, points out that "the decimation of Africa's great animal populations is traceable directly to the uncontrolled sport-hunting engage in by early colonists, their safari clients, and thousands who followed, and to the international trade in skins, furs, and horn, both in conjunction with environmental pressures such as drought and habitat loss due to developments" (1985, IX). Early twentieth-century big-game safari hunting ritualized expressions of class, gender, and social privilege, it spoke to romantic conceptions of upper-class sportsmanship, and it fulfilled a yearning for adventure especially strong among Anglo-American social élites. Big-game hunting provided the British colonial government with a source of revenue, as white tourists were charged licensing fees for permission to kill specific numbers of game animals, while native subsistence hunters following traditional methods were criminalized as "poachers" (Steinhart 2006, 113–137). In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen writes frankly about her initial enthusiasm for big- game safaris at a time when "I could not live till I had killed a specimen of each kind of Africa game" (*OA*,

232), but she also notes how agricultural life soon made her "put away my rifles" (*OA*, 14).[20] Early colonial coffee farmers cleared and burned ancient forests to make space for their farms and increase production. They capitalized upon the humus accumulated over centuries, and they often treated these tropical soils "as nonrenewable resources and abandoned their farms once the soils were exhausted" (McCook 2017, 1). In Kenya, European coffee farmers relied on cheap labor from the very native people, now reduced to "squatters," who had been dispossessed in the colonial takeover (Zelaza 1992, 173–174). Dinesen grew coffee as an understory crop, in the shade of larger plants. Unusually, as noted by the French real estate developer who purchased the farm in 1931, she refused to cultivate more than a fraction of her estate "on a commercial scale" (qtd. Thurman 1982, 199), lest she displace more of the African families who lived there. She reflects on the costs of colonial deforestation, writing that "[t]o my mind it was a sad thing when the old forest was cut down" (*OA*, 61), and she imagines playing a role in the ecological restoration of the region:

> If I had had the capital, I thought, I would have given up coffee, have cut down the coffee-trees, and have planted forest-trees on my land. Trees grow up so quickly in Africa, in ten years' time you walk comfortably under tall blue gum trees, and wattle trees, which you have yourself, in the rain, carried in boxes from the nurseries, twelve trees in a box. [...] It is a noble occupation to plant trees, you think of it many years after with content. There had been big stretches of Native forest on the farm in the old days, but it had been sold to the Indians for cutting down, before I took over the farm; it was a sad thing. I myself in the hard years had had to cut down the wood on my land round the factory for the steam-engine, and this forest, with the tall stems and the live green shadows in it had haunted me, I have not felt more sorry for anything I have done in my life, than for cutting it down. (*OA*, 309–310)

20 Dinesen's claim that "during my last years in Africa many young Nairobi shop-people ran out into the hills on Sundays, on their motor-cycles, and shot at anything they saw" (*OA*, 6) echoes Denys Finch Hatton's letter published in the London *Times* on January 21, 1928, in which he denounces motorized lion hunting and calls for stricter enforcement of game laws (Wheeler 2006, 221). In *Shadows on the Grass*, Dinesen moves closer to a conservationist stance on hunting, writing that "[w]hen I first came out to Africa I could not live without getting a fine specimen of each single kind of African game. In my last ten years out there I did not fire a shot except in order to get meat for my Natives. It became to me an unreasonable thing, indeed in itself ugly or vulgar, for the sake of a few hours' excitement to put out a life that belonged in the great landscape" (*OA*, 409–410).

Recent biographical work (Buk-Swienty 2019), newly released letters (B. F. Rostbøll 2018), and works in economic history (Boje 2018) shed light on the financial failure of Karen Coffee Co. Ltd., which significantly drained Dinesen's wealthy family's monetary funds over the years.[21] Class, race, nationality, gender, and historical circumstances influenced Dinesen relationships to Africa and Africans, making them "complex and ambivalent" (Merivirta 2023, 505). My aim in this chapter has not been to shield Dinesen or *Out of Africa* from political critique or sidestep controversial questions of power, money, or history, but rather to make visible how other ethical and political possibilities might arise from revisionist engagements with Dinesen's most popular and troublesome text. It is true that Dinesen professes deep-felt admiration for indigenous cultural expressions like *ngomas* (e.g. *OA*, 153–164), that her text moves African characters from the margins to the center of discussion, and that she more or less openly criticizes British colonial practices such as the levying of the hated hut-tax and the requirement (from 1920) that all African males above the age of 15 carry an identity document (the so-called *kipanda*) around their necks (*OA*, 358, 129).[22] It is equally true, however, that Dinesen's memoir is drenched in nostalgia, that it looks too kindly on key colonial actors such as Hugh Cholmondeley, Lord Delamere (*OA*, 259–260), and that it abounds with awkward generalizations about "all Africans" (*OA*, 97) and "all natives" (*OA*, 29, 32, 45, 104, 117, 208, 277).[23] What Dinesen elegizes as "the Happy Hunting Grounds" was always also a "business proposition" (*OA*, 216), and *Out of Africa* owes its existence to colonial agriculture, a system that she "simultaneously participated in, benefited from, despised, and repeatedly sought to subvert"

21 Economic historian Per Boje characterizes Dinesen as a "conscientious director, who worked doggedly to make the farms a profitable business" (2018, 806 [author's translation]). Nevertheless, he estimates that stockholders and investors lost as much as 100 million *kroner* (approximately 13.5 million euros) in today's money trying to keep the company afloat (2018, 796).

22 Dinesen criticizes British colonialism more outspokenly in her private letters, as when she writes the following to her brother Thomas Dinesen on February 24, 1926: "I can't tell you how much I should like you to have something to do with the 'League of Nations' and perhaps in time take up the question of the natives' interests here. I am so angry with the English because they want to impose higher taxes on them, they are talking about a kopftax of 20 shillings; it is disgraceful when you think that the most a man can earn is about 150 shillings a year; if only people at home could get to know about it, but this country is so amazingly outside the bounds of law and justice" (*LA*, 240).

23 In his essay "Frikend Karen Blixen" ("Acquit Karen Blixen"), Henrik Stangerup (2003) contrasts Dinesen's apparent disbelief in biological theories of race with the virulent "scientific" racism of another contemporary Danish writer, the Nobel Prize-winning Johannes V. Jensen. Lasse H. Kjældgaard (2009b, 126) interestingly connects Dinesen's use of generalizations with the anti-colonial and anti-racist pan-Africanism and *négritude* movements.

(Aiken 1990, 213).[24] The book's success and popularity are ambiguously tied up with "the Plantationocene," Donna Haraway's term for "the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor" (2016, 206). Yet *Out of Africa* also acquires considerable ecological power, in my Bjørnvig-inspired interpretation, by gesturing towards a world where the human/nonhuman schism would have less self-explanatory power over the ways in which we understand and organize our lives.

Suspicious critics often cast Dinesen as a dangerous modern enchantress, a belated decadent Scheherazade whose writing "continues to seduce modern readers" and "exert a fascination [...] that remains hard to escape" (Irlam 2015, 2). Ngũgĩ feminizes, sexualizes, and pathologizes *Out of Africa*, attributing its "vast erotic dreamland" to female childlessness, "incurable syphilis," and "unfulfilled desires and longings" (1981c, 35). "[T]he beauty in the prose" of *Out of Africa*, he charges, conceals Dinesen's efforts to develop "the racial myths and ideology" so important to "the imperialist bourgeoisie or imperialist forces of the exploiting classes all over the world" (1981b, 112). Dane Kennedy similarly worries about the "seductive appeal" of *Out of Africa*'s "artful creation" (1987, 37) and "feudal mirage" (1987, 47). Dinesen, it is argued elsewhere, "spins Africa and its landscape, people, and animals into a cocoon of luminous words, creating at times an enchanted world that is very seductive" (K. H. Petersen 2008, 104).

In *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Jane Bennett confesses a fondness for "metamorphing creatures" (2001, 17) and other representations that cross boundaries and violate categorical distinctions. In Bennett's analysis, enchantments can be both a way of solidifying power and control and a source of energy needed to contest and alter existing social structures. Far from inherently irrational or reactionary, she argues, the trans-species "crossings" and "morphing admixtures" (2001, 28) found for example in Michael Tournier's *Friday*, Franz Kafka's "Report to an Academy," and George Miller's *Babe* can nourish an awareness of complexity and an affective relationship with life that she believes to be utterly essential to ethical practice and, at least potentially, political reform. For Bennett, different forms of morphism can lead to a questioning of sharp distinctions, especially the schism between nature and culture, and a recognition of hybridity

24 When he and his wife arrived in Kenya, Bror Blixen notes in his memoir, "[g]old meant coffee. Coffee-growing was the only thing which had any future; the world was crying out for coffee from Kenya" (1986, 14).

that constitutes "an essential component of an ethical, ecologically aware life" (2001, 99). "If crossings function as contemporary sites of enchantment," she writes, "then they might play a role in cultivating an ethical sensibility. Their magic might generate what might be called presumptive generosity toward the animals, vegetables, and minerals within one's field of encounter" (2001, 30).

Similarly, I suggest, *Out of Africa* engenders an awareness of more-than-human attachments and entanglements that could and should be concretized in worldly practices quite different from the neocolonial conservatism with which Dinesen is often associated. Her constantly morphing text enchants and bewitches in ways that can open new promising spaces to exist in.

CHAPTER 3

In Flux: Wet Masculinities in "Peter and Rosa," "The Monkey," and "Ehrengard"

1 Introduction

In iconic artworks of European Renaissance humanism such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1485) and Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504), it is the strong, poised, and self-possessed *male* body that is centered, providing the measure for all of humanity. As the ambiguous concept of "Man" suggests, indeed, humanism is an inescapably gendered discourse, and anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) can scarcely be disentangled from androcentrism (male-centeredness). We have long understood that environmental issues are closely entwined with the ways in which we define gender identities. Given that men still hold most power in the worlds of government, business, science, and technology, it will benefit men, women, and nonhumans alike if we explore how men, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, are not only born but also made (and remade), and if we exert ourselves to unleash fresh expressions of manhood and masculinity.

Since the 1970s, ecofeminists have produced a great deal of valuable work helping us grasp how the downgrading of the natural world has accompanied the objectification of women and buttressed the exploitation of female bodies along with the planet's nonhuman creatures and resources (e.g. Merchant 1980; King 1989; Plumwood 1993; Warren 1997; Mies, Shiva, and Salleh 2014). As Sherilyn MacGregor and Nicole Seymour point out, however, "the concept of 'gender,' as far as the environmental humanities and social sciences are concerned, remains largely synonymous with women," and "men *qua* men […] are almost never objects of critical inquiry in the environmental disciplines" (2017, 10). Research (e.g. Borough et al. 2016) indicates that men are somewhat less likely than women to express concern about environmental crisis or pursue sustainable options, perhaps because they perceive the admission of environmental connectedness and vulnerability itself as intrinsically "unmanly." Yet what still "remains under-addressed are the myriad ways in which masculine roles, identities, and practices shape human relationships with the more-than-human world" (Macgregor and Seymour 2017, 10). "[M]asculine identity has been constructed as so very *anti*-ecological" (Gaard 2017, 167), but until

recently relatively little energy went into scrutinizing biophobic constructions of manhood and searching for more capacious alternatives.

This, however, is beginning to change with the emergence of ecomasculinities studies, a research paradigm committed to "uncover[ing] fresh and creative resocialisations of modern Western masculinities" (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 3). Scholars of ecomasculinities critique hegemonic masculinity's "ethics of daring" (Pulé 2007, 158) while also rejecting any essentialist claim that women are innately closer to nature than men, and while qualifying undiscriminating references to "'men' (or 'male') to describe the source of all ecological degradation" (Slovic 2004, 72). Early contributors to this discourse envisioned an alternative ecomasculine "ethics of caring" (Pulé 2007, 160) primarily but not exclusively modelled on the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual North American academics, environmentalists, and wilderness enthusiasts (e.g. Allister 2004). The use of the plural form "ecomasculinities" in recent scholarships (e.g. Hultman and Pulé 2018; Brandt and Cenamor 2019), however, indicates increasing recognition of the complexities and multiplicities of "the masculine" and the inherent ambiguity of "nature" and "the environment."

Dinesen declared that "I am not a feminist" and maintained that "feminism [...] is a matter which I do not understand, and which I have never concerned myself with of my own volition" (*DG*, 65–66). Despite such claims, her writing has attracted considerable attention from feminist, women's, and gender studies scholars (e.g. Juhl and Jørgensen 1985; Horton 1995; Heede 2001; Sabo 2005; Straumann 2011). Mid-twentieth-century Danish feminists took umbrage with what they perceived as Dinesen's reactionary views on gender, in texts that appeared to them unhealthily fixated on the past and perversely intent to sabotage the modern pursuit of full equality for women. They objected especially strenuously to Dinesen's inflammatory assertion, in "Oration at a Bonfire, Fourteen Years Late" (1953), that "[a] man's center of gravity, the substance of his being, consists in what he has executed and performed in life; the woman's, in what she is" (*DG*, 73).[1] Later feminist critics have read fictional protagonists like Malin Nat-og-Dag of "The Deluge at Norderney," Carlotta de Gampocorta of "The Roads Round Pisa," Pellegrina Leoni of "The Dreamers" and "Echoes," and Babette Hersant of "Babette's Feast" in a more sympathetic vein, showing

1 Denmark's most influential *kvindesagsforkæmper* (women's liberationist), Anna Westergaard (1954), for example, published a critical response to Dinesen in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, entitled "Forsinket svar paa endnu mere forsinket baaltale" ("Delayed Response to Even More Dealyed Bonfire Oration") Another critic was the feminist writer Ester Nagel, who satirized Dinesen's "Oration" in her picaresque novel *Lille-Ost og hans bedrifter* (*Litte-Cheese and His Adventures*) (1955).

greater appreciation for Dinesen texts' (post)modern play with gendered masks and discourses, their rejection of Christian morality and bourgeois convention, their subversion of patriarchal power and language, their foregrounding of female creativity and imagination, and their affirmation of the natural world and the sensuous life (e.g. Gubar 1981; Froula 1983, Stambaugh 1988; Aiken 1990; Stecher-Hansen 2014, 25–90).

This chapter builds upon such discussions but shifts the focus of attention from femininity to masculinity, understanding Dinesen's writing as a space where ecomasculinities come into being. Dinesen gave prominence to her father Wilhelm Dinesen's influence upon her writing, and she drew and wrote primarily under a shifting multiplicity of male pseudonyms that in addition to her preferred moniker also included "Peter Lawless," "Osceola," and "Pierre Andrézel." Reading Dinesen's narratives, moreover, one encounters a great diversity of intriguing male characters, many of whom embody and perform their maleness from divergent socio-cultural perspectives and in ways that deviate strikingly from what Raewyn W. Connell (1987) has called "hegemonic masculinity."[2] Heterodox female characters like the crossdressing Agnese della Gherardesca of "The Roads Round Pisa," the adulterous Countess Sophie of "The Caryatids," and the syphilitic giantess Lady Flora Gordon of "The Cardinal's Third Tale" are matched, in Dinesen's fiction, by atypical male figures like the obese painter Rosendahl (nicknamed "Rosie") of "Carnival," the powdered, bewigged, and impotent Prince Potentiani (whose name is spelled "Potenziani" in the Danish version) of "The Roads Round Pisa," the disfigured itinerant storyteller Mira Jama of "The Dreamers" and "The Diver," the hashish-smoking melancholic Augustus von Schimmelmann of "The Roads Round Pisa" and "The Poet," the desperate outcast Emmanuelson of *Out of Africa*, the foot-amputated Norwegian shoemaker/storyteller of "The Pearls," the medieval Wendish clairvoyant Granze of "The Fish," the sadistic and incestuous Reverend Pennhallow of *The Angelic Avengers*, the castrated opera singer Marelli of "The Cardinal's First Tale," and the moonfaced Professor Sivertsen of "Copenhagen Season," to mention but a few. Amidst the proliferation of scholarship addressing Dinesen's "écriture féminine" (Aiken 1990, 256), however, considerably less has been written about her reimagining of *masculine* identity and her conspicuous refusal to accept the unmarked universality of the male

2 Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a specific form of masculinity in a historical and society-wide social context that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities: "Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women." (1987, 183).

subject.[3] To my knowledge, nobody has studied Dinesen from the perspective of ecomasculinities studies, exploring how her stories situate male characters as integrated with, rather than separate from, the natural environment.

Stories like "Peter and Rosa," "The Monkey," and "Ehrengard," I argue in this chapter, position male characters as creatures in flux. Throughout Dinesen's fiction, I suggest, flow and fluidity seem to become prominent characteristics of masculinity. Many male characters, that is, feel and express a strong fascination with maritime culture and a deep longing for the ocean.[4] Many male characters pursue, plan, or merely fantasize about shipborne lives as fishermen (like Cardinal Hamilcar of "The Deluge at Norderney," Anders Kube of "The Poet," the Plejelt family of "The Dreaming Child," and Granze of "The Fish"), pirates (like Morten De Coninck of "The Supper at Elsinore"), deep-sea divers (like Saufe/Elnazred of "The Diver"), or sailors (like Simon of "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," Old Knudsen of *Out of Africa*, Niccolo of "Echoes," Alexander Ross and Ferdinand of "Tempests," and Povl of "The Immortal Story").[5] Many male characters flow or drift through life, accidentally or deliberately untethered from the normative fixities of home, work, marriage, and family. And many male characters express their gender identities and sexual orientations and desires in ways that waver and fluctuate, departing strikingly from the heterosexual "malestream" (O'Brien 1985, 5).

What particularly interests me in this chapter, however, is *corporeal* fluidity and *material* relatedness, a wetness of the male body that is entertained by Skipper Mærsk in "The Deluge at Norderney" when he tells his son Jonathan that "I know a cure for everything: salt water [...] [s]weat, or tears, or the salt

3 Florence C. Lewis briefly (and simplistically) remarks that in *Seven Gothic Tales* "[t]he men are helpless, effete, sensitive, introspective" while "[t]he women are dynamic and aggressive" (1979, 65). Dag Heede (2001, 90) observes that most critics who felt provoked by and attacked Dinesen's early writing were men. The probable cause of this, he argues, is that Dinesen's stories insist on treating heterosexual masculinity as a performance, no more firmly grounded in nature and no less pervasively mediated by cultural codes and conventions than heterosexual femininity. In Dinesen's tales, "[g]enders are portrayed as historical artifices, results of cultural processing, but at the same time as porous units, fluid entities, which characters constantly play on and with – just as they themselves are 'played' by them. Especially in the early stories, gender appears largely as a masquerade" (2001, 173 [author's translation]).

4 In "The Supper at Elsinore," Morten De Coninck gives succinct expression to this sometimes fatal attraction, when he declares that "[t]he earth says yes to our schemes and our work, but the sea says no; and we, we love the sea ever" (*SGT*, 331).

5 Dinesen's letters from 1949–1950 reveal that she also contemplated writing a novel entitled *Frederic the Sailor* (KBD, 1:528, 537, 541, 542, 543).

sea" (*SGT*, 39). In western thinking and writing, flow has traditionally been gendered as female. The female body, which bleeds, gives birth, and produces milk, breaching its own boundaries through discharges and fluidities, is often understood as more intimately involved in relational exchanges with the more-than-human world, more permeable to the surrounding environment, and more responsible for the unruly circulation of contaminating substances. Yet while women's bodies are said to exist in a volatile and risky state of porous susceptibility comprising constant reciprocal exchanges with other bodies and the nonhuman environment, the male body is frequently imagined as self-contained, bounded, and impermeable, constituting a world onto itself, and allowing only minimal inter- or extracorporeal traffic. Writers envisioning what Walter Benjamin (1969, 241) called "the dreamt-of metallization" of the male body, particularly between the world wars, reinforced "the androcentric dualism man/woman" (Garrard 2012, 26) and helped obscure men's "transcorporeal" (Alaimo 2010) connectedness with the more-than-human world.

Key characters in Dinesen's work embody masculinity, I find, differently from the seamlessly solid, statuesque, and self-enclosed men of steel fantasized by twentieth-century fascists, communists, futurists, militarists, and machine-age modernists. Instead of enclosing them within a hard shell, Dinesen's stories prize open her male characters' selves and physiques, challenging the experience of masculinity, and countering a masculinism predicated on abstractions, borders, separations, and a repudiation of nature and the feminine. In the following, I draw on feminist scholarship (particularly corporeal feminism and materialist [eco]feminism) and on cultural histories of male embodiment (particularly Klaus Theweleit's classic *Male Fantasies*), as I seek to navigate the "fluid space" (Aiken 1990, 91) of Dinesen's fiction. The male protagonists of "Peter and Rosa," "The Monkey," and "Ehrengard" differ considerably in age and circumstance. One, Peter Køhke of "Peter and Rosa," is an orphaned teenager, the second, Boris von Schreckenstein of "The Monkey," is a young aristocratic soldier, and the third, Wolfgang Cazotte of "Ehrengard," is a successful middle-aged painter. Yet these three stories, I argue, all produce telltale moments of liquefaction or fluidification, when boundaries are compromised and male characters find themselves re-embodied and re-environed by their all-too-human participation in relational flows. All three stories examined in this chapter demonstrate "the ecocultural potential of aesthetic texts" (Zapf 2016, 21) by pushing back against "the historical armoring of the male body" (Foster 1991, 75) with counterdiscursive storytelling and "perverse" characters whose wet embodiments begin to produce novel fruitful understandings of

masculinity and the male body in relation to other bodies and the more-than-human world.[6] Gender configurations undergird the environmental crisis in complex ways, and literary and cultural representations often illustrate how insistently "hegemonic masculinities have been constructed in opposition to nature" (MacGregor and Seymour 2017, 11).[7] Conversely, cultural production and analysis can also help germinate a creative imagination and promote urgent reconfigurations of femininity and masculinity. In this chapter, I envisage Dinesen as a writer who long preceded but can still inform our current interest in critiquing "carbon-heavy masculinities" (Alaimo 2016, 94), "construct[ing] manhood around ecological principles and practice" (Allister 2004, 7), and "restructur[ing] modern Western masculinities for the sake of all life" (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 11). Dinesen understood that masculinity is neither set in stone nor clad in iron, and her texts highlight the historicity, mutability, and potential for change inherent in men's experiences of embodiment.

2 Flow and Flux

In modern somatic philosophy, body fluids present somewhat of a scandal. For Julia Kristeva, the body's "abject" spillages, wastes, and fluids are viewed with suspicion precisely because they violate the desire and hope for a "clean and proper" body, making the boundaries and limitations of our selfhood ambiguous, and indicating the body's physical wasting and ultimate death (1980, 2–3). Corporeal feminist Elizabeth Grosz similarly argues that viscous corporeal effluvia are physically undecidable, lacking shape or form of their own; halfway between solid and liquid, they flow, seep, surge, and sluice, engulfing and infiltrating the body. According to Grosz, fluids that course within the body, trickle from orifices, and spill across bodily boundaries vividly "attest to the permeability of the body" and "its necessary dependence on an outside," betraying "a certain irreducible materiality." Body fluids "affront a subject's aspiration

6 Reviewing *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* on September 25, 1935, Frederik Schyberg of the conservative daily newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* located Dinesen's "perversity" in her texts' disruption of traditional gender identities: "[*T*]*here are no normal people in Seven Gothic Tales*. The book's basic delineation of the two genders means that all its young men are effeminate, wear their sisters' clothes, and impeccably perform ladies' roles in amateur theatricals that leave connoisseurs ecstatic, and that all its young women are mannish, dress like men, and are in turn compared to military commanders, sailor boys, or grenadiers" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 227–228 [author's translation]).

7 Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her* (1984), for example, provides a classic ecofeminist study of the diverse ways in which male and female settler writers imagined their relationship to the North American "virgin land."

toward autonomy and self-identity" (1994, 193–194) by revealing that human bodies do not simply exist but are continually made in messy exchanges with other (non)human bodies and the material world. "[N]ecessary but embarrassing" (1994, 194), viscous corporeal effluvia – "blood, vomit, saliva, phlegm, pus, sweat, tears, menstrual blood, seminal fluids" (1994, 195) – blur the contours of the coherent and self-possessed human self as conceived by western philosophy and psychoanalysis.

The fluids that stream within and across bodily boundaries attest to the body's incompleteness, materiality, and environmentality, connecting it to other embodied selves and to the nonhuman environment. Scholars in feminist new materialism thematize corporeal fluidity while hoping to lay the foundation for a new environmental ethic centered on interconnection, relationality, indebtedness, and becoming. While thinking of the human body as inherently porous and leaky runs contrary to strong western traditions, the posthumanist feminist Stacy Alaimo coins the concept "transcorporeality" to situate the human body as always already enmeshed and entangled in material exchanges with other bodies and with the physical and biological world. As embodied beings, Alaimo argues, we are literally part of our environment, which "is always the very substance of ourselves" (2010, 4). Alaimo draws attention to the fluids that flow within and across human bodies, animals, and nonhuman environments, as she revisits environmentalist Rachel Carson's claim that "each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water" (qtd. Alaimo 2016, 118). A certain powerful western narrative holds that human bodies are (and should be) solid, separate, stable, closed and controlled, Alaimo argues, but thinking about flows and fluidity "renders the human permeable" (2012, 477) and suggests that we are not sovereign masters of our own bodily destinies. The fact that "[t]he sea surges through the bodies of all terrestrial animals, including humans" (2012, 482) thus helps conceptualize the human self as "substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" (2012, 476).

In *Bodies of Water*, "hydrofeminist" Astrida Neimanis similarly foregrounds the fact that liquids flow both inside and outside human bodies, and that "the various bodily fluids that intercorporeally sustain our bodies [...] [are] part of the biological and meteorological cycles of water that extracorporeally nourish our bodies" (2017, 66). For Neimanis, humans are porous, liquid beings who can be understood through the "onto-logics of amniotics":

> We are created in water, we gestate in water, we are born into an atmosphere of the same water although more diffuse, we take in water, we

> harbour it, it sustains and protects us, it leaves us [...] at the same time as we are always, to some extent, in it. The passage from body of water to body of water (always as body of water) is never synecdochal or metaphoric; it is radically material. These complex and shared cyclings – body, to body, to body – comprise our planetary hydrocommons. (2017, 86)

By counterintuitively reimagining humans not as solid entities but as "bodies of water" involved in constant aqueous exchanges, Neimanis aims to estrange the enlightenment's conception of sovereign, discreet, autonomous individuals. Her defamiliarizing gesture reaches beyond the anthropocentric discourse of human exceptionalism, fostering the recognition that every time we drink, bleed, sweat, urinate, breastfeed, etc., our bodies remind us that "[w]e are literally implicated in other animal, vegetable, and planetary bodies that materially course through us, replenish us, and draw upon our own bodies as their wells" (2017, 3).

All human bodies contain 50 to 70 % fluids, we all require fluids to live, and we must all expel fluids from our bodies with regular intervals. It is often noted not only that human blood is mostly water but also that the watery portion of blood, plasma, has a concentration of salt and other ions that is remarkably like sea water. Nevertheless, a gendered distinction has often been drawn, separating female bodies characterized by leaking, porous fluidity from male bodies defined as rigid, impervious, and tightly bound containers. Luce Irigaray claims that "historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine" (1985, 116). Breaching their boundaries through discharges and fluidities, women's bodies are constructed as "leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting, as lacking [...] self-containment" (Grosz 1994, 203). Yet while women's bodies are said to exist in a volatile and risky state of porous susceptibility, male bodies have been granted the power – or charged with the duty – to cordon themselves off from the external world, fighting against contamination, violation, and death.

The valorized ideal of the tough, shell-like, insular male body harks back to the *cuirasse esthétique* (muscled male torso) of antique Greek athletic statues (K. Clark 1984, 40) and to eighteenth-century neoclassicists who imagined a male "body separated from its environment and from other bodies by seemingly impermeable boundaries" (Dukink 2001, 158). Monumental masculine hardbodies were privileged with particular intensity in the years between the world wars, when Dinesen began her writing career, and when "images of active and energetic male bodies hardened against external seductions, consumer conveniences, and the sensuality of the flesh abound[ed]" (Forth 2008, 196). From the 1920s to the 1940s, compact masculine bodies with hard edges

and gleaming surfaces proliferated in left- and right-wing political discourses as well as in various both élite and popular cultural genres, from modernist manifestoes (Foster 1991) to hardboiled detective novels (Ogdon 1992), bodybuilding manuals (Carden-Coyne 1999), and superhero comics (Bukatman 2003, 48–78). Early Soviet writers pictured the birth of Communist Man as a "metamorphosis from flesh to metal" (Hellebust 1997, 505), while charismatic Scandinavian body culturists dreamed of engendering a resilient "Nordic superman" (N. K. Nielsen 1999). Avant-garde thinkers and writers like the Italian futurist Filippo Marinetti and the English vorticist Wyndham Lewis worshiped the hard phallic body and called on male followers to "metallize" (Foster 1991, 13) themselves.

The celebration of the hard, dry, antiecological male body reached an apogee in the novels, pamphlets, and letters of members of German paramilitary volunteer units (*Freikorps*) between the world wars. *Freikorps* men, many of whom were World War I veterans, sought to destabilize the fragile German democracy, and they helped pave the road from democracy to fascism. As Klaus Theweleit shows in *Male Fantasies*, proto-fascist *Freikorps* "soldier males" (1987, 23) fixated on working-class, politically radical, and sexually active women, whose bodies they obsessively figured in terms of organic fluidity and liquidity, as a pathological transcorporeality cutting across all proper differences and violating all boundaries, a destructive natural force or "red tide" (1987, 229) threatening to overwhelm and engulf the German nation with "filthy floods" (1987, 407). In stark contrast, these texts celebrated the rational German soldier male's "erect soldierly body" (1987, 409), which was vigilant, impervious, hard, and metallic, as though encased in a "shell" (1987, 242) or "body armor" (1987, 223). Real *Freikorps* men have no truck with fluidity, and to suggest otherwise would be to collapse all the distinctions (male/female, native/foreign, culture/nature, etc.) on which civilization depends. To have a woman's body is to exist in a constant and intolerable state of fluid dissolution, while true manhood entails making one's body a "bulwark" (1987, 246) and aspiring towards the inorganic state of the "robot" (1987, 162) or the "man of steel" (1987, 160). In the hypermasculine and deeply antiecological discourse that Theweleit critiques, "[n]othing is to be permitted to flow" (1987, 230), and real men have no part in the unstable world of "flesh and the flowing of all the rest of the world outside" (1987, 313).

3 Sea-Changes

Female adolescents are frequently recurring figures in Dinesen's fiction (e.g. Lydenberg 1978), while stories centered on male adolescence are comparatively

rarer. *Winter's Tales*, however, contains two stories in which boys grow into men, and in both stories evolving masculinity is understood through images of flow and flux. At the climax of "The Sailor Boy's Tale," which I discussed in my introduction, Simon comes of age when he stabs the Russian sailor Ivan, eliciting a flow of "blood spouting out, and running down in his sleeve" (*WT*, 97) that recalls the story's shipboard opening scene, where Sunniva/the falcon bites Simon's thumb "so that the blood ran" (*WT*, 91), and anticipates the ending, where the Sámi woman cuts her own thumb "so that the blood spouted out, and she let it drip all over her skirt" (*WT*, 101). "Peter and Rosa," which I will focus on here, makes wetness a distinguishing characteristic of male embodiment, contrasting states where "[t]hings had lately been dry and hard, unyielding to the touch" (*WT*, 278–279) with states "[w]here all flowed and fluctuated, the whole world was fluid" (*WT*, 279).

The story's male protagonist, fifteen-year-old Peter Køpke, is rumored to be an "illegitimate child" (*WT*, 256), but he has been adopted by his uncle, a provincial parson at Søllerød, near the North Zealand coast. "[P]iously brought up" (*WT*, 252) and living in the parsonage with his coeval cousin and adoptive sister, Rosa, Peter studies theology in the expectation that he will inherit his uncle's place in the pulpit. Set around 1840 "in the last days of March" (*WT*, 251), the story captures Peter in the watershed of "adolescence" (*WT*, 277). Once "a clumsy boy with dirty hands and scratched knees" (*WT*, 255), he is now "much stronger" than his cousin and "taller [...] by half a head" (*WT*, 255). With "a philosophical turn of mind" (*WT*, 255), Peter is beginning to question his future and map out alternative destinies for himself. What "God meant him to be" (*WT*, 262) is becoming clearer to him, as he puts it in dialogue with Rosa, and "the plan of God" (*WT*, 262) for Peter Køpke does not involve him preaching God's Word to the congregation of Søllerød. Instead, he concocts a scheme to elope to nearby Elsinore, where he hopes to board the ship *Esperance* (Hope) as a sailor in the merchant marine. Peter's physical and intellectual maturation is set against the late coming of spring after a long and harsh Danish winter, when fierce winds and incessant rains break up the ice on Øresund, stirring up dormant energies and releasing streams and torrents throughout the natural world: "Then one night, after a week of raw and clammy fog, it began to rain. The hard, inexorable sky over the dead landscape broke, dissolved into streaming life and became one with the ground. On all sides the incessant whisper of falling water re-echoed: it increased and grew into a song" (*WT*, 251).

"Peter and Rosa" illustrates Dinesen's complex and ambivalent relationship to Christianity, which is a topic that is often highlighted by the story's critics

(e.g. Wivel 1987, 31–33; Stambaugh 1988, 70–74; Stormgaard 2010, 137–161).[8] When Peter reveals his plan of "running away to sea" (*WT*, 269) to Rosa, she in a fit of jealousy (and perhaps unacknowledged love) betrays his trust and denounces him to her father, the parson. The parson then, in an ironic echo of the New Testament, takes on the role of Pilate and rewards her with a "handkerchief [...] with a small pile of money tied up in it" (*WT*, 270) that she is to pass on to her stepmother. Yet while Dinesen uses biblical motifs to tell her story in this manner, she also critiques "life-denying" (Stambaugh 1988, 70) Protestant Christianity's enduring power over Danish mental and emotional life. For the adolescents, the parson's household is "overhung by the shadow of the grave" (*WT*, 254), dominated by the somber pietism of the *pater familias*, whose "mind was fixed upon the grave" (*WT*, 254) and who agonizes over "the dogma of the resurrection of the body, on which, all the same, he must preach from his pulpit" (*WT*, 270). The parson "distrusted and feared the body" (*WT*, 271), and so alienated is he from "the green earth" (*WT*, 254) that he considers his second marriage, which has produced a young son, an act of "infidelity" (*WT*, 257) to the memory of his first wife. When his second wife Eline, "a simple creature, anchored in the resigned philosophy of the peasant" (*WT*, 258), asks him for money to buy a cow, he rejects her request with reference to the imminent second coming of Christ and the Bible's command that "[w]e should not hoard up treasures in this world" (*WT*, 258). "Within the parson's house death was zealously kept in view and lectured upon" (*WT*, 252), Dinesen writes, and "[t]o grow up in the house was to the young people a problem and a struggle, as if fatal influences were dragging them the other way, into the earth, and admonishing them to give up the vain and dangerous task of living" (*WT*, 254).

The parson's Christianity is apocalyptic, dualistic, anthropocentric, androcentric, terracentric, and above all *dry* – that is, it negates a world of flow, flux, and reciprocal exchange with what Dinesen in "Tempests" calls "the sea, that ever-present and ever-inscrutable force" (*AD*, 85). The parson resembles his clerical colleague Mr. Pennhallow of the roughly contemporary *The Angelic Avengers,* who is pictured as "a little, old, dusty man" who lives "among dry and dusty books" (*AA*, 95). Yet he shares a perhaps stronger kinship with the wealthy British tea merchant Mr. Clay of "The Immortal Story," who is characterized as "a tall, dry and close old man," "iron-hard" with a "stony figure" (*AD*,

8 In exploring the psychological effects of a religious upbringing, "Peter and Rosa" complements the story "Alkmene," which immediately precedes it in the Danish *Vinter-Eventyr*.

135).[9] An alternative to the clergyman's "dusty" (*WT*, 252) Christianity is briefly evoked when the story introduces the local fishwife, Emma:

> These fisherwomen were a brisk, hardy race; they would walk twenty miles, heavy-laden, in all kinds of weather, and come home to cook and darn for a husband and a dozen children. They were quick-witted, great newsmongers and at home in every house, and they preferred their roving outdoor profession to that of the peasant woman, tied up in the stable or by the churn, and to that of the parson's wife. Emma, the fish-wife, had placed her creel on the floor and herself upon the chopping-block. She was drinking coffee from a saucer and giving out the news of the neighbourhood, laughing at her own tales. (*WT*, 271)

Rooted in an older, pre-Christian, nonagricultural Denmark, and typifying the female character type whom Dinesen called "the witch" (*DG*, 33–34), the yea-saying Emma differs fundamentally both from Rosa's angelic mother, who was "a virgin when [the parson] married her" (*WT*, 257), and from the docile, practical-minded peasant woman Eline. A "black guardian angel" (*DG*, 34) of the littoral zone, Emma *through* her trade connects land and sea, humans and animals.[10] Her "roving" (*WT*, 271) movements and coffee drinking bring to mind Sunniva of "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," while her "scarcity of teeth" (*WT*, 271) makes her kin to the irascible "toothless bald old Kikuyu wives" (*OA*, 161) of *Out of Africa*, whose "wrinkled toothless faces dissolve in laughter" (*OA*, 368). Emma carries the witch's improper "Dionysianism" (Stambaugh 1988, 84) and the unconquerable power of laughter implicit in the Hebrew name Isak into a household of stifling patriarchal seriousness. If the parson's desiccated religion threatens to drag Peter and Rosa "into the earth" (*WT*, 254), Dinesen's story

9 Immobilized by gout, the solitary Mr. Clay values "solid fact" (*AD*, 151) and worships gold, striving for a metallic hardness that will be "proof against dissolution" (*AD*, 176–177). He associates body fluids, which he calls "the juices of life," with weakness and corruption: "'I myself,' he said, 'am hard, I am dry. I have always been so, and I would not have it otherwise. I have a distaste for the juices of the body. I do not like the sight of blood, I cannot drink milk, sweat is offensive to me, tears disgust me. In such things a man's bones are dissolved. And in those relationships between people which they name fellowship, friendship or love, a man's bones themselves are likewise dissolved'" (*AD*, 176–177).

10 The medieval pagan shaman Granze of "The Fish" is a similarly liminal character who rises out of and seems to belong to the ocean: "[A]s they rode down the dunes they saw [...] Granze himself, in the water to his knees, wading ashore, and dragging a weight, a heavy catch of fish, after him. [...] He had trussed up his goatskin frock to the waist, and the young men could not help laughing at the sight of him, so little human was his crooked, dark nakedness. He waded on land, shaggy and flat-footed, snorted like a water-dog and placed on the sand the big fish he trailed" (*WT*, 238–239).

associates Emma with the ocean, with water, and with fluidity. It is she, after all, who brings news that the sea ice at Øresund is finally breaking up: "All winter the fishermen had had to walk a long way out on the ice, to take cod with a tin bait. Now the ice was breaking; the open water was in sight. In a few days they would have their boats afloat once more" (*WT*, 272).

To relieve the tension between them, Peter and Rosa decide to walk to the coast to observe the spectacle described by Emma. Once there, they lose themselves in an escapist fantasy, pretending that an ice floe is the *Esperance* taking them far away from the parsonage. The game turns deadly serious when the floe separates from the land ice, and soon they are adrift on the open sea. Instead of jumping to safety, Peter decides to stay with Rosa, and when the ice disintegrates beneath their feet they are "swept down, in each other's arms, in a few seconds" (*WT*, 285).

Peter and Rosa's drowning fulfills, in a tragic-ironic way, the liquefaction of the solid human identity that Dinesen has carefully prepared with constant references to oozing, dripping, soaking, sopping, running, and streaming liquids including rainwater, seawater, meltwater, tears, sweat, milk, gin, and coffee. In making abundant references to fluids, and in displaying the literal wetness of the characters, "Peter and Rosa" theorizes humans becoming watery via their material entanglements. Connected to, surrounded with, and penetrated by moisture of all kinds, the story's human characters cannot be severed from the environment, which Peter seems to acknowledge when he characterizes the ocean as "a friend":

> Peter said: "Is it not a strange thing about the sea, Rosa? You may look out over it as over a prairie, all the horizon round. And then, just by turning your eyes, you may look down into it as well, all the way to the bottom of it, and it holds back nothing from you. People sometimes say that the sea is treacherous and the earth trustworthy. But the earth closes itself up to one. There may be anything, just below your feet – a buried treasure, the treasure of one of the old pirates – and you can have no idea of it. And as to the air – you may gaze up into it, but you will never know how it looks from the outside. The sea is a friend." (*WT,* 279)

The dissolving and connecting power of wetness is made manifest throughout "Peter and Rosa." Thus, the titular pair's final immersion in "the ice-cold water" (*WT*, 285) literalizes Dinesen's story's suggestion that we think of human beings, including male human beings, less as earthborn than as seaborn, unstable selves-in-motion that are made and unmade by material flows in a thoroughly wet world.

Both Rosa and Peter foresee their watery destinies. While walking to the coast, the "soaked" Rosa wades through "clear water" and feels "intoxicated"

by "the sense of universal moisture": "She felt as if, within a minute or two, she herself, and Peter with her, might melt and dissolve into some unknown, salt flow of delight, and become absorbed into the infinite, swaying, wet world" (*WT*, 279). Shortly before, Peter tells a story of a skipper whose wife steals the precious blue stones that serve as eyes for his ship's figurehead, whereupon he wrecks his vessel and goes "to the bottom" (*WT*, 275) with his entire crew. While planning his elopement earlier in the story, Peter repeatedly contemplates drowning, which appears to him the probable and perhaps not altogether unbecoming destiny of a nineteenth-century Danish sailor:

> Peter, in his survey of the future, also took the sailor's end into consideration. His mind dwelled for some time on his last couch, at the bottom of the sea. Soberly, his brows knitted, he contemplated, as it were, his own bones upon the sand. The deep-water currents would pass through his eyes, like a row of clear, green dreams; big fish, whales even, would float above him like clouds, and a shoal of small fishes might suddenly rush along, an endless streak, like the birds tonight. It would be peaceful, he reflected, and better than a funeral at Søllerød, with his uncle in the pulpit. (*WT*, 252–253)

There is no evidence that Peter, like Malli in "Tempests," has studied the plays of Shakespeare, and it seems unlikely that a pious Danish clergyman would allow texts by the English playwright, who plays with identity and gender and makes very frequent references to pagan gods and beliefs, to be read by his impressionable teenage ward. Unbeknownst to himself, however, but suitably in a winter's tale, Peter has begun to embrace a Shakespearean understanding of the uncertain place that human individuals, including young men like himself, occupy in it a world of "universal moisture" (*WT*, 279). Peter's anticipatory vision of his drowned body on the ocean floor owes a specific debt to Ariel's famous song of underwater metamorphosis in act one, scene two of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), a text that interested Dinesen considerably and that has long held the attention of ecocritical and posthumanist scholars (e.g. Mentz 2009, 1–13, Brayton 2012, 166–195; Duckert 2017, 1–45):[11]

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:

11 Dinesen "discovered" Shakespeare at fifteen and developed a "*personal* enthusiasm" (*LA*, 209) that was to last her all her life. She counted *The Tempest* among her favorite Shakespeare plays but watched her first performance, directed by Peter Brook and starring John Gielgud as Prospero, during a visit to Stratford in November 1957 (*KBD*, 2:375).

> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange. (Shakespeare 1999, 178)

The spirit Ariel speaks these lines in an effort both to comfort the Neapolitan prince Ferdinand, who is shipwrecked on the beach of an uninhabited island, and to make him play his part in the theatrical proceedings that the magician Prospero has contrived to end his exile on the island. Ariel is an ambiguously gendered, perpetually mutating cyborgic mixture of human technology and nonhuman nature. Acting at Prospero's behest, Ariel depicts the allegedly drowned body of Ferdinand's father, King Alonso, broken down and dissolved by "salt water's transformative impact on human flesh" (Mentz 2009, 1).[12] In Ariel's song, the body of Alonso, who is the highest-ranking male authority figure in the play, lies scattered across the seabed, now strikingly bereft of the integrity and wholeness that are the hallmarks of the self-possessed male subject, but integrated into a larger and strangely beautiful assemblage of disparate living elements. Alonso retains vestiges of his human appearance, but his body is both enriched and estranged, augmented and annulled, disassembled and itemized as in the rhetorical figure of the blazon, simultaneously in and part of the ocean. The human being's discrete and independent status liquefies, as Alonso's singular body mutates into curious new material forms.

The intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare makes "Peter and Rosa" more than a bittersweet coming-of-age story about a romantic Danish adolescent's foiled nautical dreams. Dinesen's Peter foretells his death by water, but in so doing, he also entertains an alternative, emergent, not yet fully articulated understanding of life. He views himself as he will be, "mudded in that oozy bed" (Shakespeare 1999, 273), but he also dimly perceives what he already *is* – that is, a creature embodied not through boundaries, borders, and hard edges but through apertures, interfaces, and circulations. Peter has an arresting vision, the significance of which he still does not fully comprehend, of the body's ecological embeddedness in the larger world with which it transacts. Increasingly attuned to "the fact that everything was wet" (*WT*, 278), he is turning from his uncle's world, where everything is "dry and hard, unyielding to the touch" (*WT,* 279), to the world of Shakespeare, where human beings both female and male are inescapably co-implicated in a dynamic, watery world.[13]

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12 As Ariel speaks these lines, however, the audience is aware that Alonso has neither died nor transformed.

13 Viewed in this way, humans are perhaps not so dissimilar from other creatures such as the ducks that Peter and Rosa observe while walking to the coast: "Now there were tuffed ducks swimming in the pale water, themselves so similar to it in colour that they could

Peter's Shakespearean visualization of his own body blended into the seascape, surrounded and penetrated by water, refutes any dualist "picture of paradise" (*WT*, 254), any culturally authoritative dogma of human exceptionalism, and any dream of hard and dry masculine embodiment. In his mind's eye, Peter views his sea-changed corpse recontextualized by strange kinships and proximities. He recognizes himself as a creature with fluid boundaries, entering and simultaneously entered by the ocean, less a solitary, self-possessed entity than a component within swarms, streams, and currents. He intuits how the human body, which temporarily accommodates the mind, commingles with sand, fishes, and whales within a greater, ever shifting network.

Literature is riddled with drowned and drowning bodies, from Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601) to Lycidas in John Milton's "Lycidas" (1638), James Steerforth in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Eustacia Vye in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), Beata Rosmer in Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886), Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Phlebas the Phoenician in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Yet there were few twentieth-century writers who made so many references to drowning or enjoyed drowning characters as much as Dinesen. The first story of the American *Seven Gothic Tales*, "The Deluge at Norderney," not coincidentally opens with an inundation that becomes a mass drowning event, claiming the lives (presumably) of the four protagonists as well as hundreds of unnamed humans and animals. The first story of the American *Winter's Tales*, "The Young Man with the Carnation," has the dejected poet Charlie Despard wondering "why I did not drown myself last night" (*WT*, 12), and in "Tempests," it is the tale's androgynous protagonist, Malli Ross, who imagines herself in a watery grave:

> Full fathom five my body lies,
> Of my bones are coral made,
> Those are pearls that were my eyes,
> Nothing of me that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring my knell.
> Hark! now I hear them – ding dong bell. (*AD*, 126)

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only be distinguished by their black necks and wings, an irregular, shifting group of little dark specks upon the waves" (*WT*, 281).

When Peter and Rosa sink to the bottom, they join the skipper in Peter's own inset anecdote of the blue eyes as well as old Madam Bæk's husband in "The Supper at Elsinore," Povl's father in "The Immortal Story," who is believed by his son to be "down there, in the sea" (*AD*, 190), and numerous drowned characters in "Tempests" including Captain Ross, Guro, Jonas Hosewinckel, and possibly Malli herself.[14]

In private conversation, Dinesen contrasted Goethe, dry and landlocked in Germany, with Shakespeare, "who always brings the ocean with him" (qtd. Svendsen and Wivel 1962, 187 [author's translation]). If *The Tempest* is "Shakespeare's wettest play" (Duckert 2017, 3), "Peter and Rosa," with its vast reservoir of water images and references, is likely Dinesen wettest story.[15] Although it does not rank among Dinesen's best-known tales, "Peter and Rosa" is particularly remarkable for the straightforwardness and equanimity with which its male protagonist embraces material enmeshment and wet embodiment as inescapable conditions of life:

> "Many ships go down, Peter. Most sailors are drowned in the end." He had to fetch his mind back from the picture of her in the window before he could speak. "Yes, I know," he said. "But all people are to die some time, you know. And I think that to be drowned will be the grandest death of all." "Why do you think that?" asked Rosa, who was herself scared of water. "Oh, I do not know," said he, and after a moment: "It will be, perhaps, because of that great lot of water. For when you come to think of it, there is really nothing dividing the one ocean from the other. They are all one. When you drown in the sea, it is all the seas of the world that take you. It seems to me that that is grand." (*WT*, 266)

Christianity epitomizes what John R. Gillis calls a "terracentricity" that has become "foundational to western civilization" (2012, 7). The Book of Genesis was written at the time when the Hebrews were adopting an agricultural mode of life, and in the Christian Bible, Paradise is a "landlocked" garden, "Earth is birthed by a patriarchal god," "land is a paternal rather than a maternal force," and "after the fall, the sea appears as an alien environment, a perpetual threat to humankind" (2012, 10).[16] The terms in which God curses Adam – "By the

14 Tone Selboe (1996, 130–131) argues that Malli plans to drown herself at the end of the story, rather than rejoining Herr Soerensen's theatrical troupe.

15 The word "wet" is used six times in the story, while "water" occurs twenty-one times.

16 A similar argument is made by W. H. Auden, who writes that in western thought "the sea […] is the state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and

sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19) – resonate throughout the Bible (e.g. Gen. 18:27; Job 30:19; Eccl. 3:20), while the Apocalypse of St. John prophesizes a redeemed world where "there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1).[17] A drowning à la Shakespeare appears less horrific to Peter than a respectable Christian interment in the ground, because the former more honestly confronts the constant sea-changes of embodied human existence. While the Christian burial ritual ("Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust") attempts to safeguard the human being's exceptional status in the universe, submersion in the sea, by contrast, dispels the human and more specifically masculine fantasy of impervious identity.[18] Men should perhaps not fear wet embodiment too much, Peter lets us surmise, for we have never been particularly hard and dry in the first place.

4 Admissions and Emissions

Men are irresistibly drawn to water in Dinesen's fiction, and Boris von Schreckenstein of "The Monkey" is another male character who feels an affinity with the wet element:

> "I should like," said Boris, [...] "to go away and live upon a forlorn island, far from other people. There is nothing for which you feel such a great longing as for the sea. The passion of man for the sea," he went on, his dark eyes on Athena's face, "is unselfish. He cannot cultivate it; its water he cannot drink; in it he dies. Still, far from the sea you feel part

into which, unless it is saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always likely to relapse" (1950, 17).

17 Contrasting this terracentrism, Lady Helena in the story that Carlie Despard tells the sailors in "The Young Man with the Carnation" maintains that "the water, which is the noblest of the elements, does, of course, go all through the earth, so that our planet really floats in the ether, like a soap-bubble" (*WT*, 21).

18 In the Danish version of the story, "Peter og Rosa," the narrator uses the expression "kaste jord" ("throw earth") to describe the Christian burial (*VE*, 188). In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen critiques how the Kikuyu chief Kinanjui's dead body is seized by Christian relatives and interred in a manner completely antithetical to his non-Christian beliefs, wishes, and mode of life. "The Kikuyus," Dinesen writes, "do not bury their dead, but leave them above ground for the Hyenas and vulture to deal with. The custom had always appealed to me, I thought that it would be a pleasant thing to be laid out to the sun and the stars, and to be so promptly, neatly and openly picked and cleansed; to be made one with Nature and become a common component of a landscape" (*OA*, 326).

> of your own soul dying, disappearing, like a jellyfish thrown on dry land." (*SGT*, 145)[19]

Appearing as the third story in *Seven Gothic Tales*, "The Monkey" is set among soldiers and aristocrats in one of "the Lutheran countries of northern Europe" (*SGT*, 109) that is likely to be Prussia (Kabell 1968, 127), Europe's foremost military power during the early- to mid-nineteenth-century period of the story. In "The Monkey," the young officer Boris has dishonored himself by involvement in what appears to be a homosexual scandal, and now he consults his aunt Cathinka, who owns the titular monkey and is the Prioress of a former convent that has been adapted into a home for elderly ladies. To ward off family disgrace, Cathinka commands that Boris court and wed Athena Hopballehus, the daughter of a neighboring aristocrat recently made wealthy by winning a decades-long lawsuit. Such a union, she hypothesizes, will both repair the damage to Boris's reputation and in time hopefully produce an heir "of noble birth" (*SGT*, 109) who can unite the two families. The Count of Hopballehus and his daughter live in isolation from the surrounding world, but a mysterious exchange of letters hints that there exists a prior, perhaps incestuous liaison between the two families. The physically strong but sexually inexperienced Athena rejects Boris's suit, however, vowing that she "will never marry" (*SGT*, 135). The Prioress then invites Athena to a "great supper of seduction" (*SGT*, 139) that she hopes will weaken her defenses and seal the alliance.

Dinesen's neogothic extravaganza revels in ambiguous reversals, cryptic innuendos, and risqué double entendres, and critics have long struggled to resolve the gender trouble that it foments (e.g. Aiken 1990, 133–153; Hees 1984; Mishler 1985; Heede 2001, 49–57, 99–105). What particularly interests me here is how Dinesen disputes the ideology of the "sealed up, impermeable [male] body" (Grosz 1994, 199) and keeps fluidity uppermost in readers' minds. Characters in this story of "wine-begotten hopes and moods" (*SGT*, 127) partake of fluid substances such as coffee (*SGT*, 134), wine (*SGT*, 116, 125–128, 140, 144), champagne (*SGT*, 140) and beer (*SGT*, 143). The Count of Hopballehus is the owner of an estate with a "famous row of *jets d'eaux* [fountains], which were constructed by the great Danish astronomer Ole Roemer, the same who made the *grandes eaux* of Versailles" (*SGT*, 135). When Boris calls upon him,

19 The Danish version of the story, "Aben," elaborates on Boris's thalassophilia: "Han havde selv som Dreng haft mange Drømme om Havet, ja, var engang løbet hjemmefra for at gaa til søs, var blevet hentet tilbage, og havde græmmet sig i lange Tider" ("As a boy he himself had had many dreams of the ocean, had even once run away from home to go to sea, but had been brought back and had grieved for a long time") (*SFF*, 122).

the Count compares their meeting to the wedding of Cana, and asserts that "water has certainly been changed into wine" (*SGT*, 126–127): "'Come in, come in, Boris,' he said, 'we will drink a glass together, you and I, from the wine which I have put aside for today'" (*SGT*, 125). Among other exploits, the Count has written *The Undine* (*SGT*, 127), a tragedy whose title refers to a female water spirit seeking to marry a terrestrial male to gain a human soul.

Later, during the "great supper of seduction," the Prioress plies Athena with rich food and wine, and Athena, whose skin is "white as milk" (*SGT*, 134), struggles to maintain her composure under the influence of the Prioress's potent drink:

> She had drunk very little wine in her life, and had never tasted champagne, and with the amounts which the hostess of the supper party poured into her, she ought rightly not to have been able to stand on her legs. But she had behind her a long row of ancestors who had in their time lain under all the heavy old oak tables of the province, and who now came to the assistance of the daughter of their race. Still the wine went to her head. (*SGT*, 140)

Throughout the story, wine is "poured out [...] very freely" (*SGT*, 140), and both Athena and Boris contemplate the effects of these potent beverages on their mental state and behavior. On the night of the dinner, Athena worries that she has "drunk too much of the good wine. Look, my hand is not even steady when I put it on this table" (*SGT*, 140). On the morning after, Boris, "who could drink more than most people" (*SGT*, 140), still feels the effect of "the wine of the previous night" (*SGT*, 159), and he suspects that "a good deal of [Athena's] pallor and immobility might be due to the wine and the exertion of the night" (*SGT*, 158).

When Athena retires to her room, the Prioress orders Boris to force himself upon her and thereby coerce her to comply with their marriage plans. When Boris objects that "there is a limit to the effects of will-power in a man" (*SGT*, 149), his aunt concocts a liquid "love philter" (*SGT*, 155) to fortify his resolve:

> The old woman kept staring at him. She stretched out her dry delicate little hand and touched him. Her face twisted in a wry little grimace. After a moment she moved around to the back of the room and brought back a bottle and a small glass. Very carefully she filled the glass, handed it to him, and nodded her head two or three times. In sheer despair he emptied it.

> The glass was filled with a liquor of the color of very old dark amber. It had an acrid and rank taste. Acrid and rank were also the old dark-amber eyes of the woman, watching him over the rim of the glass. As he drank, she laughed. Then she spoke. Boris, strangely enough, afterward remembered these words, which he did not understand: "Help him now, you good Faru," she said. (*SGT*, 149–150)

Gothic fiction is rife with scenes of poisoning, drugging, and intoxication, attesting to the genre's preoccupation with questions of bodily (in)stability, (im)permeability and power(lessness) (e.g. Davison 2016). This episode illustrates the ingenuity with which Dinesen decenters normative understandings of gender and sexuality. Intent that Boris marry, reproduce, and carry on the noble von Schreckenstein name, the Prioress seeks to steel her soldier-nephew's phallic prowess. Dipping into her fount of arcane knowledge, the "witch-priestess" (Stambaugh 1988, 57) sends the "young officer" (*SGT*, 141) on a mission to conquer the reluctant virgin. It is highly ironic, however, that Boris's hardness must be produced through the ingestion of pulverized rhinoceros's horn, an exotic substance or liquid *pharmakon* that "acts as both remedy and poison" (Derrida, 2004, 75).[20] Far from coming naturally to all men, Dinesen implies, heterosexual, penetrative, and procreative desire must be taught, enforced, and disciplined. Codes of gendered behavior and sexual orientation governing what it means to be male or female lie embedded less in human beings themselves than in collective structures, social expectations, and conventional practices (Heede 2001, 49–57).

In addition, this scene of "Gothic pharmacology" (Davidson, 2016, 206) illuminates how Dinesen makes manifest the "interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human and nonhuman bodies" (Alaimo 2010, 2), and especially how she situates male bodies as porous, processual, and vulnerable to infiltration and pollution. To wear down Athena's defenses, the prioress serves "marzipan and crystallized fruit" (*SGT*, 140), "champagne" (*SGT*, 142), and a "sweet pudding" (*SGT*, 146) spiced with cloves imported (like the rhino horn) from Africa. Here as everywhere in Dinesen's writing, the use of animal metaphors carries considerable significance. The rhinoceros' panzer-like skin and phallic horn make it a suitable symbol for a complete and indestructible masculine body with "armorlike properties" (Theweleit 1987, 164). Boris's embodiment is defined not by unflinching impenetrability, however, but by

20 "Faru" is Swahili for rhinoceros, and "The Dreamers" tells us that in parts of Africa "rhinohorn [...] is highly valued as an aphrodisiac" (*SGT*, 339).

its extreme susceptibility to substances that enter his body, course through it, and compromise its integrity from within: "His blood leapt up to his brain; he hardly knew where he was. With failing breath he wondered if this was an effect of the Prioress's love potion" (*SGT*, 151). Even before he ingests the Prioress's aphrodisiac, Boris is shown enjoying "two glasses [of wine], which did him good" (*SGT*, 116), drinking "his wine in a happy mood" (*SGT*, 128), and "pouring himself out some more coffee" (*SGT*, 134). A little later, Boris expounds the kinship that he feels with the ocean and its watery creatures: "There is nothing for which you feel such a great longing as for the sea. […] far from the sea you feel part of your own soul dying, disappearing, like a jellyfish thrown on dry land" (*SGT*, 145). As Alaimo argues, visualizing the "extreme fluidity and fragility of jellyfish" can open new perspectives on (post)humanity, for "[w]hile Western humanist subjects have long imagined themselves as distinct from their environments […] jellies exhibit another way of being in which the living creature is immersed within and inseparable from its watery world" (2013, 140, 152). Boris's humorous self-comparison – to a gelatinous jellyfish rather than a monumental rhinoceros – establishes permeability and viscosity as crucial (though mostly disavowed) characteristics of human and more specifically male embodiment. It implies that male bodies are not contoured and contained but radically open to the environment, changing, growing, and evolving in their engagements with the world.

Seven Gothic Tales is awash in scenes and images of flux and flow, from the terrific bursting of dams and dikes that activates the plot of the first story in the American edition, "The Deluge at Norderney," to the nautical "swan song" planned by Anders Kube in "The Poet," a "last great epos" in which "Naiads and tritons danced in the waves […]; the whales passed over their heads like clouds; dolphins, swans, and fishes played in the powerful and pearly foam of long breakers, and the winds played at flutes and bassoons, and joined in great orchestras" (*SGT*, 397). Bodies in "The Monkey" are not solid and impervious but porous and permeable, linked to other bodies and sites through constant liquid exchanges. Men are caught up in this state, as fluids ooze not only into but also from the male body. When Boris intrudes upon Athena in her bedchamber and disingenuously professes his passion – "Athena […] I have loved you all my life" – he is met with stubborn resistance:

> For a moment the light-eyed girl stared at him, bewildered. Then she drew herself up as a snake does when it is ready to strike. That she did not attempt to cry for help showed him that she had a clearer understanding of the situation, and of the fact that she had no friend in the house, than he had given her credit for; or perhaps her young broad

> breast harbored sheer love of combat. The next moment she struck out. Her powerful swift and direct fist hit him in the mouth and knocked out two of his teeth. The pain and the smell and taste of the blood which filled his mouth sent him beside himself. He let her go to try for a stronger hold, and immediately they were in each other's arms, in an embrace of life and death. (*SGT*, 152).

With this scuffle, Dinesen again burlesques the normative distribution of gender roles in heterosexual courtship rituals. Athena is introduced as "a strong young woman of eighteen, six feet high and broad in proportion, with a pair of shoulders which could lift and carry a sack of wheat" (*SGT*, 129). With her powerful physique, strong political persuasions, and complete disinterest in heterosexual marriage, she towers above Boris, the "fickle lover" (*SGT*, 153) dressed "in his white uniform and high golden collar, his pomatumed curls like a halo in the light" (*SGT*, 130). Boris's fluidification has been carefully prepared by the images of drinking, seepage, staining and spilling that recur throughout the story and especially during the "great supper of seduction," as when "in her excited state of mind [Athena] overturned her glass, breaking the stem of it, and the wine flowed over the tablecloth" (*SGT*, 145). The flow of blood from Boris's mouth, moreover, parallels the décor of the bedroom, whose "floor had a wine-colored carpet with roses in it, which, near the lamps, seemed to be drinking in the light, and farther from them looked like pools of dark crimson into which one would not like to walk" (*SGT*, 151). Previously "blood leapt up to his brain," but here, at the climax of the story, Boris feels blood leaking from his body: "The blood kept coming into his mouth [...] Gasping for air, his mouth full of blood, he saw the whole room swaying from one side to another" (*SGT*, 154). Unlike Freudian psychoanalytic critics, I read Boris's manhandling not as a symbolic castration (Hees 1984, 20; Mishler 1985, 443) but as a counterdiscursive fluidification that helps us reimagine masculinity in terms of corporeal incompleteness, fragility, and environmentality. With its fleshy contours and seeping liquid, Boris's wound prizes open the antiecological male body, reveals its depth and vulnerability, and lays bare its inescapable participation in organic processes. The blood that spills from Boris's "bleeding mouth" (*SGT*, 155), in other words, dissolves the myth of the heroically contained and controlled male physique where "all orifices [...] are closed" (Bakhtin 1984, 320) and inscribes male corporeality as a "mode of seepage" (Grosz 1994, 203). Gendered representations have often stressed female enmeshment in fluidity to suggest that "[w]omen are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men" (Grosz 1994, 14). "The Monkey," however, co-implicates male bodies in the "maelstrom" (*SGT*, 158) of creaturely consanguinity.

5 Regendering Flow

"Ehrengard" was first printed in abbreviated form as "The Secret of Rosenbad" in the American women's magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* in December 1962, and subsequently it has often been included in English-language editions of *Anecdotes of Destiny*, the publication for which it was originally slated.[21] Described by Dinesen as a "joke" (*KBD*, 2:118), "Ehrengard" contains echoes of Choderlos de Laclos' *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) and especially Søren Kierkegaard's *The Seducer's Diary* (1843), to which it is often seen as "a kind of feminist response" (Smyth 2004, 191) or "meta-narrative counter-comment" (Bunch 2013, 497). Equally importantly, the story connects intertextually to other parts of Dinesen's oeuvre, including "The Monkey." Hailing from a strict Prussian soldier family, the titular heroine Ehrengard has been "[b]rought up in the sternest military virtues" (*AD*, 228), and not coincidentally she shares a surname with Boris von Schreckenstein of Dinesen's earlier story.

Set (like "The Monkey") in early nineteenth-century Germany, "Ehrengard" transports readers from the world of gothic romance to that of "pastoral comedy" (Langbaum 1963, 639). The Grand Duke and Duchess of the small German principality of Fugger-Babenhausen desperately need male heirs, lest "the ducal crown [...] pass to a lateral branch of the dynasty, of doubtful legitimacy and principles" (*AD*, 216). After "a waiting time of fifteen years" (*AD*, 216), the couple finally produce a son and heir, but the "angelic" (*AD*, 217) Prince Lothar, when he comes of age, shows little interest in marrying and perpetuating the family line. The Grand Duchess commissions her friend, the fashionable womanizing painter Wolfgang Cazotte, to resolve the quandary, and success seems secure when Lothar marries Princess Ludmilla of Leuchtenstein. The plot thickens when it becomes clear that Ludmilla expects a child "a full two months before law and decency permitted" (*AD*, 223).[22] Upon Cazotte's suggestion, Ludmilla is removed to the remote rococo Rosenbad Castle, where her circumstances can be concealed until the birth of her child can safely be proclaimed to the world.

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21 In Danish, "Ehrengard" appeared as a separate book publication in 1962, translated by Clara Selborn.

22 That Ludmilla becomes pregnant almost instantaneously somewhat jars with the "old lady" (*AD*, 215) narrator's claim that Lothar "admired beauty in women as he admired it in flowers [...] [b]ut *la belle passion* [...] to him seemed to remain alien" (*AD*, 218). As so often in Dinesen's stories, unresolved ambiguity surrounds the circumstances of the child's conception and the husband's claim to biological paternity (e.g. Heede 2001, 87–88; Møller 2005).

At Rosenbad, the emphasis shifts towards Cazotte's growing obsession with the princess's virtuous maid of honor, Ehrengard. A "blatantly misogynistic" (Stambaugh 1988, 94) libertine and aesthete, Cazotte in many ways resembles Kierkegaard's ironic seducer, Johannes, but Cazotte contrives something more subtle than a simple physical seduction. He plans to make Ehrengard blush, eliciting a physical reaction that he associates with humiliation and self-surrender and that he believes will expose her sensual warmth more effectively than any sexual encounter: "I shall in time be drawing my young Amazon's blood, not down onto the ground – for I dislike the sight of human blood outside the human body, it is the wrong color and mars a picture – but upwards from the deepest, most secret and sacred wells of her being, making it cover her all over like a transparent crimson veil and making it burn her up in one single exquisite gasp of flame" (*AD*, 233). Cazotte discovers that Ehrengard is in the habit of bathing nude in a forest lake, and he begins clandestinely painting her naked portrait. Seeing herself captured, revealed, and compromised in his painting, he speculates, will make Ehrengard blush, her blushing will seal his triumph, and she "will be more thoroughly seduced than was ever any other maiden" (*AD*, 245):

> The picture which he had here been ordered to paint – "Nymph bathing in a forest lake," or "The bath of Diana" – would be in itself a wonder and a glory, the crowning of his career as an artist. But more wonderful and glorious still would be the moment in which he was to set it before the eyes of its model.
> [...]
> The figure on the canvas would remain chastely silvery before the ardent eyes of the spectators. But the maiden by his side would slowly become all aglow. Behind the shawl, silk gown, embroidered petticoats and dainty cambric, the straight, strong, pure body from heel to forehead would blush into a deep exquisite crimson, a mystical *rose persan*, which no clear water of a mountain lake would ever wash away. (*AD*, 251–252)

Throughout this story, Dinesen evokes conventional conceptual codes that link women's bodies with indeterminacy, impermanence, and fluid boundaries. Cazotte refers to the feminized Rosenbad community as "the Venusberg" (*AD*, 252), a name that is both a reference to Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* (1845) and the German word for the *mons veneris* of the female genitals. Venus' Greek name, Aphrodite, was taken from the word *aphros* ("foam"), and Cazotte also characterizes the "coterie" of Rosenbad as "servants of the seaborn Goddess" (*AD*, 232). At Rosenbad, the household organizes itself around the

pregnant body of the Princess Ludmilla, "heavy with the sweetness of life" (*AD*, 235). When Ludmilla gives birth to a boy, the community expands to accommodate the young wet nurse Lispeth, "buxom, pink and white" and the mother of "two children beside the baby which she had left in order to give her warm bosom and heart to the little Prince" (*AD*, 240–241). As the result of intercourse and the precursor to childbirth, pregnancy makes the female body's permeability visible. Iris M. Young writes that pregnancy "challenges the integration of my bodily experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. [...] [T]he boundaries of my body are in flux. In pregnancy I lose the sense of where my body ends and the world begins" (2005, 49–50). Breastfeeding similarly highlights how fluids collapse the distinction between inside and outside, and how "[w]omen are often understood to be in possession of insecure (leaking, seeping) bodily boundaries" (Longhurst 2001, 2). Pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, all of which figure prominently in Dinesen's narrative, seem to epitomize the female body's liminality and lack of fixed contours.

In plotting Ehrengard's "ruin" (*AD*, 244), Cazotte, "the irresistible Don Juan of his age" (*AD*, 218), imagines her as a porous vessel that can be filled and emptied at his desire: "I am making her drink in by eye, ear, and nostril and by every pore of her clear skin the sweet poison of the Venusberg" (*AD*, 237). Although Cazotte considers himself a genius and fancies his painting a masterpiece "for all eternity" (*AD*, 251), his voyeuristic likeness of Ehrengard as "a water nymph happily back in her element" (*AD*, 250) is steeped in familiar aesthetic conventions and cultural dichotomies. Far from original, it draws on the Greek myth of the birth of Venus, on classical stories of sirens, nymphs, and naiads, on Renaissance images of Diana and Actaeon, and on innumerable eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representations of naked female bathers:

> Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through, with tributaries, pools, surfs and deltas; woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges; love as the collision of two waves, as a sea voyage, a slow ebbing, a fish-catch, a storm. (Theweleit 1987, 283)

By painting Ehrengard as an enticing *baigneuse*, Cazotte will reveal her essential nature and "capture," "fasten," and "fix" (*AD*, 251) her in her proper, watery element. As so often before, Cazotte's male gaze will objectify woman as a creature of messy materiality, a "seaborn goddess" (*AD*, 232) inescapably part of the environment, engulfed by the fluidity that defines her. At the same time, the

painting will affirm an equally traditional understanding of the male subject as isolated from, set off against, and exalted above the female body and the natural world. While Ehrengard will be sensually immersed in water, Cazotte will, as always, occupy the high and dry ground.

The story culminates when jealous rival members of the Babenhausen dynasty inveigle a young peasant, Matthias, to kidnap his wife, the wet nurse Lispeth, and deliver the royal baby to them as evidence of foul play. When the fleeing pair stop at an inn to "feed the baby" (*AD*, 264), Ehrengard and Cazotte arrive in hot pursuit, hoping to retrieve the prince, and a brawl ensues:

> [Ehrengard] gripped Matthias by his long hair and three times knocked his head against the wall behind him till the room darkened and swam before his eyes. He gave out a row of low wails which, however, far from frightening his tormentor, infuriated her into striking him in the face with her fist, so that the blood spouted from his nose. In actual fear of his life, of being knocked to pieces by the strong young hands that held him, he made his cries for help ring through the house. (*AD*, 296)

By coincidence, Ehrengard's fiancé, Kurt von Blittersdorff, is at the inn, and alarmed by the altercation he demands to know who the child is. Ehrengard cannot break her vow of secrecy, so she sacrifices her relationship with Kurt by claiming that the child is her own. Kurt, in turn, requests that she disclose the name of the father:

> "It is he," she said. "Herr Cazotte is the father of my child."
>
> At these words Herr Cazotte's blood was drawn upwards, as from the profoundest wells of his being, till it colored him all over like a transparent crimson veil. His brow and cheeks, all on their own, radiated a divine fire, a celestial, deep rose flame, as if they were giving away a long kept secret.
>
> And it was a strange thing that he should blush. For normally an onlooker in a *fauteuil d'orchestre* would grow pale at seeing the irate hero of the stage suddenly turn upon him. The actual situation held very grave possibilities to Herr Cazotte. A duel might be the immediate consequence of it, and Herr Cazotte, as it is known, disliked the sight of human blood outside the human body. Any gallant warrior of Babenhausen, knowing Kurt von Blittersdorff's reputation with a sword or a pistol, might have gone white, even white as death.
>
> But Herr Cazotte, who was an artist, blushed. (*AD*, 276)

"Ehrengard" is a "story of blushes" (Anderson 1992), and Cazotte's blushing – in lieu of Ehrengard's – marks the story's ironic denouement. A century-long

tradition in North European and American aesthetics has gendered and racialized the mysterious physiological phenomenon of blushing, associating light-skinned people's facial reddening with hidden layers of sensibility and sensuality (Rosenthal 2004). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction, "[b]lushing is the realm of the female" (Wiltshire 1992, 79), functioning metonymically to indicate women's sexual or biological instability. Dinesen, however, regenders blushing in poignant characterizations of her male protagonists. In "The Immortal Story," for example, the "tall, dry and close" (*AD*, 135) Mr. Clay's antithesis, the young Danish sailor Povl, is "full of the juices of life" (*AD*, 177) and easily "flushed with food and wine" (*AD*, 177). Povl reddens readily, frequently, and forcefully throughout the story. After enjoying a glass of wine, "he suddenly blushed so deeply that his eyes seemed to water with the heat from his burning cheeks" (*AD*, 173), and later again, "the blood rushed to his face; it sank back, mounted again and kept glowing darkly through the tan of his cheeks" (*AD*, 180). Povl plunges into the story, setting solids in motion.[23] In his company, "even Mr. Clay had strangely come to life. It was as if the young runner [...] had made his own old blood run freer; he even had a faint pink in his cheeks, like that of a painted woman" (*AD*, 172).

In "Ehrengard," too, blushing betrays the male body's "reenfleshed" (Thomas 2002, 71) involvement in the flows of the natural world, which Cazotte has disowned, aestheticized, and feminized. Cazotte observes the colors of the landscape, and he dreams of replicating in Ehrengard's face the phenomenon known as "*Alpenglühen*" (alpine glow), when "[a]fter the sun has set, and as the whole majestic mountain landscape is already withdrawing into itself, suddenly the row of summits, all on their own, radiate a divine fire, a celestial, deep rose flame, as if they were giving up a long kept secret" (*AD*, 234). During the catastrophe, however, it is Cazotte's own body that is naturalized, revealing its "play of [...] colors" (*AD*, 234).[24] Dinesen repeatedly reminds her readers that Cazotte "disliked the sight of human blood outside the human body" (*AD*, 276), and the older man only narrowly escapes the bloodletting that befalls his younger counterparts, Boris and Matthias. Yet the flow of his blood has already divulged its "long kept secret," and Cazotte's immediate disappearance from Babenhausen and his failure to complete the painting indicate the severity of his exposure. Cazotte's irrepressible blushing, I suggest, again challenges the

23 Susan Brantly finds that Povl is related to nature and "the watery element of the sea [...] the same essences that the dry Mr. Clay despises" (2002, 195).

24 Johnny Kondrup writes that "Cazotte blushes because Ehrengard with her reply so to speak takes him down from his aesthetic spectator position and involves him in the life that he prefers to consider and arrange from a distance" (2011, 104 [author's translation]).

ideology of masculine corporeal inviolability. Dinesen's late sex comedy, in other words, not only "reverses" (Smyth 2004, 189) Kierkegaard's *The Seducer's Diary*; it also continues the work of "Peter and Rosa" and "The Monkey" by deconstructing Cazotte's painting of Ehrengard as "bathing [...] Diana" (*AD*, 254). Cazotte's flushed face in the final scene reminds us of the male body's disavowed "debt to nature" (Kristeva 1980, 102) and lays bare the fact that that men too have "bodies of water" (Neimanis 2017, 1). Instead of Ehrengard, it is Cazotte himself who is exposed as "seaborn" (*AD*, 232).

6 Conclusion

While en route to Kenya in late 1913 on the *ss Admiral*, Dinesen struck up a shipboard acquaintance with the German army officer Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870–1964). Nicknamed "Africanus" and "the lion of Africa," von Lettow-Vorbeck had helped quell the Boxer rebellion in China in 1900 and participated in the suppression of the Namaqua and Herero insurrection in German South-West Africa (now Namibia) in 1904–1907. He later rose to fame (or notoriety) as commander of German-led guerilla forces combating the British in East Africa during World War I. After the war, von Lettow-Vorbeck was hailed as a military hero, and in July 1919 he led a corps of right-wing volunteers fighting to prevent a working-class takeover of Hamburg. In Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, von Lettow-Vorbeck epitomizes the *Freikorps* ideal of stalwart soldierly manliness whose maintenance required unremitting disavowal of "floods, torrents, raging water" (1987, 230). Von Lettow-Vorbeck, Theweleit argues, worked hard throughout his life to preserve his tough shell, and he abjured all fluid softness through careful acts of discipline including the erasure of his wife's name from his autobiography (1987, 10–14).

Upon arrival in Mombasa on January 14, 1914, von Lettow-Vorbeck gave Dinesen a photo of himself accompanied by the poem "Arab Aphorism" ("Arabisches Sprichwort" [1851]) by the German poet Friedrich von Bodenstedt:

> Das Paradies der Erde
> Liegt auf dem Rücken der Pferde
> In der Gesundheit des Leibes
> Und am Herzen des Weibes.
>
> [Paradise on Earth
> Is to be found on horseback
> In the health of the body
> And in the heart of woman.]

In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen briefly mentions the encounter and cites the poem, though she changes the wording:

> Das Paradies auf Erde
> Ist auf dem Rücken der Pferde,
> Und die Gesundheit des Leibes
> Am Busen des Weibes. (*OA*, 260)
>
> [Paradise on Earth
> Is to be found on horseback
> And the health of the body
> At the bosom of woman.]

Dinesen's reference caught the attention of von Lettow-Vorbeck, who wrote to her in April 1939, objecting to the substitution of "heart" by "bosom." Dinesen's alteration, von Lettow-Vorbeck observes, has lent the poem an unintended "physical" interpretation, which "is a great mistake and gives quite another meaning" (*KBD*, 1:297–298).

A self-described "soldier's daughter" (qtd. Stecher-Hansen 2010, 55), Dinesen maintained cordial relations with von Lettow-Vorbeck, corresponding with the German war hero (or war criminal) on several occasions and reporting her April 1939 visit with him at some length in in her belated 1948 essay "Letters from a Land at War" (*DG*, 92–100).[25] We can read the substitution of "bosom" for "heart" as neither "garbled German" (Gaudi 2017, 133) nor as innocent "misquotation" (Stecher-Hansen 2014, 96) but rather as a duplicitous "dismantling, via rewriting" (Aiken 1990, 32) through which "counter-discursive energies" (Zapf 2016, 139) furtively unsettle male strategies of disavowal. "'He was hard,'" World War I German soldiers said about von Lettow-Vorbeck (*DG,* 94), yet this exchange reinscribes the pattern that I have identified in "Peter and Rosa," "The Monkey," and "Ehrengard." Dinesen softens the German general's metallic masculinity by linking him with the female breast, an organ "both biologically and culturally associated with flux" (Giles 2005, 304). Here as elsewhere, she makes the would-be man of steel a "breasted body [...] blurry, mushy, indefinite, multiple, and without clear identity" (Young 2005, 80). Imposing her "physical interpretation" on the poem and the soldier male who gifted it to her elicited a defensive reaction from von Lettow-Vorbeck, who promptly wrote to set the record straight. By contrast, we who read Dinesen's words today might choose to

25 Marianne Stecher-Hansen (2010, 55) attributes Dinesen's ambivalent fascination with "the warrior ethos" to her father, Wilhelm Dinesen, who authored books about his fighting in the battle at Dybbøl (1864) and in the Franco-Prussian (1870–1871) and Russian-Turkish (1877–1878) wars.

respond in a different, less recalcitrant spirit, heeding her invitation to "remember the liquid ground" (Irigaray 1991, 37), recognize that "men's bodies are at least as fluid as women's" (Young 2005, 81), and explore what happens if male fluidity is acknowledged and mobilized rather than disavowed and resented.

Gender is a key factor in shaping perceptions of environmental relationships, and moving towards sustainability requires that we rethink dominant ideas about both femininity *and* masculinity. Neither rearmoring the male body nor mythopoeticizing men as indomitable cowboys, warriors, and hunters will help us articulate adequate responses to chemical pollution, environmental injustice, mass extinction, ocean acidification, and climate change. A more fruitful strategy would be to adopt a stance of "insurgent vulnerability" based on the acknowledgment "that we all inhabit transcorporeal interchanges, processes, and flows" (Alaimo 2016, 108).

Current feminist, ecofeminist, and new materialist scholars debate how notions of female corporeal leakiness can be rescued from their more essentialist and derogatory meanings and used to formulate a new environmental ethic (Stephens 2014). Grosz wonders why "[t]here are virtually no phenomenological accounts of men's fluids" (1994, 198), while Benjamin, Theweleit, Foster, and others critique the literary, cultural, intellectual, and political valorization of impervious masculinity throughout the twentieth century and even today.[26] Numerous scholars have analyzed the key role played by literary texts and other cultural forms and genres in normalizing hegemonic codes of "manly" identity and behavior that situate men in transcendent, alienated, adversarial, or exploitative relationships vis-á-vis women and the natural world.[27] Yet it is also possible to find modern literary writers both male and female who endeavor to recover "the forms of seepage that are [men's] own" (Grosz 1994, 202). Works by the French avantgarde writer Jean Genet, for example, document his interest in "those knock-out body fluids: blood, sperm, tears!" (Genet 1993, 202). And Leopold Bloom, the "new womanly man" (Joyce 2000, 614) of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), obsessively ruminates on female *and* male corporeal effluvia, including his wife Molly's breastmilk and menstrual blood, the semen that Molly's lover Blazes Boylan leaves on the sheets of his marital bed, and the urine that Bloom himself unleashes in copious amounts.

26 In Alaimo's view, two-time US president Donald Trump appeals to many voters because he performs an "impenetrable masculinity that is inseparable from racism, xenophobia, [...] misogyny" and "the rejection of environmentalism" (2016, 95–96).

27 In *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992), for example, Jane Tompkins explores how the assertion of masculinity in the western genre often involves the violent assertion of male privilege and dominance over women, ethnic and sexual minorities, animals, and the land: "To be a man in the Western is to grow out of the environment, which means to be hard, to be tough, and to be unforgiving" (1992, 73).

Forging a gender-ambiguous authorial persona, Dinesen published stories in women's magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, but she also permitted *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Winter's Tales* to be reproduced as Overseas Editions freely distributed among US servicemen fighting in World War II (Rabinowitz 2014, 114–115). Dinesen's fiction teems with characters who exhibit "deviant masculinity," in that their "defining desires and identifications are 'perverse' with respect [...] to a phallic standard" (Silverman 1992, 1). Like many of Dinesen's stories, "Peter and Rosa," "The Monkey," and "Ehrengard" all raise doubts about their male protagonists' libidinal investments and identifications. Peter appears physically attracted to his cousin and stepsister Rosa but ultimately dreams of joining the all-male community of the merchant ship *Esperance*. Throughout "The Monkey," Boris labors under a cloud of suspicion concerning his involvement in sexual practices that people "had learnt to connect [...] somehow with those romantic and sacred shores of ancient Greece" (*SGT*, 111). And while Cazotte enjoys a reputation as "conqueror and seducer" (*AD*, 218) of women, he is most prominently shown deliberately foregoing the "physical delight" of heterosexual relations in favor of a "celestial embrace" (*AD*, 245).

What has primarily concerned me here, however, is not whether such male characters can be read as a-, bi-, or homosexual, but rather how these narratives *queer* "the hard, organized, phallic body devoid of all internal viscera" (Theweleit, 1987, 218). Early in "The Dreamers," Mira Jama articulates a humorously crude and reductive account of the wet masculinity that has preoccupied me in this chapter:

> "Oh, Lincoln Forsner," said the noseless story-teller, "what is man, when you come to think upon him, but a minutely set, ingenious machine for turning, with infinite artfulness, the red wine of Shiraz into urine? You may even ask which is the more intense craving and pleasure: to drink or to make water. [...] The world drank in the young story-teller Mira. He went to its head, he ran in its veins, he made it glow with warmth and color. Now I am on my way down a little; the effect has worn off. The world will soon be equally pleased to piss me out again, and I do not know but that I am pressing on a little myself." (*SGT*, 275)

In her stories, I have argued, Dinesen pursues the important strategy of imbricating male characters in "a metaphysics of fluids, where the being of any location depends on its surrounding and where we cannot delineate clearly what is inside and outside" (Young 2005, 81). Dinesen's writing yields not an affront to masculinity but a timely challenge to men's "internalized invincibility" (Pease 2019, 120) and an invitation to consider what alternative meanings masculinity can have in this "infinite, swaying, wet world" (*WT*, 279).

CHAPTER 4

Unfamiliar Families: Kinship Trouble in *Last Tales*

1 Introduction

The environmental emergency in which we find ourselves generates new urgent conversations about human sexuality, reproduction, family, and kinship. "I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and 'the family,'" writes Donna Haraway,

> and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope. It is time to theorize an "unfamiliar" unconscious, a different primal scene, where everything does not stem from the dramas of identity and reproduction. Ties through blood [...] have been bloody enough already. I believe that there will be no racial or sexual peace, no livable nature, until we learn to produce humanity through something more and less than kinship. (2004, 285)

The strong association with "overpopulation" discourses has made the connection between reproduction and environmental degradation very contentious. Haraway maintains, and she is scarcely alone in this, that our environmental problems – mass extinction, overconsumption, desertification, climate change, etc. – are greatly exacerbated by the dominance of certain family structures, by widespread forms of reproductive behavior, and by the narrowness of the ways in which we understand such terms as "family" and "kinship." Under the controversial slogan "make kin not babies" (2016, 137), Haraway envisions a world where "babies should be rare, nurtured, and precious" (2016, 208). Shunning coercive reproductive governance and neo-Malthusian victim blaming, she calls on humans, and especially well-to-do Western humans, to challenge the meaning of kinship and create new relational spaces, rather than automatically "doing" or "making" family in ever smaller, more detached, constrictive, and resource-demanding units.

Haraway's juxtaposition of "family" and "kin-making" recalls the distinction between "filiation" and "affiliation" that Edward Said introduced in his 1983 essay "Secular Criticism." Filiative bonds, for Said, are associations owing to individuals' birth that connect them to family and nation, whereas affiliative

pacts or ties are made rather than given, defined through deliberate and conscious effort:

> If a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority – involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict – the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms – such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of "life," whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society. (1983, 20)

A shift in cultural authority from filiation to affiliation, Said argues, is discursively enacted in the transition from nineteenth- to twentieth-century literature. While Victorian fiction appears fixated on marriage, genealogy, and legitimate reproduction, modernists' loss of faith in western civilization's legitimizing metanarratives led writers like T. S. Eliot to deemphasize blood ties and family connections, while also searching for alternative, compensatory models of productive relationship (which Eliot found in the Anglican Church). "Childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerate celibate men and women" Said claims, "populate the world of high modernism with remarkable insistence, all of them suggesting the difficulties of filiation" (1983, 17).

In an often quoted November 1928 letter to her aunt, Mary Bess Westenholz, Isak Dinesen like Haraway places "the family" in quotation marks, critiquing the mentality that would make the monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive family unit the only authentic form of human association:

> Friendship, – Wahlverwandtschaft, – in the end that is the highest human relationship for me. I believe that a human being has far greater influence through the mind than through "the family," and that Absalon in his capacity as a monk bequeathed more to his own time and the future than Esbern Snare with a large family. [...] Nature's way in these matters is often merely an extensive, ravenous egoism that includes husband and children at the expense of everyone else. [...] Summa summarium: there is so much in life to love, so much to live for, that to me there is something blasphemous about this monopoly of love and cooperation between human beings by marriage and family life. (*LA*, 393–394)

Proceeding from her critical essay "On Modern Family and Other Observations" (1926), and strewn with the very "[c]hildless couples, orphaned children,

aborted childbirths, and unregenerate celibate men and women" whom Said mentions, Dinesen's narratives center on virgins, widows, spinsters, bachelors, orphans, runaways, bastards, cuckolds, eunuchs, adoptees, divorcées, stepchildren, godchildren, and surrogate parents, but rarely, as the Danish reviewer Frederik Schyberg (in)famously objected in 1935, on "*normal people*" (G. Rostbøll 1980, 227 [author's translation]) lodged in traditional relationships. Often set in the nineteenth century and indebted to nineteenth-century intertexts, Dinesen's crooked courtship narratives, broken inheritance stories, and bildungsromane gone awry carefully deconstruct the family romance plots of Victorian novels like Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), which elevated home and hearth to an almost secular religion.[1] They ask what alternate possibilities arise when fateful events, such as Morten De Coninck's last-minute abandonment of his fiancé Adrienne Rosenstand in "The Supper at Elsinore," make "impossible [...] any true relation to other human beings" (*SGT*, 218).[2] A brief backward glance at the "imaginative counterworlds" (Zapf 2016, 59) discussed in previous chapters will suffice to indicate how persistently Dinesen lets atypical constellations of *Wahlverwandtschaft* (elective affinity) supersede traditional biofamilies. Thus, "The Deluge at Norderney" assembles four unlikely protagonists from shattered families in a curious ad-hoc company of strangers, while other texts give us the aging childless/childfree "sect" (*AD*, 21) of "Babette's Feast," the women-only, monkey-haunted "convent" (*SGT*, 109) of "The Monkey," the fatherless "Venusberg" (*AD*, 252) community of "Ehrengard," and the homosocial nautical world of Bodø in "The Sailor-Boy's Tale," where "[t]here were some women [...], but many of the men danced with each other" (*WT*, 98). *Out of Africa*, in turn, resonates with twentieth-century cultural anthropologists' increasingly open-minded inquiries into non-European peoples' radically different but equally valid and no less "natural" sexual morals, marriage customs, and family structures. Dinesen writes equally nonjudgmentally, for example, about the celibate cohabitation of the Catholic French missionaries, about the Kikuyu practice of polygamy, and about the strict separation of genders in the Moslem Somali community. With only two glancing references to "my husband" (*OA*, 255, 256),

1 Barry McCrea writes that "[t]he English nineteenth-century novel from Austen on seems [...] to be in the thrall of a sort of fertility cult, where all sense of beginnings and endings are predicated upon marriage and procreation" (2011, 7).

2 When the spectral Morten appears to his sisters, Eliza tells him that "we are old maids, all on your account. Nobody would have us. The De Conincks have had a bad name as consorts since you went off and took away the heart and soul and innocence of Adrienne" (*SGT*, 257). As viewed by the old housekeeper Madam Bæk, however, the sisters' "hard skepticism as to any man being in love with them" (*SGT*, 219) preexists Morten's abandonment of Adrienne.

the narrator shows how human exiles and eccentrics like Dinesen herself, the British aristocrat Denys Finch Hatton, and the Danish sailor Old Knudsen do not form "normal" families of their own but are conjoined with human children such as the Kikuyu boy Kamante and with "oddkin" (Haraway 2016, 4) like the orphaned bushbuck kid Lulu to form an extended, fluid, multinational, and multispecies household.[3]

Previous critics have explored Dinesen's prioritization of unfamiliar groupings in ways that move beyond judgmental critical tropes like barrenness, sterility, eccentricity, and perversity. Armed with insights from Michel Foucault, Eve K. Sedgwick, and Judith Butler, Dag Heede in *Det umenneskelige – Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen* (*The Inhuman: Analyses of Sexuality, Gender and Identity in Karen Blixen*) strikes a stunning blow against traditional Dinesen reception, which he characterizes as "spells (2001, 22 [my translation]) cast to neutralize the troubling otherness of her texts' "posthuman monstrous speech" (2001, 19 [author's translation]). Heede's interpretation seeks to recapture the "demonic" (2001, 37 [author's translation]) qualities of Dinesen's texts that perturbed reviewers such as Schyberg. In Heede's reading, Dinesen systematically mimics, parodies, and distorts dominant narratives of gender, sexuality, and family to strip underlying identity constructions of their normalcy and authoritativeness. Her stories hold up a "magic mirror" (2001, 36 [author's translation]) in which humanism's deepest-held beliefs and most sacrosanct values are rendered strange, weird, or queer.

Jacob Emery's *Alternative Kinships: Economy and Family in Russian Modernism* provides an interesting counterintuitive historical context for Dinesen's fomenting of kinship trouble, situating her texts within a larger modernist corpus of critical, speculative, and utopian writing on families and kinship. Emery's main project is to study early twentieth-century politically radical artists of the Russian avantgarde, who engaged in a programmatic effort to critique "the genetic lineages that undergird exploitation of women and the peasantry" and explore "alternate modes of family identity that [...] might conceivably take their place" (2017, 10–11). In a short but suggestive section of his

3 Old Knudsen in particular appears to the narrator to be in flight from bourgeois domesticity: "All the same, when I was talking with him I felt in his life the constant presence of an unknown woman. [...] [I]n my thoughts I called her Madam Knudsen. [...] She was the wife of the curtain-lectures, and the housewife of the big cleaning-days, she stopped all enterprises, she washed the faces of boys, and snatched away the man's glass of gin from the table before him, she was law and order embodied. [...] Knudsen must have met her at a young age, when his mind was soft enough to receive an ineffaceable impression. He had fled from her to the Sea, for the Sea she loathes, and there she does not come, but ashore again in Africa he had not escaped her, she was still with him" (*OA*, 184).

book (2017, 103–105), Emery includes Dinesen among a larger multinational group of writers who use the traditional tropes of gothic fiction (adultery, incest, concealed letters, haunted houses, secret crimes, ancestral curses, etc.) to denaturalize the consanguineous family's authority in ways that resonate with the Soviets' social experimentation.

In this chapter, I continue contemplating how Dinesen's "counterdiscursive ecopoiesis" (Zapf 2016, 59) contests the traditional focus on heteroreproductive family-making with alternative ways of looking at the *oikos*. More specifically, Haraway, Said, Heede, Emery, and others inspire me to understand Dinesen's imaginative disturbances of traditional family values as ecopoietic acts of "[q]ueer re-worlding" (Haraway 2008b, xxvi) that aim "to make 'kin' mean something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy" (Haraway 2016, 161). Implicating Dinesen in the urgent socioecological project of "kinnovation" (Haraway 2016, 208), this chapter specifically examines how marriage, family, and blood filiation are tested, broken, stretched, and productively recomposed in key stories of *Last Tales* (1957), a publication particularly intent to uncover heterodox ways of imagining human and more-than-human interconnectedness. In *Last Tales*, which was her first story collection in more than fifteen years, Dinesen collected tales written over an extended period, grouping them under three headings: "Tales from Albondocani," "New Gothic Tales," and "New Winter's Tales." In this chapter, I explore two interwoven leitmotifs which cut across this tripartite division, and which I label "gothic celibacy" and "queer breastfeeding." Under the first rubric, I explore how Dinesen reworks gothic fiction's ambivalent fascination with celibate Catholic bishops, virgins, convents, and penitents to highlight Christian asceticism's challenge to patriarchal filiation. Subsequently, I analyze an ambiguous, ideologically embattled, and symbolically (over)loaded, motif – breastfeeding – that Dinesen deploys in several historical narratives including "A Country Tale" and "The Caryatids: An Unfinished Gothic Tale."

2 Gothic Celibacy

In a long September 1926 letter to her brother Thomas, Dinesen expresses a desire to join the Catholic Church, albeit as a priest rather than a nun:

> I cannot be possessed and have no desire to possess, – it can be cold and empty, God knows, but it is not cramped or stifling. I know that I must accept this aspect of my life "unconditionally" too, for however much I may long for something more secure and intimate in my life, when the

> crunch comes I back out of it, and this recurs continually. You know that I have said that I would like to be a Catholic priest, and I still maintain this, – and I am not far from being one, – but he would have to be more than human if he did not sometimes heave a deep sigh on seeing the lights lit in the windows and the family circle gathered together. (*LA*, 281–282)

How should we understand the frequent references to Christian and often specifically Catholic images, beliefs, practices, institutions, and character types in Dinesen's fiction? Why are so many stories in *Last Tales* set in Mediterranean countries, and why do so many involve unmarried cardinals, priests, penitents, and virgins? Fictions in the gothic tradition, of course, routinely use southern European abbeys, crypts, and convents as prominent settings, and they repeatedly feature priests, prelates, priors, friars, and other Catholic clerics as primary protagonists and antagonists. The corrupt abbess, the unchaste or pregnant nun, the conniving confessor, and the lascivious monk are clichéd staples of gothic, as are live entombments, forced vows, masochistic penances, the sacrifice and burial of illegitimate children, secret tribunals, and scenes of public interrogation, torture, and execution administered by officers of the Inquisition.[4] A gothic novel like Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), for example, impugns Catholic ecclesiastical celibacy and communal life in monosexual convents with prodigious force. Ambrosio, the thirty-year-old abbot of Madrid's prestigious Capuchin monastery, is introduced as "so strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman" (1995, 17). Abandoned at an abbey in early childhood, Ambrosio is raised within the antifamily of the Catholic Church, where monks are busy "rooting out his virtues, and narrowing his sentiments" (1995, 237). Clerical vows arrest an otherwise healthy, virile man in a perverse state of prolonged virginity, but suppressed lust, once unleashed, impels "the voluptuous monk" (1995, 225) to fornication, rape, incest, matricide, devil worship, and ultimately damnation. For Lewis, celibacy at best allows wicked, hypocritical libertines to ply their depraved trades and at worst distorts natural impulses into sadism, masochism, necrophilia, incest, and homoeroticism. As Ambrosio's crossdressing seductress (who is really a minion of the Devil) torments him, she declares

4 That anticlerical and anti-Catholic sentiments were central to gothic fiction has been persuasively argued by Diane L. Hoeveler, who finds animosity towards "the Roman Catholic Church and its network of abbeys, convents, and secret tribunals" running "as a sort of leitmotif throughout the gothic novel, reifying British and enlightenment dread of medievalism, superstition, and uninformed prejudice" (1998, 52).

that "[u]nnatural were your vows of celibacy; man was not created for such a state" (1995, 224).

According to Mark Larrimore, "Christianity has not only always had queer members, has not only always had the potential to be queered, but has from the start been a site of radical queerness" (2015, 2). David Hunter substantiates this claim by interpreting early Christian celibacy as a queer practice that subordinated the heterosexual couple and the nuclear family to a more expansive communitarian ideal of intimacy. Defining "queer" as a form of life that is "transgressive or opposed to societal norms, particularly with respect to sexuality and gender identity" (2015, 13), Hunter argues that early Christian celibates successfully challenged marriage, family, and blood kinship, disrupting and sometimes overturning the received patriarchal norms and gender categories that governed late ancient society (2015, 21–22). Emulating the unmarried state of Jesus and St. Paul, Christianity's early devotees built around themselves another, unsecular society of believers no longer bound by the familiar blood ties of family and kinship. In the face of intense social pressures to marry and procreate, single-sex monastic communities and other alternative living arrangements offered robust alternatives to heterosexual kinship and created an opening for new forms of social identity and modes of life not predicated on father-, husband-, wife-, and motherhood. Catholicism continues to emphasize virginity and celibacy in ways that implicitly devalue marriage and family. Clerical celibacy creates a category of ambiguously gendered people "committed to living in unsettled and unsettling ways" (Larrimore 2015, 4). It maintains a perspective from which procreative coupledom can be viewed as only one, and not necessarily the most elevated or rewarding, way to live.

In *Last Tales*, Dinesen appropriates gothic's fascination with Catholic celibacy but turns it on its head. In these late stories, Christian asceticism provides counterdiscursive sites from which the "blasphemous [...] monopoly of love and cooperation between human beings by marriage and family life" (*LA*, 394) can be challenged, and from which possible alternatives to the structured patriarchal family life that was the bedrock of enlightened Protestant society can begin to be imagined. By centering narratives around ideas, practices, and institutions that work at a perpendicular to the business of procreative heterosexuality, Dinesen defamiliarizes powerful cultural assumptions about the timelessness, normality, and healthiness of patriarchal authority and the monogamous nuclear family. She points to the enormous historical and cultural variation of kinship structures, which even in the West have not always revolved exclusively around the consanguineous network and the male-female conjugal unit. She entertains the notion that there always have been and *could still be* coherent forms of individual subjectivity and meaningful modes of community,

relationship, and intimacy outside or in addition to the tightknit structures of marital coupledom.

3 Marriage and Its Discontents

For many years, Dinesen toyed with the idea of composing a loosely organized novel encompassing a great many, perhaps even hundreds of interconnected stories (Brantly 1992). The proposed title of this unfinished and probably unfinishable project was *Albondocani*, an alias used by the Caliph Harun Al-Rashid in the *Arabian Nights*. The seven stories that appear in *Last Tales* as "Tales from Albondocani" make strange bedfellows, lacking the thematic unity and consistency that we associate with the novel form. The sequence does, however, have a protagonist or hero of sorts in the eighteenth-century Italian Catholic Cardinal Salviati, who homodiegetically narrates two stories and appears (if only briefly) as a character in a third.[5] Similar to Joseph Conrad's persona Charlie Marlow, the fictive Cardinal Salviati functions both as a mouthpiece for the author and as a masking and distancing device that helps her control and shape her material. A scion of a noble family, Salviati has risen to an elevated rank in the Catholic Church, moving "in the high places of the world" (*LT*, 20) as political advisor of princes and spiritual guide to aristocratic ladies. "Men and women," he declares, "in the course of time have come to me and have asked my advice. Many of them have come […] [i]n deep distress and anguish […] which, however, have never been deeper than my compassion with each of them – and have put their problems before me in all kinds of terms" (*LT*, 3–4). According to Eve K. Sedgwick, "Catholicism […] is famous for giving countless gay and proto-gay children the shock of possibility of adults who don't marry, of men in dresses, of passionate theatre, of introspective investment of lives filled with what could, ideally without diminution, be called the work of fetish" (1990, 140). Whether Salviati has ever felt or acted on hetero- or homosexual desires of his own is unclear and perhaps irrelevant. Officially unsexed by his vow of celibacy, he narrates from inside the Catholic Church's unfamiliar family, in oblique relation to the widespread understanding of marriage as "the narrative goal par excellence, the redeeming moment toward which we expect stories […] to tend" (McCrea 2011, 8). Although he can officiate at both weddings and christenings, Salviati's storytelling tends

5 Cardinal Salviati is also briefly referenced in "Ehrengard" (*AD*, 224). According to Dinesen's secretary, Clara Selborn (1988, 53), Dinesen borrowed the name Salviati from that of a Roman *palazzo* that accommodated Scandinavian pilgrims.

towards deprivileging conjugality and reproduction, which are presented as merely some and by no means necessarily the most natural or appealing choices in determining human companionship. A dark-clad avatar of respectability, Salviati tells tales rife with kinship-troubling potential.

In "The Cardinal's First Tale," Salviati narrates his own life story in response to an unnamed "lady in black" (*LT*, 3) in an unspecific "library" (*LT*, 5). "A girl of fifteen," his tale begins, "with rich gifts of heart and mind, and magnificently innocent, was given away in marriage to a brusque and bigoted nobleman three times her age, who took a wife to have his name live on" (*LT*, 5). Embodying gothic misogyny at its most extreme, Prince Pompilio descends from Manfred, the villain of Horace Walpole's genre-defining *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), who is pathologically determined to continue his dynasty despite a prophecy saying that the eponymous castle will pass out of his family's hands. Similarly obsessed with the begetting of male heirs to continue his ancestral lineage, Pompilio subjects his "inexperienced" (*LT*, 5) teenage bride, the Princess Benedetta, to a forced marriage with connotations of rape, pedophilia, assault, and imprisonment. He reduces woman to moveable chattel or to a "fragile, precious vessel within which a rare seed had been laid down to germinate," lest her "husband's old name" (*LT*, 6) be allowed to perish.

When Benedetta gives birth to a "frail" (*LT*, 6) one-eyed son, her husband decrees a three-year period of marital chastity, not to protect her but to ensure that her fertility remains intact so that she can produce more perfect sons in the future. During this hiatus, while the couple live "condemned to celibacy" (*LT*, 10), Benedetta experiences the happiest moment of her life, when she hears the celebrated opera singer Giovanni Ferrer, who sings under the name Marelli. The couple exchange only a single glance, which turns out to be life-altering for both:

> How describe the beatitude into which, in the course of a few hours, her whole being was transported. It was a birth, the pangs of which were sweet beyond words, a mighty process which needed, and made use of, every particle of her nature, and in which, undergoing a total change, she triumphantly became her whole self.
>
> [...] At the seventh recall, before the last drop of the curtain – while the whole house was afoot and applauding madly – from the stage-boards and from a nobleman's gilt box, a pair of blue and a pair of black eyes met across the pit in a long deep silent glance, the first and the last. (*LT*, 6)

Once marital relations resume, Benedetta soon becomes pregnant again, which prompts an almost violent confrontation over the unborn child's future.

When nature favors Pompilio with a double blessing in the form of male twins "as like as two peas" (*LT*, 13), the couple decide that Atanasio will be destined for a clerical career, while Dionysio will be free to pursue the arts. Meanwhile, the older boy, Ercole, who is "heir to the name and its future perpetuator," is "trained in all the accomplishments of a nobleman and a courtier" (*LT*, 18). Disaster strikes when the infant Dionysio is killed in a fire kindled, ironically, by a burning "pile of old missives from the Holy See to worthy ancestors of the Prince" (*LT*, 14). And more than twenty years later, six months after Atanasio is "ordained to the priesthood," Ercole "quite suddenly died from nothing more alarming than a cold in the head caught at a levee" (*LT*, 19). Thus, "[o]ut of the three sons born Pompilio and Benedetta, Atanasio was now the sole heir to the great name and wealth of the family" (*LT*, 19–20).

Reflecting gothic's obsession with "issues of succession and inheritance" (Kilgour 1995, 18), "The Cardinal's First Tale" reveals and conceals identities, constructs and deconstructs kinship claims. It is striking that Salviati neither directly identifies himself with any of the story's characters, nor does he use words (like "father" or "mother") that would make these connections obvious. Only gradually and by implication do readers infer that Pompilio and Benedetta are his parents, and that Salviati himself is the family's sole surviving son. "Who are you?" (*LT*, 3, 4) asks the lady in black, and the answer to this question remains ambiguous throughout. Officially, Salviati is Atanasio, the twin whom Pompilio, motivated less by genuine religious feeling than by his customary vanity and pride, destined for a clerical career. Rising from priesthood to bishophood and cardinalship, Salviati has followed the path mapped by Pompilio, who decreed that he become "a Prince of the Church and the glory of his name" (*LT*, 18). His life has been lived in dutiful conformity with his name, bestowed upon him by his father in imitation of "the great Father of the Church St. Athanasius, who is known as 'the Father of Orthodoxy'" (*LT*, 11).

The story, however, allows for another interpretation that is subversive rather than supportive of filiation. The surviving twin's identity rests only on the unreliable testimony of Pompilio's "old, impoverished but proud-hearted maiden aunt" (*LT*, 5), and it is entirely possible, perhaps even probable, that of the indistinguishable boys, it was really Dionysio, Benedetta's favorite, who survived the fire.[6] Benedetta, we are told, had made Dionysio "his mama's lover" (*LT*, 13), forming an unsettlingly powerful, erotically charged bond with her son that Salviati (*LT*, 14) compares to the love between the Virgin Mary

6 Suspicions of the official patriarchal story are strengthened when Pompilio's aunt somewhat mysteriously dies shortly after the fire, "invoking the name of Dionysio" and venting "odd fancies that nobody could understand" (*LT*, 16).

and the infant Christ. This passion only grows now that the boy believed to be Atanasio becomes her "bambino lover" (*LT*, 16):

> To the mother the pretty boy – apart from being his own adorable self – was the child-prophet of earthly beauty and delight. She spent much time in his company, was even annoyed when her love affairs took her away from him, and in her smiles and sighs made him her confidant, as if she wished to see his little figure in the classical role of Cupid loosening his mother's girdle. The child was thus at an early age schooled in the art of equipoise. (*LT*, 18–19)

Moreover, Salviati's decision to remain in the Catholic Church even after the death of his older brother can be read as an act of defiance of, rather than obedience towards, Pompilio. Since Salviati cannot legally marry and produce legitimate heirs of his own, the paternal line will die out with him. Thus, Pompilio's machinations to ensure that his wife "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) so that "his name live on" (*LT*, 5) will have engendered the very sterility that he sought to avoid. The gothic villain's worst nightmare – an end to patrilineal succession – will have come true.

"The Cardinal's First Tale" refracts heterosexual courtship, reproduction, and "married life" (*LT*, 12) by viewing it through a terrifying gothic lens. To marry, in this story, is to submit one's dreams and wishes to the merciless logics of "the traffic in women" (Rubin 1975) and of "reproductive futurity" (Edelman 2004, 4). Hinging entirely on inheritance, succession, and the reproduction of socioeconomic structures, compulsive heterosexual coupledom perpetuates a harmful fixation on material property. Marriage inhibits the expansion of care outside the claustrophobic family circle, tethers men and women to their gendered bodies, and imprisons weaker family members, especially women, within worlds of oppression and barely concealed violence:

> The Prince, seeing the sudden terrifying shadow of public scandal fall on his house, hurriedly placed himself between [Benedetta] and the door, and at her second little step forward, still speechless, took a desperate, awkward hold of her slim arm. The moment he touched her the Princess fainted. Her husband laid her on the sofa, rang for her maids and marched out of the boudoir. (*LT*, 12)

Wedded life fulfills no character's desires, reduces no character's loneliness, and enriches no character's life. Even Pompilio, the patriarch who feels "unappreciated by his wife, unfortunate in his son and heir, exiled from the elevated circles in which he was wont to shine, and in the heyday of his manhood

condemned to celibacy," comes to perceive "himself as a chosen martyr on earth, and a saint in embryo" (*LT*, 10).

At the same time, however, Salviati's narrative also opens "zone[s] of possibility" (Edelman 2004, 114) when it points to alternative intimacies that can form outside the strictures of marriage and family. Among the many forgettable "love affairs" (*LT*, 19) that Benedetta enjoyed in her "second, third and fourth youths" (*LT*, 9), Salviati attributes special significance to her brief exchange with Marelli, who has been physically emasculated to preserve his beautiful high-pitched voice:

> Smile not – not even in pity – at the fact that the youth, who called to life a young woman's heart, was a being of Marelli's kind, a *soprano*, formed and prepared in the Conservatorio of Sant' Onofrio, and once and for all cut off – no, laugh not! – from real life. But bear in mind that this whole love affair was of a seraphic order and went to a tune. (*LT*, 8)

Interestingly, it is the asexual nature of the encounter – that fact that Marelli (like Salviati himself) "was the lover of no woman" (*LT*, 9) – that lends this relationship its mysterious, transformative power in the lives of both characters. The chaste glance forges a deep connection and establishes a queer but durable kinship against which the patriarchal reproductive family seems a pale and undesirable alternative. Manifesting itself as a "spiritual impregnation" (Langbaum 1975, 28), the look invigorates both Benedetta and Marelli as no "normal" hetero- or homosexual encounter ever could. Marelli's singing takes on a new power, as his "world-famous treble was changed" from "a celestial instrument" into "the voice of the human soul" (*LT*, 8). The "often-embraced" Benedetta, too, is more permanently altered by her asexual "devotion" (*LT*, 8) to her "only true lover" (*LT*, 9) than by any other relationship. Strengthened by her "seraphic" love affair, she musters the confidence to "defy Heaven and him [Pompilio]" (*LT*, 11) by demanding that she have some say in deciding the future of her children.

Salviati's own interaction with the frame story's enigmatic "lady in black" (*LT*, 3) further underscores the life-giving potential of relationships formed athwart or in the margins of a world dominated by kinship-based heterosexuality. The lady, it appears, has come to Salviati sometime previously to relieve a major spiritual crisis, and he has helped calm her existential chaos:

> When I first told you of the horrible conflict, of the cruel dilemma which was rending my heart, I put before you, I know, a number of details, in themselves unconnected and contradictory, and so jarring that I had to stop the ears of my mind to them. In the course of our talks together all

> these fragments have been united into a whole. Oh, not into an idyll – I am well aware that I am in for a *furioso* – but into a harmony without a discordant note to it. You have shown me myself! (*LT*, 4)

Though much about the bond shared by these characters remains mysterious, Salviati and the lady clearly enjoy an emotional intimacy that defies normative ideas of what male-female relationships should look like. Thus, while heterosexual marriage tends to lock both male and female characters into fixed gender functions, this story's confessor-confessant relationship opens a space where roles can be reversed and identities can be challenged. When she asks that the Cardinal "confess" (*LT*, 3) his identity, the lady assumes control over the exchange, reversing the normal flow of confessional discourse, and Salviati grants her request, sensing that "maybe we two shall never meet again" (*LT*, 5). In addition, the terms used by the lady to characterize her relationship with Salviati – "friend, […] teacher, adviser and consoler" (*LT*, 26) – seem to place the male authority figure in the traditionally feminized role of self-sacrificing caregiver. The Cardinal's relationship with the lady in black is not predicated on sexual desire and apparently has nothing to do with family as we normally understand it, and precisely therefore these characters seem free – freer, at any rate, than any "normal" male-female couple would appear to be – to help each other grapple with the story's central questions: "Who are you?" and "Who am I?" (*LT*, 3). Linked neither by blood, nor by desire, nor by reproductive requirements, the Cardinal and the lady can engage in a mutual "becoming that is without filiation or hereditary production" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 241).

4 Fanatical Virginity

Salviati returns as narrator in "The Cardinal's Third Story" (strangely, there is no "The Cardinal's Second Story"), the disquieting tale that is believed to have earned *Last Tales* rejection by the English Book Society and the American Book-of-the-Month Club.[7] The framing of this story recalls "The Dreamers" from *Seven Gothic Tales*, which is in turn reminiscent of gothic forebears like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Now located at the center of a storytelling "circle" that also encompasses "the Spanish Ambassador" (*LT*, 73), Salviati delivers another tale capable of unsettling faith in the blessings of reproductive marriage. The story

7 In an August 1957 letter to Robert K. Haas, Dinesen mentions that Robert Lubbock of Putnam considers certain parts of the story "too frivolous to the English Book Society, and that even his own staff had been shocked at certain pages of the book" (*KBD*, 2:359).

draws on Salviati's own experiences combined with information relayed by another lower-ranking and less sophisticated cleric, "the friend of my childhood, Father Jacopo Parmecianino," to narrate the life of the "heroine" Lady Flora Gordon, a wealthy, large-bodied, unmarried Scottish heiress in her "middle forties" (*LT*, 74):

> The Lady Flora was by no means ugly. But all the same a presence like hers would be difficult for any lady to carry. For she was a giantess, mightier than any of those whom, as a child, I have seen shown in our fairs. Wherever she went, she stood head and shoulders above the men with whom she conversed. She was correspondingly vast of hips and chest. Her hands and feet, in themselves beautiful, were of a size to match those of the marble angels in my own chapel, and her white teeth compared with those of the faithful dapple-gray on the back of which I have passed many happy hours of my youth. Nose, jaw, ears and bosom, as well, in this lady were of goddess-like dimensions. She had rich red hair, but her grandly swung eyebrows and her thick eyelashes were almost colorless. Her skin was fresh and white, although slightly freckled. Her voice was full, clear and harmonious. (*LT*, 74–75)

During a protracted Grand Tour of the European Continent, the skeptical and freethinking Lady Flora befriends Father Jacopo, who, "horrified at her heresy" (*LT*, 78), launches a well-intentioned conversion campaign. Lady Flora, however, fends off the priest's theological advances with vituperative wit and persiflage in the manner of Jonathan Swift and eighteenth-century French *philosophes*. Salviati takes an interest in Lady Flora in part because she, too, came of age in a patriarchal household where "married life" (*LT*, 71, 77) was marred by gothic malice and cruelty. Upon marriage, Lady Gordon's father's "wealth [...] had been increased by her mother's great dowry" (*LT*, 76), but while the parents were well-matched in terms of class and financial status, their deeper incompatibility is revealed by their incongruent physical appearances:

> This virtuous and noble lady, her mother, had been as tall as the daughter and had weighed as much. But on the other hand the maiden's father – around whom a multitude of gay and gallant anecdotes had grown up, so that to his countrymen he had become a kind of mythic figure – was below medium height and slight of build. Yet at the same time the Scots nobleman had been so harmoniously proportioned, with such big radiant eyes, such rich locks, and such perfect gracefulness in all his movements,

> that till his death he was reckoned to be the finest-looking man in the Kingdom. (*LT*, 76–77)

When his wife confronts him over his many infidelities, Lady Flora's father resorts to relentless mockery of her wife's body, "until the friends of her childhood and youth no longer found in her any trace of the maiden's or the new-married wife's rich and innocent nature" (*LT*, 79). Salviati conjectures that Lady Flora's witnessing of marital torment and suffering has irrevocably estranged her from any prospect of heterosexual love or marriage: "Undoubtedly at an early age she vowed never through a marriage or a love affair to repeat her mother's misery, and this in itself was a barren and desolate destiny" (*LT*, 79).

It is a keen irony in the story that while Lady Flora takes a position of scornful anti-Catholicism, her demeanor and behavior replicate that of virginal and celibate women worshipped by the Catholic Church. Early Christians held virginity in high regard, associating ascetic celibacy in both men and women with divine blessing. This belief in the spiritual and almost mystical power of virginity persisted in the Catholic Church, where the pinnacle of feminine virtue is embodied by the Virgin Mary, whose virginity not only facilitated the birth of Christ but also led to her own sanctification and remarkable assumption. Catholic hagiography is filled with the stories of virgin martyrs whose religious fervor, extraordinary miracles, and sacred wounds bear witness to their mystical power and divine protection (Abbott 1999, 47–98). Lady Flora joins the company of Malin Nat-og-Dag of "The Deluge at Norderney" and Athena Hopballehus of "The Monkey," both "fanatical virgin[s]" (*SGT*, 18, 137) vehemently committed to a sexual orientation that transcends and transgresses accepted norms of gendered behavior. The financially and emotionally independent Miss Flora has embraced celibacy as a conscious choice, rather than a destiny imposed by external circumstances or authorities. On the brink of middle age, she understands the unpartnered life as a permanent state, inherently meaningful, rather than a transitional phase on the way towards matrimony. Like a latter-day version of the early Christian genderbending Saint Thecla, Lady Flora uses her "giantess" (*LT*, 74) body to defeminize and desexualize herself, situating herself outside heterosexual norms and expectations.[8] Using as her "motto" Christ's words "Noli me tangere" ("Do not touch me") (*LT*, 75), she

8 Composed sometime in the second century, the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* narrates how the sermons of St. Paul inspire Thecla, a young noble virgin, to numerous miraculous deeds. "While the story of Thecla is almost certainly a fiction," Hunter argues, it serves as "a potent reminder of the manner in which celibate Christians, especially women, transgressed

"shrank from any touch, physical or mental" (*LT*, 80) and even "declined to follow the British custom of shaking hands in meeting or parting" (*LT*, 75). When conversation touches upon sexually risqué topics, "to her eyes it lost any kind of interest, and she turned away from it as from something altogether beneath her dignity" (*LT*, 76). The story's male clerics, who themselves belong to celibate societies, are fascinated by her radical rejection of community. "My own oneness is my integrity," she says: "I have not married, I have taken no lover; the idea of children repels me – all because I want to be one, and alone in my skin'" (*LT*, 85).

Lady Flora has large equine teeth (*LT*, 74), and in the Danish version of the tale, "Kardinalens tredje Historie," she mocks Father Jacopo by saying that Christians have never known "Fællesskab med en svedt Hest" ("community with a sweaty horse") (*SF*, 92). If Lady Flora's distaste for normal human companionship appears strange, the community that she finally enters is even stranger. During a visit to Rome, Lady Flora tragicomically contracts syphilis after kissing a statue of St. Peter that has previously been kissed by a young man smelling "of sweat and stable" but resembling her father, "slight of build, with a perfect gracefulness in all his movements" (*LT*, 98). At the end of the story, Lady Flora recalls contemplating the duality of the syphilitic "sore" on her lips: "To what, I thought, does this bear a likeness? To a rose? Or to a seal?" (*LT*, 98). Alternatively, the wound can be interpreted as a stigma that marks her as both cursed and blessed, damned and saved. On the one hand, Lady Flora has entered a steep physical decline that seems all but certain to end with her early death:

> She had become extremely thin, and so looked still taller. She no longer had her brilliant red hair, but bore a most elegantly dressed wig. Her silk frock, costly as ever, had a choice and tasteful trimming of ribbons and lace. [...] Alas, her full clear harmonious voice of former days was gone. But in her present broken, low and hoarse voice, like to the cackle of an old wise raven or a cockatoo, there was a new joviality, a mirthful forbearance with and benevolence toward the frailty of humanity. (*LT*, 96)

On the other hand, however, the infection marks her as untouchable, placing permanent distance between her and "married life" (*LT*, 71, 77). Salviati finds that in her new role as syphilitic, she is revitalized, beatified, imbued with a

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cultural norms and redefined (one might say 'queered') traditional definitions of virtue" (2015, 22).

transcendent, saintlike quality: "she was changed; mystically she had become a maiden – an old maid" (*LT*, 96).

When Salviati last encounters Lady Flora, she is affectionately known as "Diana, or at other times as Principessa Daria, or as just Daria [which] was in fact an abbreviation of the word dromedaria" (*LT*, 95) – divine and animal nicknames that seem to exile her permanently from "normal" human relations. At this point, she has joined a "society" (*LT*, 95) of fellow syphilitics receiving mercury treatments in the spa town of Monte Scalzo:

> Their circle was naturally amiable, unprejudiced and fearless, and I felt content and easy in mind in their company. Many pleasant hours were passed at the card table, others were dedicated to music or to philosophical discussions. The lively conversation would also run on common friends and acquaintances, but would always be free of malice. (*LT*, 94)

The Cardinal feels at ease amidst the Monte Scalzo "coterie" (*LT*, 95), which appears strikingly devoid of the destructive, often murderous rivalries plaguing many other communities in Dinesen's fiction. He finds Lady Flora changed, as she now blushes at the mention of "events of an amorous nature," and in her discourse he detects "a new joviality, a mirthful forbearance with and benevolence toward the frailty of humanity" (*LT*, 96). For some critics (e.g. Brantly 2002, 158–159), the story's ending vindicates the naïve Father Jacopo's conviction that "[w]e are all branches of the same tree" (*LT*, 86). From this perspective, the syphilis bacterium has breached Lady Flora's integrity and defeated her radical individualism, and her changed deportment betrays the effects of her chastening reintegration into "human fellowship" (*LT*, 86). With Heede (2001, 231–232), however, I would stress the eccentricity of the Monte Scalzo "fellowship" (*LT*, 96), which consists precisely of people who stand outside the dominant ideas and practices that define "the human." Rather than exemplifying a "utopia" (Jørgensen 1985, 161), the Italian "Bath" (*LT*, 94) seems to capture the ambiguity of what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopias," those "real places" that act as "counter-sites [...] in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1986, 24).[9] A place like Monte Scalzo, in other words, makes it possible to identity and patrol the borderline between health and sickness, normality and abnormality. It safeguards "married life" (*LT*, 77) by isolating and confining sexual dissidents in a single, clearly identified place of "human misery" (*LT*, 94). At the same time, however, this space of

9 As examples of "heterotopias of deviation," Foucault mentions "rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons" (1986, 25).

otherness also functions as a refuge and a locus for reflecting on and critiquing the social order. Through their use of coded language "designat[ing] both present and absent friends by fictitious, romantic names – frequently taken from mythology, history or the classics" (*LT*, 94–95), the cloistered "old maid[s]" and "libertines" (*LT*, 96) of Monte Scalzo claim a space and time of their own. They flaunt and aggravate their own strangeness, composing an unfamiliar but conspicuously harmonious formulation of "fictive kin" (Weston 1991, 143). The threat of syphilitic contagion renders the "ladies and gentlemen" (*LT*, 94) of Monte Scalzo outcasts, but fascinatingly to the Cardinal, it also purchases them some freedom to organize their piece of the world in accordance with "[n]onstandard intimacies" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 559).

5 Convent Life

The last and shortest story in the "Tales from Albondocani" sequence, "The Blank Page" has elicited a great deal of critical commentary (e.g. Gubar 1981; Gabriel 1994; Stecher-Hansen 1994; Kemp 1994; Kaplan 1996, 39–45; Stadt 2020) and been anthologized in publications like *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (Gilbert and Gubar 1996, 274–279) and *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Stories* (Reynolds 1994, 117–122).[10] In "The Blank Page," Salviati's role as homodiegetic narrator is taken over by "an old coffee-brown, black-veiled woman who made her living by telling stories" (*LT*, 99). Representing a character type who appears frequently in Dinesen's fiction, the gypsy- or witch-like "old beldame" (*LT*, 100) resembles Salviati in that she can perceive and criticize human family-making behavior from the outside. In her preface to the tale, the beldame compares herself to Scheherazade, who used narrative to resist patriarchal violence. Her taletelling, she explains, has evolved in defiance of male-authored romantic stories, drawing upon a submerged oral tradition of "story-telling women" (*LT*, 104):

> You want a tale, sweet lady and gentleman? Indeed I have told many tales, one more than a thousand, since that time when I first let young men tell me, myself, tales of a red rose, two smooth lily buds, and four silky, supple, deadly entwining snakes. It was my mother's mother, the black-eyed dancer, the often-embraced, who in the end – wrinkled like a winter apple and crouching beneath the mercy of the veil – took upon

10 The editor of the latter collection, Margaret Reynolds, maintains that the story's "real unwritten history is that belonging to lesbians" (1994, xx), because same-sex desire, as she declares of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, is "not explicit. But it's there" (1994, xxii).

> herself to teach me the art of story-telling. Her own mother's mother had taught it to her, and both were better story-tellers than I am. (*LT*, 99)

The beldame's repeated reference to the story's intradiegetic addressees, an amorous couple identified as "my sweet and pretty lady and gentleman of the generous hearts" (*LT*, 100), "dear Master and Mistress" (*LT*, 102), and "dear lady and gentleman" (*LT*, 102), makes clear that her story targets and challenges a culture obsessed with male-female love relations. The beldame's story interrupts the "sweet" and "dear" couple's courtship and suspends, at least temporarily, the rites and rituals of heterosexual coupling.[11] Narrative is often associated with romance and seduction, but Dinesen's "old hag" (*LT*, 100) is an antiromantic and nonseductive storyteller whose story reroutes the "natural" course of events.

"The Blank Page" resumes and develops a preoccupation with celibate, cohabitational sisterhood and sisterliness that runs through Dinesen narratives including "The Supper at Elsinore," "The Invincible Slave-Owners," *The Angelic Avengers*, and "Babette's Feast." Situating readers squarely within that most characteristic gothic setting, the southern European Catholic convent, the old beldame relates how according to a century-old "venerable custom" (*LT*, 102) the sisters of the Portuguese Carmelite monastery Convento Velho ("the Old Convent") manufacture a particularly high-quality flax that is woven into bridal sheets used by royal and aristocratic families:

> On the morning after the wedding of a daughter of the house, and before the morning gift had yet been handed over, the Chamberlain or High Steward from a balcony of the palace would hang out the sheet of the night and would solemnly proclaim: *Virginem eam tenemus* – 'we declare her to have been a virgin.' Such a sheet was never afterwards washed or again lain on. (*LT*, 102–103)

As part of the same "time-honored custom," the once "snow-white sheet" that now bears "witness to the honor of a royal bride" (*LT*, 103) is then returned to the convent, framed, and hung in a gallery:

> In the tall main wing of the convent, which overlooks an immense landscape of hills and valleys, there is a long gallery with a black-and-white marble floor. On the walls of the gallery, side by side, hangs a long

11 Here as elsewhere, Dinesen may have borrowed inspiration from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), whose old and grizzled narrator arrests a man attending a wedding ceremony with his "glittering eye" and "strange power of speech" (Coleridge 1994, 528, 543).

> row of heavy, gilt frames, each of them adorned with a coroneted plate of pure gold, on which is engraved the name of a princess: Donna Christina, Donna Ines, Donna Jacintha Lenora, Donna Maria. And each of these frames encloses a square cut from a royal wedding sheet.
>
> Within the faded markings of the canvases people of some imagination and sensibility may read all the signs of the zodiac: the Scales, the Scorpion, the Lion, the Twins. Or they may there find pictures from their own world of ideas: a rose, a heart, a sword – or even a heart pierced through with a sword. (*LT*, 103)

The sheets' "Rorschach-like" (S. Smith 1993, 2) bloodstains tell a powerful story, reflecting society's deepest held beliefs and values back to the "long, stately, richly colored procession" of women – including "Princesses of Portugal, who were now queens or queen dowagers of foreign countries, Archduchesses, or Electresses, with their splendid retinue" – who visit the "gallery" on "a pilgrimage which was by nature both sacred and secretly gay" (*LT*, 103). The bloodstains reveal how the management and exchange of women's bodies structures civilization as we know it, enabling "happy events and disappointments" including "coronations and jubilees, court intrigues and wars, the birth of heirs to the throne, the alliances of younger generations of princes and princesses, the rise or decline of dynasties" (*LT*, 104). They establish virginity as a woman's most prized possession, supremely valuable and meaningful until the bride's quasi-ritualistic defloration by her lawful husband. Above all, perhaps, the sheets establish reproductive marriage as the planet around which all other relationships should orbit. Exhibited and treated with the reverence normally accorded to artworks or religious relics, the stained pieces of cloth advance an understanding of western civilization as a fertility cult, where everyone worships at the altar of reproductive futurity and "married life" (*LT*, 104).

The once "rich" but now "crumbling structure" (*LT*, 101) of the Carmelite convent houses a "minority culture" (Sinfield 1996, 280) that both endorses and challenges the hegemonic social structure. Persecuted heroines of gothic fiction such as *The Castle of Otranto*'s Isabella and *The Monk*'s Antonia seek refuge in monastic spaces only to find them implicated in the very forms of violence and oppression that they seek to escape. Similarly, the "portionless and humble sisters" (*LT*, 100) of Convento Velho can be labelled "complicit" (Kaplan 1996, 42) with a social order that keeps women confined within restrictive spaces. When they first grow and weave the flax, then officiate at the hanging of the sheets, and finally welcome "a long, stately, richly colored procession" (*LT*, 103) of visitors to witness the spectacle, the "good little sisters" (*LT*, 101)

voluntarily and even gleefully uphold rituals that appear to them less a duty than a "privilege" (*LT*, 102). "They take much pleasure in their holy meditations," says the beldame narrator, "and will busy themselves joyfully with that one particular task which did once, long, long ago, obtain for the convent a unique and strange privilege: they grow the finest flax and manufacture the most exquisite linen of Portugal" (*LT*, 101).

At the same time, however, the "blithe and active sisterhood" (*LT*, 101) also offers the possibility of "sororal alternatives" (Kaplan 1996, 42). The narrator connects the "air-blue" color of the "flax field flowers" to "the very color of the apron which the blessed virgin put on to go out and collect eggs within St. Anne's poultry yard, the moment before the Archangel Gabriel in mighty wing-strokes lowered himself onto the threshold of the house," and the spun flax puts her in mind of her own presexual innocence, as "flower-white, smooth and dainty as was my own little foot when, fourteen years old, I had washed it in the brook to go to a dance in the village" (*LT*, 101–102). As Susan Gubar remarks, the "Carmelite order [...] propagates a special devotion to our Lady; indeed, in the Middle Ages, Carmelite theologians were among the earliest defenders of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine that Mary was conceived without original sin" (1981, 261). Thus, if the celibate Carmelite sisters in "The Blank Page" tacitly collude with the patriarchal order, they also queerly prioritize spiritual loyalties – especially their bond with the "blessed virgin" (*LT*, 101) – above earthly ties to kin and family. In a world that views matrimony as men and women's highest calling and values procreativity above all, the "sisters of the Carmelite order" (*LT*, 100) define themselves as perpetual rather than transitory virgins and as members of an "unnatural" all-female, nonbiological collective that transcends time and space. Renouncing sex, marriage, property, and all other features of a normal life, "old and young nuns" (*LT*, 105) find agency, community, and intimacy outside of marriage and home. Removing themselves from the "cramped or stifling" (*LA*, 281) heterosexual economy, they map out alternative if marginal life paths for themselves.

The story derives its title from a single unstained bridal sheet that is hung among the others:

> But in the midst of the long row there hangs a canvas which differs from the others. The frame of it is as fine and as heavy as any, and as proudly as any carries the golden plate with the royal crown. But on this one plate no name is inscribed, and the linen within the frame is snow-white from corner to corner, a blank page.
> [...]

> It is in front of this piece of pure white linen that the old princesses of Portugal – worldly wise, dutiful, long-suffering queens, wives and mothers – and their noble old playmates, bridesmaids and maids-of-honor have most often stood still.
>
> It is in front of the blank page that old and young nuns, with the Mother Abbess herself, sink into deepest thought. (*LT*, 104–105)

Dinesen's story is often and influentially read as a self-reflexive manifesto that associates women's writing with the female body, but in my interpretation, the unstained sheet fabricated and hung by the Carmelite sisters is intimately connected to the motif of gothic celibacy that links a range of stories in *Last Tales*. The white sheet commemorates a wedding night when nothing happened, or when something happened that deviated from the expectations of "the royal papa and mama" (*LT*, 105). As a sign of absence, difference, and dissent, the white sheet tacitly critiques the nuclear family's "blasphemous [...] monopoly" (*LA*, 394) of relationality and futurity. The sheet's very blankness, in other words, allows it to symbolize not just the Carmelite nuns' own heterodox way of life but a full range of yet-to-be-realized alternatives to heterosexual coupling and reproduction. It clears a space for the imagining of less familiar forms of coexistence, including forms that may have little or nothing to do with traditional pair-bonding and family-making.

6 Queer Breastfeeding

Another recurring motif that makes families seem unfamiliar in *Last Tales* is what I call queer breastfeeding. Lactation is a basic biological function that humans share with other mammals, but in the modern world breastfeeding means so much more than that. From the eighteenth century to the present day, an enormous outpouring of medical texts, conduct books, novels, artworks, pro-breastfeeding advertisement campaigns, and internet celebrity "brelfies" has made nursing central to the meaning of family. Chief among modern "lactivists," eighteenth-century Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau campaigned to make *maternal* breastfeeding the norm among upper- and middle-class European women. For Rousseau, when "children [...] be nursed with the mother's milk" (2009, 45), it provides the social glue that glue binds men, women, and children together in orderly, closely-knit, heterosexual units with straightforward roles and responsibilities. If "mothers deign to nurse their children," he assures his readers in a well-known passage of *Emile* (1762),

"morals will reform themselves, the sentiments of nature will be awakened in all hearts, the State will be repeopled" (2009, 243). Conversely, unless "women become mothers again" (2009, 243), there can be neither virtue, nor happiness, nor growth, nor progress for a French nation threatened by "corruption" and "depopulation" (2009, 241).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, architects of the nascent Danish welfare state still sounded the same call for a return to nature. Formed in 1909, *Sundhedsstyrelsen* (the Danish Health Authority) trained a corps of female nurses to pay house calls and persuade all Danish mothers, especially those from the working class, to breastfeed their own children for at least six months. A specially designed manual entitled *Kortfattet vejledning i det spæde barns pleje og ernæring* (*Short Guide to Infant Care and Diet*), was produced and distributed, announcing that "[i]t is every mother's duty to do her utmost to breastfeed her child herself" (Sundhedsstyrelsen 1925, 9 [author's translation]). The blessings of maternal breastfeeding were further expounded in the influential pediatrist Svenn Monrad's *Moderens bog: Det sunde barns pleje* (*The Mother's Book: Care of the Healthy Child*), which appeared in nine editions from 1921 to 1952:

> Nourishment from the maternal breast is the nutritional method that nature itself has devised; we observe it everywhere in animals and primitive peoples, and in former days it used to reign supreme. One would expect there to be no doubt that maternal breastfeeding, the child's only natural means of nourishment, would be preferred and applied everywhere possible. But this is not the case. In this area as elsewhere, civilization casts dark shadows, and it is a fact both sad and irrefutable that nursing has declined as civilization has risen. (1936, 43 [author's translation])

Powerful, value-laden, and controversial cultural and aesthetic representations of breastfeeding range from medieval and Renaissance images of the *Maria lactans* to Caravaggio's *Cimon and Pero* (1606), Peter Paul Rubens' *The Origin of the Milky* Way (1637), and the final scene of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1936). Breastfeeding scenes and references also recur frequently throughout Dinesen's *Last Tales*, but rarely if ever in her stories do women nurse their own biochildren within a "proper" nuclear-familial context. Dinesen's fiction, I argue, skews, tweaks, or queers the modern construction of breastfeeding as an exclusively maternal, private, and domestic practice. When removed from its sanctioned familial context, the lactating breast in Dinesen's narratives proves a disorderly signifier of dissent and errancy. Rather than a biological function

confirming the same immutable sexual identities and family structures, real and metaphorical acts of "breastwork" (Bartlett 2006) here become gestures with the potential to produce new, expanded kinship relations.

7 The Wet Nurse's Revenge

In "A Country Tale," Dinesen revisits historical milieus, themes, and character types explored in previous stories including prominently "Sorrow-Acre" from *Winter's Tales*. Set on the Danish island of Funen during the late eighteenth-century age of social and agricultural reforms, the story uses *herregårdskultur*, the culture of rural Danish manor houses and manorial farms, as a framework to discuss the transition from feudalism to modernity and to contrast clashing aristocratic and bourgeois approaches to morality, gender, and sexuality.[12] More specifically, "A Country Tale" reenvisions the pastoral Danish countryside celebrated by national romanticism as a haunted terrain where, as Walpole put it in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, "*the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children*" (2014, 6). Replete with echoes of Greek tragedy, gothic romance, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dinesen's story tells a multigenerational narrative of two families both alienated and affiliated by blood and milk.

Like numerous narratives of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, "A Country Tale" exhibits a strong preoccupation with parent-child identification and the role of parents, particularly fathers, in their children's lives. The word "blood" appears no less than sixteen times in "A Country Tale," indicating the significance that this bodily substance holds for the story's protagonist, the twenty-three-year-old landowner Eitel, who has returned from educational travel to resume control of his ancestral estate and initiate a program of reforms.

Although Eitel has never known his father, who died before he was born, he wrestles with his spectral omnipresence and a heritage that casts a "dark shadow" over his life:

> I have never seen his face or heard his voice, yet in my small world when I was a child he was ever with me. His portrait on the wall showed the

12 The impetus for "Sorrow-Acre" appears to have come from Dinesen's conversation with a neighbor, the historian and politician Hartvig Frisch. When asked to define proletarian culture, Frisch in turn challenged Dinesen to describe a distinctly manorial culture (Hedtoft and Nørgaard 1950, 321).

> face of a handsome, gallant, gay gentleman, and the people round me have talked to me of him as your mother did to you, for who speaks ill to a child of his dead father? How did it then happen that this dead father came to his child, a dark figure looming over the little boy, wrapped in a black cloak of guilt, gloom and shame, formidable? (*LT*, 198)

The episode which particularly plagues him, and which he painstakingly narrates to his mistress Ulrikke, involved the death of a peasant, Linnert, whom Eitel's father many years ago had cruelly punished in a petty demonstration of power following a confrontation over property rights:

> "The timber-mare, which had not been used for many years, was still standing in front of the barn. My father had Linnert lifted onto it. It was a hot day, and in the course of the afternoon it grew still hotter. When the shadow of the barn reached the timber-mare, my father had it dragged out into the sun."
>
> Eitel for a moment stopped in his tale. "My father," he repeated, "had it dragged out of the shadow into the sun."
>
> [...]
>
> "As now the dusk fell," Eitel continued, "my father looked out of the window and saw that the peasant had fallen upon his face on the plank. 'Go, Per,' he said to his valet, 'and have Linnert taken down.' The valet returned. 'They have taken down Linnert,' he said. 'He is dead.'
>
> It was found that the bull had gored Linnert and broken two of his ribs. There was blood standing under the timber-mare." (*LT*, 205–206)

For Eitel, history is written in blood, and the ties that bind are the bloodlines connecting father and son – a powerful idea that he finds confirmed in both classical myth and religious scripture: "As then I read the story of Orestes, I reflected how much easier was his task than mine, since he had a virtuous father to avenge. As I was taught my catechism, the words that stuck in my mind were these, 'I am in my father and my father is in me'" (*LT*, 199). Consanguinity, Eitel feels, involves him in a transgenerational "partnership" and burdens him with a "claim" to be discharged: "[T]here was something that I must do for him; he required me to pay his debt" (*LT*, 199). Sharing his father's name and blood, in other words, implicates him in his father's crime and isolates him from the surrounding world, as he "still know[s] [peasants] to be shrinking from his blood within my veins" (*LT*, 200). Filiation compels

him to erase the stain on his family honor with expatiatory acts of "reforms and invention" (*LT*, 194):

> I myself have dreamt that with my own life and my own blood – a nobler blood, in spite of all – I might wash away the blood that ran under the timber-mare. But it has all come to this: that more of that same blood will be running at Maribo tomorrow. All my life I have felt my father to be a prisoner in the chains of guilt and hate, and I have believed that the moment would come when I would hear him say to me: 'It was well that you set me loose.' But when, now, will these words be spoken? (*LT*, 210)

Kinship trouble enters this blood-soaked story with Lone Bartels, the wet nurse who breastfed Eitel in his infancy. The daughter of Linnert and a recent "widow with a babe at her breast" (*LT*, 207), the then nineteen-year-old "peasant woman" (*LT*, 207) Lone was employed by Eitel's "gentle and kind" (*LT*, 207) mother (of whom little else is said in the story), in a possible gesture of guilt and contrition. Eitel counts "Lone's milk" as a blessing, believing that "it was Linnert's strength that she was passing on to the child she nursed" (*LT*, 208). Lone's own son, however, was denied milk, neglected, and "sent [...] away, a long way off" (*LT*, 209), and after a career as a poacher he awaits execution for double manslaughter in a nearby prison. After many years' absence, the long-forgotten Lone now appears before Eitel to claim, stunningly, that to avenge her father she exchanged the aristocratic child in her care with her own biological son:

> "It is you who are my child."
>
> He was so deeply absorbed in his own thoughts that at first he did not hear what she said. It was only when once more he found her eyes upon him that he caught her words.
>
> "Me?" he said, and after a few seconds, "Of what are you speaking, Lone?"
>
> "Aye, now I shall speak the truth," said Lone.
>
> "The truth?" said he.
>
> "Yes," she said. "Linnert is the master's boy. I took away the child and put my own in his stead, when I was giving suck up here." (*LT*, 224)

In "A Country Tale" as in related stories like "The Deluge at Norderney," "The Monkey," "Alkmene," "Peter and Rosa," and "The Dreaming Child," questions of paternity and claims to blood kinship are riddled with doubt and uncertainty. Early in the story, we learn that Eitel has fathered an illegitimate daughter,

who now lives under false pretenses as the biological child of his mistress's cuckolded husband. Lone's "nursery tale" (*LT*, 226) further underscores the fictionality that haunts biological kinship claims, making it all but impossible to determine whose blood streams through Eitel's own veins.[13] Dinesen's story includes contradictory evidence both supporting and questioning Lone's invocation of biological motherhood. While her tale of the child exchange is richly detailed and convincing, she is known to come from a family with "a gift for poetry" in which "the young men made up ballads, as the old women preserved the myths and legends of the isle" (*LT*, 206–207). Eitel readily recognizes Lone's testimony as an "ancient nursery tale" (*LT*, 224), understanding the legacy and function of changeling and stolen child narratives in European folklore. His skepticism is endorsed by another servant, Mamsell Paaske, who claims that Lone descends from "folks [who] were queer [...] all of them queer" and had "witches among them," and that she herself "is not right in her head" (*LT*, 232). Paaske undermines Lone's narrative, claiming that "[i]t was not till after you had been christened, and when it was found that the first nurse here had too little milk, that her ladyship sent for Lone" (*LT*, 233), yet Paaske, a former "beauty" who "refused to give up her spinsterhood" and "in her old age [...] had become extremely pious" (*LT*, 231), may have her own ulterior motives for telling a "nursery tale" (*LT*, 230) of her own. In addition, subtle textual clues may indicate a family likeness between Eitel and Old Linnert, his (according to Lone) maternal grandfather, as both characters seem stubbornly and self-destructively determined "that there shall be justice on earth" (*LT*, 229).

Wet nurses are conventional agents of mischief, who enter the family from without, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the cult of natural maternity gained strength, wet nurses were widely suspected of disrupting the formation of the delicate ties connecting bioparents to their children. Wet nurses were often rural, lower-class, and unmarried mothers, and critics of wet nursing frequently worried that these women's diseases, lax morals, and intemperance would spread through their breastmilk and contaminate families from polite society (Fildes 1986, 398–401). Glossing over the socioeconomic factors that made it a meaningful solution for eighteenth-century families, Rousseau heaps opprobrium both on the "mercenary" (2009, 44) wet nurses themselves and on the frivolous higher-class women who, to disport themselves in the city, turn their children over to "alien" (2009, 44) lactating inferiors. In Rousseau's view, nonfamilial nursing is an antisocial yet tantalizing practice, tainted by

13 In the Danish version of the story, "En Herregaardshistorie," the term "nursery tale" (*LT*, 195, 214, 222, 224, 228) is rendered once as "Ammestuehistorie" ("nursery tale") (*SF*, 212) and more often as "Eventyr" ("fairytale") (*SF*, 190, 205, 213, 217).

greed, selfishness, and aristocratic license, whose popularity "presages the impending fate of Europe" (2009, 44–45).

In cultures where identity is passed on from one generation to the next with the paternal seed, the relationship between wet nurse and nursling is discounted or at best considered a "metaphorical" or "fictive" form of kinship. Yet in other societies, particularly in the Middle East, wet-nursed children are sometimes said to form an unbreakable "milk kinship" not only with their nurse herself but also with infants of different gestational mothers who suckle at the same breast (Parkes 2005). In Dinesen's stories, relationships are forged by the exchange of more than one fluid, and breastmilk in particular is allowed to circulate outside the nuclear family context in ways that complicate the orderly transmission of patriarchal heredity. In "A Country Tale," the "queer" (*LT*, 232) wet nurse figure exposes the tenuousness of claims to exclusive blood-relatedness, which come to resemble dubious fictions or fairytales more than incontrovertible biological facts. At the same time, Lone's repeated assertions that "'It is you who are my child [...] you are my child'" (*LT*, 224) indicate the existence of alternate "subterranean" (Emery 2017, 105) configurations of kinship. Upon their first encounter, Eitel (whose name means "vain" in German) is overwhelmed by memories of his and Lone's shared embodied life:

> Only after a long silence did he take a step toward the woman before him. And when the candlelight was no longer between him and her, he recognized the face once so well known, and beloved by the child above all other human faces. Almost without knowing what he did he folded her in his arms, he felt her big soft body filling them, and smelled her clothes. It was as if he had lain at her breast yesterday. (*LT*, 219–220)

Later, though he still disbelieves her story, Eitel is moved to address the "peasant woman" as "little mother" (*LT*, 230): "Yes, my poor Lone," he said, "you are to call me your son, and to hear me call you my mother. We did so many times, years ago. And nothing has changed between you and me since then" (*LT*, 229). And at the end of the story, he visits and kisses the hand of the condemned criminal whose rightful place he may have usurped, and who now awaits execution in a lice-infested prison:

> "Thy mother once was nurse to me," Eitel said.
>
> Once more Linnert hesitated a little, then asked in the same unconcerned manner as before: "What was her name now?"
>
> "She is named Lone Bartels today," Eitel answered. "Many years ago she married the parish clerk. Thou, Linnert, art my milk-brother." The word echoed through his mind, "Brother."

> "Was it so?" said Linnert. He was silent for a while and then added: "It will have been but a poor drop of milk that I ever got out of those paps." (*LT*, 242–243)

Eitel's process in the "A Country Tale" involves some recognition that bloodlines are more twisted than appears, that biological kinship ties can easily be falsified, that filiation is only one of many factors constitutive of identity, and that "our generalized hematophilia" (Anidjar 2014, 30) risks eclipsing the significance of nongenetic but no less real and powerful forms of relatedness and affective belonging. Eitel's mistress, Ulrikke, was the childhood sweetheart of Eitel's doppelganger and "milk-brother" (*LT*, 209), while his father and the man whom he killed were "born the same year [...], and since my father had no brothers or sisters, the peasant boy was taken on as a playfellow to him" (*LT*, 202). Eitel invokes a mystical, exclusive connection to his "father's old name, which has been known in the country for many centuries" (*LT*, 200), but it is mentioned both early (*LT*, 202) and late (*LT*, 244) in the story that Linnert's family's farmhouse once occupied the ground where Eitel's house now stands and that its foundations can still be found underneath the manor. The aristocracy's physical proximity to, material dependence on, and strongly suggested sexual liaisons with serfs and peasants over many generations make patrician and common families all but impossible to disentangle. Irrespective of "flesh and blood" (*LT*, 214), whether Eitel really "is the child that quickened in [Lone's] body" (*LT*, 224) or not, he arguably *is* kin to Lone, in that it was she who nursed him through his earliest childhood and he who "sucked the very mother's love from the peasant woman's breasts" (*LT*, 223):

> She was always with me, since my mother was too delicate to have me about her, and I have seen her in my mind like a big hen covering me with her warm wings, sitting by my bedside when I was ill and concocting strange sweet and bitter medicines for me, and I have remembered the songs that she sang and the fairy tales that she told me. For in her family they all had a gift for poetry, and the young men made up ballads, as the old women preserved the myths and legends of the isle. (*LT*, 208)

The wet nurse in "A Country Tale," to borrow Hélène Cixous' well-known metaphor, rewrites the bloody grammar of kinship in "white ink" (1976, 180). Eitel holds that "I am in my father and my father is in me" (*LT*, 199), but Dinesen story intimates that people are "in" each other in complex and contradictory ways, affiliated by consanguineous, collactaneous, and other forms of association. While it certainly involves an unequal and unjust financial transaction, wet nursing allows us to think of kinship as multiple rather than singular, as fractured rather

than centered, and as something that is made as well as given, constituted not only straightforwardly, through biological inheritance, but also queerly, through acts of care, intimacy, and "response-ability" (Haraway 2016, 12).

8 The Witch's Curse

Dinesen wrote "The Caryatids: An Unfinished Gothic Tale" alongside the short stories that made up *Seven Gothic* Tales, but for unknown reasons she left the English text not only unfinished but also unpublished until it appeared in *Last Tales* under the heading "New Gothic Tales."[14] Set in the 1840s in the French region of Dordogne, "The Caryatids" brings together another two families whose multigenerational histories are more complexly entangled than would first appear. Interestingly, "The Caryatids" also multiplies instances in which breastfeeding turns weird or queer, exceeding or contravening its official function of binding biofamilies together.

Having lost her parents at an early age, the heroine Childerique is now herself "[t]he mother of [...] three children" (*LT*, 108). She is "devoted wife" (*LT*, 128) to Philippe, the present "young master of Champeslé" (*LT*, 117), whose long-dead father, the Baron de La Verandryé, exiled himself and his young son to the wilderness of Canada. After the death of his wife, the Countess Sophie, Childerique's father remarried, and his second wife gave birth to a son, who now inhabits the neighboring estate of Haut-Mesnil.[15] As the story begins, Childerique is arranging her twenty-fifth birthday and "planning a match" (*LT*, 113) between her half-brother and her widowed friend Delphine. She is vexed to discover, however, that her brother plans to leave the family and abscond to the forest to indulge his amorous liaison with another widow, the eighteen-year-old reputed witch Simkie, who leads a band of "gypsies" (*LT*, 110) living at the millhouse of Masse Bleue.

In conversation with her brother, Childerique elucidates the story's title when she compares herself to a caryatid, a draped female figure used as support in classical architecture:

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14 In the spring of 1938, however, a Danish version of the story entitled "Karyatiderne – En ufuldendt fantastisk Fortælling" ("The Caryatids: An Unfinished Fantastic Tale") appeared in the Danish journal *Tilskueren* and in the Swedish magazine *Ord och Bild*.

15 Childerique's "brother" is unnamed in the English text, but in "Karyatiderne," he carries the name Childeric (*SF*, 119, 132). By giving the couple homonymous names, Dinesen enhances the story's gothic confusion of identities.

> We did not forget our honor, or the honor of our houses, when you went away. There is not one, no not one, of the women of Haut-Mesnil, who has disgraced her name, the name of our father. Is it forever, then, the task of the women to hold up the houses, like those stone figures which they call caryatids? And are you now, Lord of Haut-Mesnil, going to pull down all the stones of our great house, upon your own head, and upon mine, and the heads of all of us? (*LT*, 132–133)

Maternal breastfeeding is one vital act by which caryatid women prop up hearth and home:

> Childerique got herself and her family into the landaulet; she let the coachman drive the horses for the return journey. The little boy grew sleepy on his nurse's knees.
>
> "Give him to me, Marie," said the mother.
>
> No sooner was he seated in her arms than he dropped off to sleep, his dark curls – luminous as the black cherries that they had been served – toward her bosom. She became absorbed in the delight of the pressure of his firm little body against her own, and sat silent, thinking of the struggle she had had with her stepmother, before she got the old woman's consent to nurse her babies herself. "What obstacles people do make for our happiness," she thought. (*LT*, 115–116)

The story veers towards gothic, however, when it is revealed that Philippe, unbeknownst to his wife, has discovered a secret cache of love letters revealing that Sophie conceived Childerique during an adulterous liaison with Philippe's own father, the Baron de La Verandryé. If Philippe has married his half-sister, this will explain why in Childerique's company, he has always felt a "rare sympathy and feeling of home which [...] was real and sprang from a source deep in their blood" (*LT*, 125), whereas "[w]ith him, while she was such a devoted wife, radiant with love, her feelings seemed to be more those of a sister or comrade than of a woman in love" (*LT*, 128). It also means, however, that Childerique's relation with her nurslings is a strange one, as the children at her breast (two girls and a boy) are simultaneously her biological children, her nephews and nieces, and each other's sisters, brother, and cousins. Unintentionally, then, Childerique's breastfeeding of her progeny confounds a unified and unitary understanding of family. Each time Childerique "nurse[s] her babies herself" (*LT*, 116), her breastmilk gives new life to relationships whose key constituent elements – "father," "mother," "sister," "brother," etc. – we understand as fluid, blurry, and unstable. Each time she performs her "first duties" (Rousseau 2009,

241), in other words, Childerique unwittingly queers the fixed family structure whose health, naturalness, and purity Rousseau and other lactivists exalted. The caryatid's mothering unknowingly tells of a world where family ties can have multiple contradictory meanings, and where nonnormative kinds of kinship can be lived.

A ghostly presence who still haunts her daughter's thoughts, Childerique's mother, the Countess Sophie, is less a "caryatid" than what Susan Brantly calls a "blossom," who appears to have more in common with errant licentious heroines of eighteenth-century fiction or with transgressive "new woman" characters of fin-de-siécle and modernist writing.[16] By copulating with her neighbor, Dinesen's Sophie refutes the powerful insistence on marital fidelity, domesticity, coupledom, and biological purity. When she conceives and bears an "illegitimate" child, she realizes Rousseau's dread that woman prove capable of adulterating the husband's bloodline and compromising the integrity of the family. Caught in a universe where "women [...] are holding up the houses" (*LT*, 133), Sophie reminds readers that wifehood, monogamy, and opposite-sex companionate marriage do not exhaust the many polymorphous ways in which gender, sexuality, and intimacy can be realized. Whether her relationship with the Baron La Verandryé be described as adultery, polygamy, polyamory, or ménage á trois, it makes visible real and perdurable alternatives to the heterosexual nuclear family's "extremely narrow context for living" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 556).

Even many years after her death, the countryside still resounds with stories about the Countess Sophie's "imaginative, defying" (*LT*, 121) exploits:

> Many things at Haut-Mesnil were explained by the strange luster which was still spread everywhere by the memory of the Countess Sophie, Childerique's mother. The remembrance of this beautiful young woman seemed to live in all the province, like an afterglow of her rich vitality. People talked about her as if she were still alive, and little tales of her grace and generosity were hurried upon him [Philippe], as if he could not be accepted as a true child of the community until he shared this creed. He heard of her curious taste for disguise, so that she would, like a neat female Haroun al Raschid, become acquainted with the poor and outcast of the land in her maid's apron, or even dressed up as a horse-dealer's

16 The "blossom," Brantly writes, "is aware of the rules of patriarchy and gives the appearance of observing them. Like the caryatid, she can be married and have borne children to carry on the family line. The difference lies in the blossom's taste for subversion" (2002, 10).

> boy, for she was an exquisite horsewoman; and of her impulsive heart, when, on finding a poor tenant's household lamenting a dead mother and a new-born baby, she had shifted her own little daughter to the arms of the nurse, and laid the forlorn child to her full breast. (*LT*, 121)

With her taste for theatrical masquerade, Sophie recalls roleplaying, crossdressing, and genderbending female characters in Dinesen's fiction, from Pellegrina Leoni of "The Dreamers" to Agnese della Gherardesca of "The Roads around Pisa," and Athena Hopballehus of "The Monkey," all of whom illuminate the author's "fascination with a fluid or epicene sexuality [and] the permeable boundaries of gender difference" (Gabriel 1994, 85).[17] For Philippe, however, the most striking evidence of the Countess Sophie's fabled eccentricity was her habit of breastfeeding outside, and in defiance of, the sanctioned nuclear family framework. Medieval artists frequently depicted the Virgin Mary sharing her milk between the infant Christ and other worshippers, and later religious images similarly allegorized Charity as "a surrogate mother who nurses children who are explicitly not her own" (Ventura 2018, 139). Sophie's public, unsupervised, and unapologetic "cross-nursing" (R. Shaw 2004) of a peasant stranger's orphan child resists the enlightenment's "colonizing [of] the breast" (Perry 1991), as it provocatively recuperates the virgin mother's nonexclusive *caritas*. Sophie's uninhibited caregiving asserts the ambiguity of breastfeeding, constructing it as a biocultural "poiesis" (R. Shaw 2004, 9) that can underwrite different configurations of femininity, kinship, and solidarity. With queer disdain for privacy, modesty, and domesticity, Sophie flouts medical and patriarchal authorities "intent on limiting the circulation of female body fluids within the nuclear family" (Sperling 2016, 29). Her irreverent gesture indicates that attachment can be a choice rather than a biological destiny, that affiliation can be practiced in opposition to essentialism, that bodies can connect in multiple ways, and that some groups both in and outside the modern West have always breastfed otherwise, building relationships defined not by blood-relatedness but by elective affinities or *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

The teenage "gypsy woman" (*LT*, 141) and reputed "witch" (*LT*, 134), Simkie, is not a physical breastfeeder, yet Dinesen still surrounds her story's third powerful female character with images of milk and flow.[18] Simkie proves *Last Tales*'

17 Early in "The Poet," Dinesen mentions a tragic historical equivalent, the Danish Queen Caroline Mathilde (1761–1775), who "impressed her Danish subjects by riding to hounds in men's clothes" (*SGT*, 358).

18 When Dinesen wrote her story, the word "gypsy," which many now consider unacceptable, was widely used to refer to itinerant people with Romani and other ethnic backgrounds.

most powerful instigator of kinship trouble. A fatherless, widowed, barefoot "sorceress" (*LT*, 142), she presides over a nomadic "tribe" (*LT*, 115), "pack" (*LT*, 139), or "gang of gypsies and poachers" (*LT*, 109) centered at the old forest mill, Masse Bleue, which was once an orderly and productive site but is now the center of Dionysian "dances, [...] darkness, magic" (*LT*, 135) and other forms of "ungodliness" (*LT*, 110). Said to originate "from a country in the East" (*LT*, 110), Simkie is privy to Childerique's family's shameful secrets because her father, Udday, served as a messenger between her adulterous parents but was later said to place "a curse upon my father and all his descendants" (*LT*, 115). In the story's present, tensions rattle the Haut-Mesnil community, jeopardizing the queasy coexistence of "settled people" (*LT*, 111) and "foreigners" (*LT*, 141) who "came and went, and had no real home" (*LT*, 110). Villagers are disturbed because these transients, living outside the realm of the law, involve themselves too closely with animals, disregard Christian rituals, seem to question the existence of the human soul, and generally "do not believe in the Lord" (*LT*, 110). Unconfirmed rumors hold Simkie responsible for the death of her husband, a "pious old miller," who "used to birch his young wife" (*LT*, 139), and implicate her in the bizarre disappearance of the local Catholic priest, Father Bernhard, "who was a pious man" (*LT*, 111).

Simkie's breastfeeding is metaphorical rather than literal, but it has the same effect of destabilizing (rather than cementing) "settled" understandings of selfhood, gender, sexuality, and relationships. In a key scene, Childerique's brother (who in truth is no biological relative) declares his intention to abandon his kind and join the strange companionship of those who "live on the moors and the waste land where the vipers are" (*LT*, 131):

> "You know, Childerique, how frightened I have been, all my life, of vipers and snakes – even now, when I set eyes on one of them I feel as if I should die. Well, I should like to be invulnerable to their bites, too. I will be with the people who cannot be hurt by vipers," after a moment he added, "who play with them, and make them dance." (*LT*, 131–132)

Childerique's "bewitched" (*LT*, 141) brother desires nothing more than to escape genealogy and filiation, which "was like the cravings of vampires, with their large wings, asking for your blood and offering you, with deep sighs, their own thick hot blood in return" (*LT*, 136). To rendezvous with his "slut" (*LT*, 140) mistress, he must immerse himself in lacteal flow, "rid[ing] through long milk-white stripes of mist, which rose from the damp meadows near the river" (*LT*, 137).

The story's climax occurs when Childerique seeks out the "mill witch" (*LT*, 134) in her "viper's nest" (*LT*, 139) to demand that her nemesis "release my

brother of this magic" (*LT*, 141). In response, Simkie cunningly vows to perform a magical "charm to turn the heart of your brother, your father's son, entirely away from the woman whom he now loves, and thinks of as his wife" (*LT*, 142). This spell will, in an irony unsuspected by Childerique, accomplish the opposite of what she hopes: It will alienate her husband and half-brother Philippe from herself, rather than drive her imaginary brother from Simkie. To compel Childerique to return, the enchantress uses the "magic of the wheel" (*LT*, 144) to show Childerique a vision of her own conception:

> Just in front of her lay a vast space of water, and upon it hung a thin milky mist. She heard wild ducks a little way off, between the rushes. It was all dim around her, like a big bouquet of foliage, reflected within a thick silver mirror.
> [...]
> In the dusk on the shore she saw a form moving, curious to her at first. It was a woman in white, but as she was swathed in a dark shawl, the upper part of her body become one with her surroundings, the white skirt swept on as on its own. [...] she saw also, at that same moment, the reflection of a star, the first or the last of the summer night, shiver in the lacteal surface of the water. There was a seat in the wood; the young lady sat down on it, and leaned her head upon her folded hands at the back of the seat.
> [...]
> A young man came along the forest path, from the opposite side to the woman, hastened up to her and took her in his arms; she sank into his embrace.
> At the moment when the lady gave herself up to her lover's adoration, Childerique knew her. It was her mother, the fair and cherished Sophie, younger than herself and bright with beauty and happiness. "Oh, dear Mother," she thought, "apple of my eye, I see you at last." The young man must then be her father, so much younger than she remembered him, really just like Philippe when he had first come to France. Her mother, she thought, had come out to meet her father in the park. (*LT*, 146–147)

All the story's conflicts, themes, and motifs converge in this dreamlike episode, which Susan H. Aiken perceptively interprets through the lens of post-Lacanian feminist theories of abjection and *écriture feminine* (1990, 199–205). Dinesen repeatedly imagines the landscape with the use of milk imagery ("milky mist," "lacteal surface"), and she lets Childerique note that Simkie suddenly looks "worn like a woman with child" and "drag[ging] herself along laboriously [with] the stiff and empty face of a woman near her confinement" (*LT*, 144). These

elements connect with the story's other nursing references, suggesting that Simkie's witchcraft can loosen the ties that bind and nourish "possibilities outside the bounds of marriage and motherhood" (Aiken 1990, 197). Childerique journeys to the forest "in the service of [her father's] house" (*LT*, 142), hoping to expel the demon "for the honor of Haut-Mesnil" (*LT*, 141): "'Get you gone' [...] 'Get you gone,' she repeated" (*LT*, 139). What follows, however, is an erotically charged initiation scene that leaves the older woman "[e]nraptured and transported" with "a queer delight" and a "deep ecstasy about this new world opened to her" (*LT*, 146), "longing" for more exposure to the "world of sweet witchcraft" (*LT*, 148). Although Childerique remains baffled by the vision and "why the gypsy was showing it to her" (*LT*, 146), there is a dawning recognition of her own family's complexity and impropriety: "The gestures were all so familiar; it was indeed as if she had seen herself and Philippe in a looking glass, younger and fairer" (*LT*, 148). The story ends abruptly soon hereafter, and Dinesen stubbornly refused any request to divulge the continued destinies of her characters (Brantly 2002, 183). It seems likely, however, that Simkie's white magic has launched Childerique on a path of self-discovery that will compromise her status as a caryatid "work[ing] to hold up the world" (*LT*, 140).

Sinuous, serpentine, and shapeshifting, her queerness marked by her gender-ambiguous and culturally indeterminate name, Simkie practices a sorcery that can unmake "settled" (*LT*, 111) identities, family structures, and even the very shape of the human.[19] "[B]oth married and widowed," "broader than Childerique and more rounded in all her lines, and singularly light of movement" (*LT*, 138), Simkie possesses many "graceful and fascinating" (*LT*, 141) characteristics yet still conveys a distinct sense of being neither fully female nor fully human:

> She was barefoot and had on nothing more than a shirt and a closely folded, faded blue cotton skirt. [...] [S]he, here in her own house, wore her thick hair in two pigtails; between them at the nape of her neck a coarse tatter of hair bristled out, a sign of strength.
>
> At the nearness of this strong and fresh young body Childerique's fury came back; she felt in her hands the desire to seize the rich round amber-colored throat and to strangle this creature who defied her, and a deadly nausea at the thought of touching her, as if she had had a snake in front of her – and the latter feeling was the strongest. (*LT*, 138)

19 In the 1920s and 1930s, the Indian classical musician Uday Shankar performed in Europe with a French pianist and dancer, Simone Barbier, who took the stage name Simkie. Dinesen, it seems, derived her "gypsy" names from this pair of popular performers.

Accusations of literal and metaphorical parricide follow Simkie wherever she goes, and she is known throughout Champeslé as the implacable enemy of patriarchal law and order. Thus, in her dialogue with Childerique, Simkie reveals that she plans to use Childerique's firstborn son's blood in a pagan sacrificial ritual: "Madame, […] you must bring your little son to help us make the spell. A male child, who has in him blood common to you, who will speak the charm, and of him about whom we speak it. Blood, Madame, such noble blood is precious in magic" (*LT*, 143).

During her climatic encounter with Childerique, Simkie offers an additional vision that further complicates how we might understand familial relationships:

> Before her a great pattern of glowing red sparks was forming itself. First it was like a wheel, then settled into a sort of fixity, but what it was she could not tell. From time to time it was blurred, some of the lights were put out. A strange smell, alarming to her, and a new noise, a grunting or rummaging, spun round her head.
> […]
>
> The large moving forms amongst the trees were a troop of huge black boars, some of them quite close to her. They were all busy grunting and rooting up the earth, buffeting one another and rubbing their flanks and backs upon the mighty fir trunks. A sow with her young passed her; a terrible old boar with terrible tusks turned and fixed his little red eyes on her, and afraid that he would come for her she flinched back. It was all gone. She was in the mill again, giddy and out of breath. She found herself staring, with a queer delight, into the face of the gypsy.
>
> "What is that? What was all that?" she asked.
>
> "That was the old forest of Haut-Mesnil," answered the miller's widow. "That was just the place where the great house stands now." (*LT*, 145–146)

I perceive the shaman-like Simkie as *Last Tales'* quintessential "kinnovator" or "clanarchist" – terms that Haraway borrows from Lizzie Skurnick to characterize a person who refuses traditional definitions of family and "makes family in nonconventional ways" (2016, 208). In "The Caryatids," Philippe has spent his childhood in the Canadian wilderness "in the company of wild red-skinned men" (*LT*, 120), who have different and more expansive understandings of personhood and family than is common in western culture. Here he became "the blood-brother of the Mohicans" (*LT*, 121) and "the friend of an old Indian horse-trader, who had assured him that he was, at the very same hour as he was trading horses in the marketplace of Quebec, even as well, in the strong and

shaggy shape of a timber wolf, hunting and sleeping in the mountains" (*LT*, 127). Simkie shows Childerique the "troop" (*LT*, 145) of wild boars just before she conjures up the vision of her biological parents, and by juxtaposing "vision lovers" with "vision animals of a burning sky and a forest of a thousand years ago" (*LT*, 150), she points to deeper and broader forms of relatedness that stretch back in time and can even extend beyond the span of the human species. The young witch's "spells and magic" (*LT*, 141), in other words, radicalize the story's queering of kinship by envisioning a larger "family" encompassing *all* the creatures, human and nonhuman, who have ever lived at Haut-Mesnil. Juxtaposing "true pictures" (*LT*, 148) of human and nonhuman companionship, Simkie (and Dinesen) thus challenges Childerique (and the reader) to enlarge their family feelings and entertain the strange notion that humans might consider themselves "siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species" (Haraway 2003, 11).

9 Conclusion

The medieval Saint Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) has been called both "the patron saint of ecology" (White 1967, 1207) and "one of the queerest saints in the Catholic tradition" (Grima 2022, 53). Saint Francis rejected his paternal inheritance, broke with his wealthy family, and gave away his possessions, founding a fraternity of celibate and indigent followers that soon became a monastic order that has survived to the present day. Hester G. Gelber finds that "there emerges from Francis's own writings and from the legends that recount the details of his life a picture of Francis taking on himself a maternal or fraternal role, but not that of a father" (1987, 22), while Christina Cedillo notes that he "professed that his side bled frequently [and] also claimed to have seen himself breastfed by Christ" (2015, 75). Most importantly, perhaps, Saint Francis revitalized and radicalized early Christianity's challenge to family, when he expanded his definition of kinship to include nonhuman creatures and the natural elements. For Saint Francis, the entire world composed one vast friary, in which each "brother" and "sister," whether human or nonhuman, played a distinctive and essential part.

In *Shadows on the Grass*, Dinesen faults Christian missionaries to Kenya for "not hav[ing] – as they ought to have had – Saint Francis of Assisi at their Mission station" (*OA*, 386–387). In the same text, she first Africanizes Saint Francis' "Canticle of All the Creatures" (1224) by writing "Praise be to thee, Lord, for Brother Lion, the which is very calm, with mighty paws, and flows through the

flowing grass, red-mouthed, silent, with the roar of thunder in his chest" (*OA*, 409). Later she continues in the same vein:

> Praise be to thee, Lord, for Sister Giraffe, the which is an ambler, full of grace, exceedingly demure and absent-minded, and carries her small head high above the grass, with long lashes to her veiled eyes, and which is so much a lady that one refrains from thinking of her legs, but remembers her as floating over the plain in long garbs, draperies of morning mist or mirage. (*OA*, 411)

The promising potential of sexual reform, family planning, and still controversial forms of birth control concerns Dinesen already in the long posthumously published essay "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations" that she, having definitively separated from Bror von Blixen-Finecke, included in 1923–1924 letters to her brother Thomas (*OMM*, 85–96). Many years later, Dinesen stresses how she fears that unchecked human population growth will exacerbate social and environmental emergencies. "I have often felt," she tells the readers of *Fyns Stiftstidende* in January 1957, that "overpopulation is humanity's – and humanism's – most terrible threat" (Brundbjerg 2000, 227 [author's translation]).[20] Dinesen was not antifamily and she did not oppose biological reproduction per se, but neither did she perceive the nuclear family as the normative and ahistorical *sine qua non* of human civilization. With her queer way of viewing things, she took a strong interest in the possibility of building households and kin relations otherwise. Rather than propound a programmatic antinatalism, her stories help us understand how alternate "submerged kinships" (Emery 2017, 105) can punctuate, interrupt, and supplement more traditional understandings of the *oikos*.

According to Said, "modernism was [...] a response to the crisis of what could be called filiation – linear, biologically grounded process, that which ties children to their parents – which produced the counter-crisis within modernism of affiliation, that is, those creeds, philosophies and visions reassembling the world in new non-familial ways" (1975, xiii). Yet if Dinesen's penchant for

20 Dinesen's comments resonate with concerns voiced by her sister, Ellen Dahl, in her essay "Lad Naturen i Fred" ("Leave Nature in Peace"): "There seems to be only a certain place in nature for each species, which degenerates or acquires new enemies if it spreads too widely. Only mankind has so far been able to multiply without meeting resistance, and who knows if that will not be our downfall?" (qtd. H. Petersen 2017, 120–121 [author's translation]).

kinship trouble can be historicized with reference to modernism, her stories' "turn from filiation to affiliation" (Said 1983, 18) also chimes with increasingly urgent ecopolitical critiques of unsustainable ways of "doing" family. As novelist Richard Powers (2021) writes, finding ourselves in the Anthropocene means that "[w]e're now in the middle of a family emergency that will test all family ties," and therefore both humans and the environment will benefit if there is greater flexibility to envision alternative ways to forge ethical relationships, loving bonds, and collective solidarities within and across human and human-nonhuman boundaries. In the spirit of "kinnovation" (Haraway 2016, 208), it behooves us to revisit Dinesen's gothic family romances and queer nursery tales precisely at a time when we recognize that the planet cannot support humanity's never-ending exponential growth, and when we find ourselves urgently looking for a greater diversity of equitable, capacious, and sustainable conceptions of family, belonging, and relationship.

CHAPTER 5

Weird Tales for Strange Times: Ruptures with Reality in "Eneboerne," "The Monkey," and *The Angelic Avengers*

1 Introduction

After some debate with her American publisher Robert Haas, Dinesen decided to title her first English-language publication *Seven Gothic Tales*. "And when I used the word 'Gothic,'" she recollected in 1959, "I didn't mean the real Gothic, but the imitation of the Gothic, the Romantic age of Byron, the age of Horace Walpole, who built Strawberry Hill, the age of the Gothic revival" (Brundbjerg 2000, 213–214). A year later, the Danish equivalent followed as *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (*Seven Fantastic Tales*), a title perhaps gesturing more strongly towards cultural influences from German romanticism (Brantly 2002, 14–15). While Robert W. Langbaum insists that "Isak Dinesen is not a writer of hair-raising tales" (1975, 89), other scholars studying Dinesen in relation the gothic and the fantastic have produced a substantial body of critical work primarily grounded in various forms of psychoanalysis, feminism, and poststructuralism (e.g. S. James 1983; Black 1985; Aiken 1990, 67–83; Stoddard 1996; Rees 2006; Kastbjerg 2013, 242–342).

In this chapter, I read Dinesen's fiction against the grain of her own nomenclature, as I reconsider three key texts published at different moments in her career – "Eneboerne" (1907), "The Monkey" (1934), and *The Angelic Avengers* (1944/1946) – as multigeneric mutations or interstitial cross-pollinations that deserve to be labelled *weird*. Emerging out of the burgeoning late-Victorian and Edwardian popular print culture, the weird was established as a literary category between the world wars, when it was used to distinguish writers associated with the American pulp fiction magazine *Weird Tales* (1923–1951) including Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, and H. P. Lovecraft.[1] In "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1925), Lovecraft influentially

1 The word "pulp" refers to the low-quality paper on which these magazines were printed.

differentiates the "true weird tale" from narrower and more conventional applications of gothic, fantastic, and ghost story formulae:

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the dæmons of unplumbed space. (2004, 84)

Less a fixed genre than a way of working across or athwart genres, the weird is conceptualized as a "mode" (Machin 2018, 16), an "inflection or tone" (Luckhurst 2017, 1045), or "the result of a worldview" (Joshi 1990, 1) that "veers" (Luckhurst 2017, 1052) between periods, movements, national traditions, and cultural hierarchies. Focused more on mood, atmosphere, affect, and worldview than on plot, character, and verisimilitude, and tilting "towards the existential, the ontological, and the epistemological" (Machin 2018, 19), weird stories build dark and discomfiting storyworlds with elements that question, interrupt, violate, or destabilize widely accepted ideas about the world and the human place in it. The "weird creates not just unease, but dislocation" (VanderMeer and VanderMeer 2011, 154), it engenders a "sensation of *wrongness*" (Fisher 2016, 15), it expresses an urgent feeling of "estrangement of our sense of reality' (Noys and Murphy 2016, 117), and it "call[s] into question what we think we know about ourselves and the world" (Weinstock 2016, 187). The plots of Lovecraft's stories, inasmuch as they can be said to exist at all, arise from a traumatic rupturing of the social consensus of reality. They almost invariably involve a male New England scientist or academic who undertakes a journey of discovery, believing that rational inquiry will help affirm humans' comfortable and secure position in the world and in the cosmos at large. In the course of the tale, however, the entitled scholarly protagonist uncovers bizarre evidence that upends enlightenment ideologies, utterly confounds orderly epistemological paradigms, and explodes any sense of safe or privileged human being-in-the-world. Lovecraft's weird-finders end up bereft of their orientation and grounding in the world, unhinged, traumatized, and permanently diminished by their entanglement in powers and processes that defy comprehension and refuse the centrality and meaningfulness of human life.[2]

2 The closing reflections of the Bostonian anthropologist Francis Wayland Thurston in the short story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) are exemplary: "I have looked upon all that the

"The weird," writes Roger Luckhurst: "is hard to define because it focuses on the horrors of the hard to define" (2016, xvi). In the twenty-first century, a resurgence of popular and critical interest in the weird has produced a considerable number of scholarly journal issues, anthologies, and edited volumes (e.g. Luckhurst, Machin, and Jarvis 2017; Edmundson 2019; Greve and Zappe 2020). The loosely interconnected stories composing Lovecraft's tentacular "Cthulhu Mythos," which began to attract a cultlike following soon after his death in 1937, have attracted new attention from literary critics, cultural theorists, and philosophers even as his texts' virulent xenophobia and racism continue to provoke controversy (e.g. Sederholm and Weinstock 2016; Gonzalez and Sederholm 2021). The weird has been moving from the margins to the center of critical discourse, I suggest, because it resonates with the crisis of governing epistemological paradigms, with current anxieties about humans' (in)ability to understand and control the world, with acute uncertainty about the future, and with the fundamental strangeness of life in what is frequently termed "the Anthropocene." Bruno Latour observes how in the alleged Age of Man, nature has "unexpectedly taken on [the role] of the active subject! […] [T]hrough a surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is human history that has become frozen and natural history that is taking on a frenetic pace" (2014, 13). According to Amitav Ghosh, the climate crisis evokes an "uncanny" recognition of insights – that "humans were never alone" and that "we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts who share elements of that which we had thought to be most distinctively our own" (2016, 44) – that have been repressed by the epistemological paradigms of Western science and by key institutions of bourgeois modernity such as the realist novel. Timothy Morton (2013) hypothesizes human beings decentered and humiliated by vast, intangible, amorphous entities labeled "hyperobjects," whereas Anna L. Tsing argues that current developments, far from placing the *anthropos* safely in the driver's seat,

> is not the era of human mastery of nature. It is not the fulfilment of dreams of progress. On the contrary! The point of the term is to make us aware of how much we do not control, and of what a mess our species has made without really thinking about it. […] Unrealistic dreams of the reach of human mastery fueled the scholarly divide between humans, ready to conquer, and nonhumans, waiting for conquest, just as these dreams encouraged the programs of irresponsible investors. Messes,

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universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. But I do not think my life will be long. […] Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men" (Lovecraft 2013, 51–52).

> people thought – if they thought at all – would be cleaned up later. Well now we are all down inside the mess, with no signs of clean up. (2015, 44).

If the term "Anthropocene" implicitly promises a reassuring continuation of human power and separateness amidst superstorms, wildfires, landslides, melting icecaps, rising seas, droughts, dead zones, and zoonotic pandemics, the alternative term "global weirding" (Friedman 2010; Canavan and Hageman 2016) perhaps better captures the reality of profound bewilderment and the urgent need for new acts of cognitive mapping. Similarly, if mainstream realist literature can be viewed as practicing "modes of concealment that prevent [...] people from recognizing the realities of their [ecological] plight" (Ghosh 2016, 119), weird fiction in turn maps onto our present predicament, in which "the wild has become the norm" (Ghosh 2016, 8). With a taste for the bizarre, the extreme, the macabre, and the outré, weird writers from Arthur Machen to Ray Bradbury, Daphne du Maurier, and China Miéville *never* accepted the banishing of "the unheard-of and the improbable" (Ghosh 2016, 41) in the name of gradualism, uniformitarianism, and common sense. Central texts in the weird mode from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" (1838), Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows" (1909), Johannes V. Jensen's "Kondignogen" (1907), and Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915) were *always* part of a countertradition attuned to stranger, darker, uncannier, less realistic, but perhaps (as we now comprehend) truer and timelier ways of imagining the natural world and the human place in it.

Notorious for his xenophobia and misogyny, Lovecraft only acknowledged a narrow and selective range of male Anglo-American ancestors, and he particularly championed four enabling "modern masters" (2004, 138) of the weird mode: Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James, and Lord Dunsany. Recent critics and editors, however, have worked to reconceptualize the weird as a broader category that can encompass a more international and gender-diverse range of texts and authors. Ann and Jeff VanderMeer's seminal anthology *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011), assembles more than 100 stories by authors as widely dispersed as Lovecraft, Kafka, du Maurier, Gustav Meyrink, Jose Luise Borges, and Stefan Grabinski. Like Melissa Edmundson's *Women's Weird: Strange Stories by Women, 1890–1940* (2019) and *Women's Weird 2: More Strange Stories by Women, 1891–1937* (2020), however, the VanderMeers' massive tome bypasses Dinesen's texts specifically and Scandinavian literature more generally.[3] The Old English word *wyrd*, from

3 The Modern Library's *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* (Wise and Fraser 1944), by contrast, reprints Dinesen's "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" alongside weird classics like Edgar Allan Poe's

which the contemporary "weird" is derived, was a noun signifying "the principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny" (OED). The Dinesen stories that interest me in this chapter merge the archaic understanding of *wyrd* (the machinations of an omnipotent external fate or destiny) with the modern understanding of weird (as something that defies rational explanation). "Eneboerne," "The Monkey," and *The Angelic Avengers*, I here argue, all exemplify weird fiction's fugitive genre-shifting, -mixing, and -transgressing dynamic to explore human estrangement, precarity, and "outsideness" (Lovecraft 2004, 176) in an unfamiliar and unpredictable world where something seems to be *wrong*. Rather than rigidly following generic conventions, Dinesen's slippery tales play fast and loose with elements from different popular forms including gothic, fantastic, ghost story, crime mystery, supernatural horror, and much more to enact "kind[s] of perturbation" (Fisher 2016, 15) that weird (or *wyrd*) our experience of living in a habitual, predictable, transparent, rule-governed, and knowable universe. Confronting the breakdown of traditional, authoritative, predominantly western, and characteristically male-oriented ways of knowing, understanding, and inhabiting reality, these tales force the realization that there is, as Shakespeare's Hamlet puts it, considerably "more to the world than is dreamt of in [our] philosophy" (Shakespeare 2006, 225). If literature in the Anthropocene can still be understood as "a particularly powerful form of cultural ecology" (Zapf 2016, 89), I find that Dinesen's forays into the weird, eerie, and uncanny have value, timeliness, and ecological power in that they capture and help us process the characteristic experience of being out of place, not at home, or ill at ease on an unfamiliar planet.[4] Though they were written many years ago, Dinesen's stories of epistemological and ontological crisis provide poignant evocations of a weird world that now, in the early twenty-first century, is increasingly becoming visible as *our* world.

2 *Uhygge* All Around

As recent anthologies (e.g. A. J. Mogensen and Jensen 2019; A. J. Mogensen 2022) suggest, early-twentieth-century Danish literature was pulpier, eerier,

"The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla," M. R. James's "Casting the Runes," Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan," and Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror." Timothy Jones includes a brief discussion of Dinesen's "The Dreaming Child" in his chapter on "The Weird Tale" for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English* (2019, 168).

4 Bill McKibben (2011) argues that since the dawn of industrial civilization, humans have inadvertently been making a planet so lively, alien, and inhospitable that it now deserves a new, weird name: "Eaarth."

and weirder than literary historians have commonly assumed.[5] In Dinesen's "Eneboerne" ("The Hermits"), the words "uhygge" and "uhyggelig," which can be translated as "uncanny," "eerie," "unsettling," or "weird," are used no less than five times.[6] Here, for example, the twenty-year-old heroine Lucie Vandamm and her husband Eugène find themselves huddling in a tiny cabin on a remote solitary island beset by bizarrely protracted and violent storms:

> And as it swallowed up all these voices in itself, the storm filled the air with such a terrible noise that it was to the hermits like being at the bottom of a witch's cauldron. The fire went out, the whole house was filled with an icy weirdness ["uhygge"], and everything in it that was loose hammered, wiggled, and thundered like little trolls who found their pleasure in mixing their voices with the great mighty spirit, the storm, and acting out their mad little dances together with the eternal sea, – and in the middle of this cold house the hermits sat and waited for the storm, of which there was still hope that it would one day stop. (*KV*, 29–30 [author's translation])

The first story that Dinesen ever published, under the pseudonym "Osceola," "Eneboerne" appeared in the Danish literary journal *Tilskueren* (*The Spectator*) in August 1907 on the recommendation of the influential critic Valdemar Vedel. It was never rewritten or translated into English, and apart from a few short notices (e.g. Black 1985, 383–384), it has largely been ignored by critics. Set in the late eighteenth century, the story meshes influences from a number of popular genres to achieve a haunting vision of "anthropoperipheral" (Miëville in Venezia 2010) nonbelonging amidst elemental forces that seem at best indifferent and at worst openly hostile to human projects.

The recently married Vandamms have journeyed from England to the island, whose name and geographic location are never revealed, to ensure

5 According to Anders B. Jensen, "[t]he first decade of the twentieth century was the germination time for a sickly and twisted literary growth, which flourished briefly in the period until 1920." Literary-historical accounts solely focused on the post-1900 rise of Danish realism and naturalism, Jensen argues, risk overlooking the existence and popularity of such texts, in which "the twisted, the exaggerated and the supernatural cause a breakdown of our normal, everyday understandings of reality" (2019, 187 [author's translation]).

6 For a discussion of *uhygge*, see Sandberg 2015, 25–35. The antonymic and much better-known term, *hygge*, denotes informal socialization in a cozy, unthreatening atmosphere characterized by "spatial encapsulation and interactional clustering around common, central points" (Linnet 2011, 34). Dinesen criticizes Danish *hyggemania* in a November 1944 letter to Birthe Andrup (*KBD*, 1:383–384).

that Eugène, an obscure but arrogant and obsessive intellectual and political reformer in the tradition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, can focus on finishing "a great work" (*KV*, 16 [author's translation]). The island, it turns out, is haunted by the ghosts of pirates whose ship sank forty years ago. Soon, Lucie is visited by the specter of the young drowned Irish sea-captain Christobal Christmas, a melancholy but courteous apparition who bewails his death and enjoins her in ever more desperate terms to leave the island lest she, too, lose her life prematurely. Since the enlightened Eugène ironically cannot apprehend the ghosts, however, Christmas's warnings go unheeded, and as "terrible tempests" (*KV*, 22 [author's translation]) begin to batter the island, Lucie is drawn further and further into the spectral world. The story is told through a combination of letters and third-person narration, which enhances the hermeneutic ambivalence characteristic of what Tzvetan Todorov (1975) calls a "fantastic" text. Lucie's death, which can be interpreted both naturally (as the result of cold, loneliness, and exhaustion) and supernaturally (as ghostly possession), prompts a final letter from Eugène to Lucie's father, in which the bereaved husband regrets his "limitless egotism" and admits that "I do not know what caused her death" (*KV*, 36 [author's translation]).

The period from the 1880s to the 1920s is widely considered the golden age of the ghost story, and spectral tales enjoyed particular popularity among female writers, who often used the form to reflect critically on gender relations and sexual politics in patriarchal society. Jennifer Uglow points out that "the popular origins of ghost stories, their alliance to oral tradition, gave educated women one way of criticizing and undermining the structures which constrained their lives" (1988, xi). Melissa Edmundson adds that "[l]ike the ghosts and spirits which haunt their pages, women writers of ghost stories 'troubled' the present by raising awareness of unsafe domestic spaces, gender relations, economic conditions and the consequences of imperialism" (2013, 5). Throughout "Eneboerne," Lucie struggles but fails to find meaning and satisfaction in her socially prescribed roles as dutiful daughter and self-sacrificing wife. Lucie grows up in a country house with her mother, who is "weak and always bedridden," her three sisters, who "left to themselves [...] were closely knit by a sincere friendship," and her father, "a little-appreciated scientist and politician, [who] harbored a deep contempt for women and only occasionally and very theoretically concerned himself with the upbringing of his four young daughters" (*KV*, 13 [author's translation]). She is the product of a misogynist culture that practices a strict separation of genders, reserving education for boys and men while leaving girls and women isolated and vulnerable.

"[V]ery gifted, a passionate and suffering nature, a great idealist, but curiously narrow in his concepts of ideals" (*KV*, 14 [author's translation]),

Eugène Vandamm enters the household as "the patriarch's friend [...] despite a thirty-year difference in age, in warm sympathy, shared interests, shared pride and lack of appreciation" (*KV* 14, [author's translation]). While Eugène's affection for Lucie seems relatively perfunctory – "After some time he fell in love with Lucie, who was the youngest and most beautiful of the four [sisters]" (*KV*, 14 [my translation]) – the older male scholar and his younger protégé are "like-minded friend[s]" united by their deep preoccupation with "life's highest questions" (*KV*, 14 [author's translation]). Lucie, in turn, accepts Eugène's marriage proposal after "some days' consideration" (*KV*, 15 [author's translation]), reciprocating his feelings with a love in which "there was much admiration" but also "much pity": "Sometimes she thought she had been deceived, though she did not know how, but she loved him. When they were together, he spoke much, and a shyness in her nature made him think that he did not know her" (*KV*, 15 [author's translation]). In this early story as so often in Dinesen's later fiction, the hegemonic cultural ideals of romantic love and marriage are treated with trenchant though understated irony. Heterosexual coupling appears less an irrepressible emotional impulse or urge than a social convention. Lucie's father's household, the narrative implies, is a world where the purest and most intense relationships are between men, and where the exchange of women functions primarily to strengthen such homosocial bonds.

Once married, Lucie finds herself in a loveless relationship with a distant, cerebral, work-obsessed husband who immediately rejects her attentions as intrusions:

> He began his new book, a great work, and as he worked his way into the thought of it, they drifted apart by his silence. He had such difficulty in compiling it in the city, where he was constantly disturbed, that it drove him mad, and when he came and told her that he had to go away and live alone in order to write his book in peace, it did not occur to her that she could stay behind, she traveled with him and tried to the best of her ability to make life comfortable for him and to find something to occupy herself. (*KV*, 15–16 [author's translation])

Lucie's situation on the desert island, where she is separated from the community of her sisters and confined to a sparse, cold cabin with an equally frigid and uncaring spouse, offers a grim vision of conjugal domesticity. Like Lucie, Christobal Christmas is (or was) already married, but whether we understand "her friend, the young Irish officer" (*KV*, 29 [author's translation]) as a "real" revenant or as a psychological projection of her unfulfilled "hunger for love" (Uglow 1988, xiii), the gallant Byronic ghost-sailor ironically proves a warmer,

kindlier, and livelier companion to Lucie, with her "imaginative and receptive mind" (13 [author's translation]), than her pedantic flesh-and-blood husband ever could. In the course of their increasingly impassioned encounters, Christmas declares Lucie his love, and their relationship culminates in a quasi-adulterous embrace:

> He came close to her, at once he took her in his arms, wrapped both his arms around her, he had never touched her before. Everything went black before her eyes, and a terrible coldness enveloped her completely, as he pressed her close to him, like the cold waters of the sea over a drowning man. She stood completely stiff for a moment, suddenly heard a long wailing scream in the darkness, and thought: Is it me who screams, and then felt how she sank deeply, and the darkness collapsed over her. (*KV*, 31–32 [author's translation])

Published when Dinesen was twenty-two, and inviting comparison with works of the female fantastic by contemporary writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Sitwell, Thit Jensen, Astrid Ehrencron Kidde, and Selma Lagerlöf, "Eneboerne" inaugurates Dinesen's careerlong efforts to dispel the aura enveloping heterosexual courtship rituals and bourgeois married life.[7] Women writers felt considerable attraction for ghosts and ghost stories, Vanessa D. Dickerson argues, because "the position of the nineteenth-century female" was "influential [...] yet equivocal, ambiguous, marginal, ghostly" (1996, 5). At one moment in the story, Lucie discovers that "[t]here was a woman among the pirates, though Lucie was not told how she had come there, who seemed paler and more shadowy than the others, and who had her long hair hanging down her back; her high voice sometimes sounded like that of a seabird through the storm" (*KV*, 29 [author's translation]). As she lies dying, Lucie sees in her mind's eye a "pale and slender child" whom she recognizes as Joseph, the servant boy who "crashed from the rock on their first day on the island" (*KV*, 35 [author's translation]). In patriarchal society, Dinesen's story suggests, women already lead insubstantial, spectral lives. They lurk in the background, haunting environments where they can never truly be at home. It seems cruel but

7 Lagerlöf can be viewed as the preeminent Scandinavian representative of the female or proto-feminist ghost story renaissance of the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century. In her 1898 short story "Spökhanden" ("The Ghost Hand"), for example, the appearance of a spectral severed hand forces the young woman Ellen to question her decision to enter into a loveless bourgeois marriage yet leaves her no viable alternative to this fundamentally dishonest way of life (Lagerlöf 1943).

also fitting that Lucie should end up joining the female pirate and the servant boy, both marginal and ephemeral figures, in whatever lies beyond "the real and proper life" (*KV*, 28 [author's translation]).

It appears, however, that there is more than one nonhuman agent troubling the world of "Eneboerne." Dinesen's story's more profoundly *uhyggelig* effect, I suggest, stems from its disconcerting vision of a natural environment that is weirdly alive and unfriendly, refusing to accommodate human wishes and desires. Since Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the uninhabited island has been a powerful narrative motif, and "some of the most popular literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is replete with desert islands" (Kinane 2016, 6). John R. Gillis asserts that the West "not only thinks about islands, but thinks *with* them" (2004, 1), while Elizabeth DeLoughrey holds that literary islomania laid the foundation for a representation of island confinement, seclusion, and timelessness, which subsequently served to justify and authorize the Western taming of the environment and subduing of foreign lands. Literary islands are there for the taking, DeLoughrey argues, and "[t]he self-made male who accidentally colonizes a desert isle has been a powerful and repeated trope of empire building and of British literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (2007, 13).

In "Eneboerne," however, the attempt to occupy what Lucie calls "our island" (*KV*, 10 [author's translation]) yields an experience that strikingly reverses this colonizing project. Far from presenting a lush and inviting pastoral environment, Lucie's distinctly northern rocky landmass is protected by deadly reefs and enveloped in cold fog and mist:

> To the west there are high rocks that run straight down into the water, and the sea roars and breaks at their feet and far, far away. The fishermen say that they were hidden reefs, a pirate ship once sank here, that's why they call them the Gallows Hills. Further in and to the east, our island is lower, completely overgrown with grass and somewhere down in a depression there is a long birch grove – but when you are up on the highest places, you can see the water far around and the other islands, just like the hedges and the cut boxwood bushes in the garden at home. (*KV*, 10–11 [author's translation])

Anything but blank and ahistorical, moreover, the nameless island has a past that lingers uncannily, confronting Lucie in the shape of the ghostly pirate crew whose ship, the *Andalusia*, "was wrecked here 40 years ago on the reefs they call Gallows Hill":

> Two candles were lit and stood on the table, and at the table some men sat playing cards. One of them sat with his back to her, and the others were so absorbed in their game that they did not notice her, and she remained quite still and watched them attentively. They played very eagerly and loudly; whole piles of gold coins were passed from one to the other, and during this their faces were very spooky ["uhyggelige"] to look at, for they played as prisoners might play in prison on the last morning before their execution, and while the morning was already dawning, and as if this moment was a conflagration, torn out by a terrible fire. (*KV*, 21 [author's translation])

In the course of Dinesen's narrative, Lucie's island and the surrounding waters emerge as sites of resistance to "western models of passive and empty space such as *terra* and *aqua nullius*, which were used to justify territorial expansion" (DeLoughrey 2007, 3). The story, in other words, redefines the island and the ocean neither as blank spots on the map that can be readily inhabited nor as passive resources that can be safely exploited by the human protagonists, but as weirdly active and wily antagonists, pushing back against human domination.

From the beginning of the story, Lucie feels acutely conscious of "threatening dark and uncanny ["uhyggelige"] and hostile powers" (*KV*, 33 [author's translation]) inherent in the sea, the land, and the air. Already in her introductory letter to her sisters, she construes the death of the couple's servant boy, Joseph, as a conscious, deliberate act by which the island seeks to repulse them. "And isn't that a wonderfully eerie ["uhyggelig"] welcome from the island," she writes: "[I]t's as if it didn't want us here" (*KV*, 9 [author's translation]). Later, in prose still primarily focalizing Lucie's experiences, the third-person narrator uses similar forms of personification to endow the island with a strange, menacing vibrancy. Lucie's deteriorating situation on "the distant and cold island" (*KV*, 18 [author's translation]) only strengthens her understanding of the elements – "the cold and the fog, the rocks, and the sea" (*KV*, 20 [author's translation]) – as adversarial agents that have declared her and her husband *personae non gratae*: "[S]he began to feel so strangely heavy about her heart, for there was such an expression in all things to her that the storm was not a storm alone; its noise was horrible to listen to, because it signified unfriendliness, dislike, and now she understood that the quiet gray weather in the first days had signified mistrust" (*KV*, 23 [author's translation]).

Throughout "Eneboerne," the environment's active and unpredictable agency appears to run counter to human desires and schemes. A dark turn occurs when the first seven-day storm breaks, striking "terror" (*KV*, 22 [author's

translation]) into Lucie's heart: "On the seventh day the storm subsided, as if satisfied with what it had accomplished, and the air became quieter again, but the sea continued to run high. (*KV*, 23 [author's translation]). After a hiatus of two weeks, the second, nine-day storm manifests nature's ill will with a new, superior force:

> The second storm followed. From the time when it first began to blow, and as it rose and still rose and let loose its furious fury over the island, Lucie knew what it meant, and that it was a threat, repeated because the first was not understood, so frothy and snorting because the person who uttered it was losing patience. Dissatisfied with the effect of the first warning and saddened by the presence of these living people, the sea sent them messenger after messenger for nine days to shake them off. (*KV*, 29 [author's translation])

Dinesen's weird desert island story consistently locates agency with the nonhuman, while stressing the human characters' smallness, passiveness, vulnerability, and exposure in the face of the "great ocean's mighty waters" (*KV*, 22 [author's translation]). Rather than Lucie and Eugène occupying "their" island, the island's dynamic processes occupy them, throwing up "flying flakes of foam [...] as if in a kind of furious and wild arrogance to show that there were no limits to its power" (*KV*, 22 [author's translation]). Nothing in "Eneboerne" remains stable, compliant, or docile, simply offering itself to human possession. Everything, including the howling winds, the turbulent waters, and the very shape of the island, is unruly and restless, resisting the emigrants' attempts to grasp or contain it. For Lucie, "it was as if the cold damp air outside laid its hand, as it struck her, not only on her face and body, but on her soul, and as clearly as in words told her its opinion" (*KV*, 21 [author's translation]). The strange, prolonged storms breach all boundaries, weaken all defenses, and pierce all architectural, bodily, and psychic spaces. The fisherman's cabin provides no protection from "the mysterious world of the sea [that] began to rise under this storm, to show how little the obstacles that were set against it mattered, and to fill and flood, to lift and rock everything, and to penetrate everywhere" (*KV*, 29 [author's translation]). The "voice of the wild sea" fills the islanders' heads with "a noise so deafening that it ached in their heads" (*KV*, 22 [my translation]), and the "sharp salty moisture that the sea brought up against the rock penetrated [Lucie's] whole body with its coldness" (*KV*, 23 [author's translation]).

Weird horror fiction, Andrew Thacker argues, meditates on human finitude and allows us to consider "the subtraction of the human from the world"

(2011, 6) without going mad. No longer the object of human manipulation, but increasingly unknowable and unthinkable, the world in weird fiction often "'bites back,' resists, or ignores our attempts to mold it into the world-for-us" (Thacker 2011, 4). Dinesen sets her narrative in 1779, amidst changing ideas about human-natural relationships. Lucie's father, who "counted only on the driest facts and trusted only his own eyes and ears" (*KV*, 13 [author's translation]), adheres to reductive enlightenment positivism, while his daughter exhibits a characteristic romantic attentiveness to the wild and sublime aspects of the natural world. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the wizard Prospero uses magic arts to control both the weather and the behavior of other human characters. Eugène's first (and unsuccessful) philosophical treatise bears the title "Quos ego" ("Whom I") (*KV*, 14), the phrase with which Neptune, the Roman god of the sea, seeks to subdue the rebellious winds in Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC). This imperious, patriarchal, godlike power, however, everywhere eludes the story's human characters, who find themselves not at the center of things but relegated to the margins in a chaotic world at best indifferent to human wellbeing.

In her inchoate but strangely captivating literary debut, Dinesen reveals her attraction to the weird mode when she meshes Robert Louis Stevenson-inspired pirate melodrama with feminist critique, Robinsonade, and "dark ecology," a mode of ecological thinking that "includes negativity and irony, ugliness and horror" (Morton 2010, 17). Written and published well over a century ago, the story's most significant contribution is its powerful invocation of what Lovecraft calls "cosmic alienage or outsideness" amidst "an atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces" (2004, 176). By prioritizing *female* weird knowledge, moreover, Dinesen resists the predictably gendered logic of better-known narratives by contemporary writers like Blackwood and Lovecraft, who typically reserve *unheimlich* insights for their exclusively male protagonists. From the perspective of the island, Lucie realizes, she and Eugène have no certain place, enjoy no special privilege, and can even be considered alien, intrusive presences. To be sure, "Eneboerne" is narrated in a manner that allows skeptical readers some freedom to psychologize Lucie's weird visions as the products of her fragile and increasingly frenzied imagination.[8] The more alarming likelihood, however, is that Lucie, and Lucie alone, can intuit the couple's and potentially everyone's *uhyggelige* situation with frightening clarity. In my interpretation, then, the title of Dinesen's debut

8 The meanings of better-known texts from the same period, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1973 [1892]) and Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* (2021 [1898]), pivot on a similar ambiguity concerning the female narrator's mental state.

story must surely be understood as ironic, for as Lucie discovers at her peril, humans find themselves nowhere alone but everywhere beset by "threatening dark [...] powers" (*K V*, 33 [author's translation]) on a haunted, unstable, lively planet that seems at best unresponsive and at worst actively and even consciously adversarial to human homemaking endeavors.

3 Something Wrong

Reprinted in anthologies like *Man into Beast: Strange Tales of Transformation* (Spectorksy 1946, 156–208) and *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Baldick 1992, 344–385), "The Monkey" is often justifiably placed among "the most Gothic of [Dinesen's] tales" (James, 1983, 43). In the third chapter of this book, I focused on the story's "hero" Boris von Schreckenstein in order to highlight the story's seriocomic undermining of inviolable soldier masculinity. I now return to reconsider "The Monkey" as a story that engages with gothic but pushes beyond gothic conventions to activate the energies of what Lovecraft labels "the true weird tale" (2004, 84).

The term "gothic" originally implied a relation to the ancient Germanic tribe known as the Goths, but its meaning eventually came to encompass all the qualities associated with northern European culture and especially the Germanic culture and architecture dominant during the medieval period after the fall of Rome. While companion stories such as "The Roads Round Pisa" have a Mediterranean setting, "The Monkey" is set exclusively in one of "the Lutheran countries of northern Europe" (*SGT*, 109). Obsessed with patrimony and ancestry, the barbarian, gorilla-like Count of Hopballehus traces his family to the Wends, one of the "wild Nordic tribes" (*SGT*, 131) who, like the Goths, flourished in Europe during the Dark Ages.

Eve K. Sedgwick opens her argument in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* by writing that "[o]nce you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind (and you can tell from the title), you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty" (1986, 9). "The Monkey" recreates eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic fiction's characteristic atmosphere of unease, foreboding, anxiety, gloom, and entrapment. It reuses many of gothic's familiar physical trappings, including a convent, a castle, a dark forest, a magic potion, and a library filled with "brittle folios a hundred years old [...] dealing with strategy, princely marriage contracts, and witches' trials" (*SGT*, 109). It resuscitates some of gothic's most formulaic character types, including a witchlike Prioress, an obsessive male aristocrat, a longsuffering virgin, and a melancholic lover, and it self-consciously exploits the gothic form's association with seduction,

madness, decadence, intoxication, monstrosity, sexual deviance, sorcery, supernatural excess, and shocking revelation. The central intrigue concerning Boris's and especially the Prioress's dogged pursuit of Athena Hopballehus is both interfamilial and intergenerational, involving sex, property, inheritance, (il)legitimacy, power, deceit, manipulation, coercion, and violence. Following the "great dinner of seduction" (*SGT*, 139), Athena finds herself, like so many gothic heroines before, enveloped in a web of lies and virtually imprisoned in the erstwhile convent's "stately buildings" (*SGT*, 109). Moreover, the Prioress's subsequent demand that Boris rape Athena recalls innumerable acts of fantasized, threatened, or realized sexual violence in gothic fiction.[9]

Typically for gothic narratives, "The Monkey" also explores the past's impact on the presence, and as several critics (e.g. Hees 1984; Mishler 1985) have suggested, the story hints suggestively at the power of forbidden knowledge and buried secrets. Letters, wills, deeds, transcripts, diaries, journal entries, and long-lost but rediscovered manuscripts figure prominently in gothic fictions, inspiring Jane Austen's brilliant mockery in *Northanger Abbey* (1818).[10] In "The Monkey," Boris first calls on his aunt, the Prioress Cathinka, just as she receives a letter whose content clearly makes a profound impression on her:

> Just then the door opened and the Prioress's old servant came in again, this time with a letter on a silver tray, which he presented to her. She took it with a hand that trembled a little, as if she could not very well take in any more catastrophe, read it through, read it again, and colored faintly. "It is all right, Johann," she said, keeping the letter in her silken lap. (*SGT*, 117)

When Boris visits Hopballehus, he carries another letter from the Prioress to the Count, who in turn appears still shocked by a third "letter from his lawyer, which he had just received, and was still holding in his hand" (*SGT*, 124). This third letter contains the news that the Count has won a lengthy lawsuit that restores to his possession what he understands as his ancestral land in Poland – a decision that suddenly makes Athena a wealthy heiress. Later, when priming her nephew for his assault on Athena's virtue, the Prioress conveniently

9 According to Kate F. Ellis, "[o]ne of the real achievements of the Gothic tradition is that it conjures up, in its undefined representation of heroinely terror, an omnipresent sense of impending rape without ever mentioning the word" (1989, 46). In "The Roads Round Pisa," Prince Giovanni (Nino) Gastone's rape of Agnese della Gherardesca, in lieu of her friend Rosina, is narrated so obliquely that the exact events of the story have often eluded readers.

10 In Austen's novel, Catherine Morland discovers a mysterious gothic manuscript that daylight reveals to be "an inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters" (1995, 163).

produces yet another real or forged letter that puts pressure on Boris by implicating him more strongly in the unfolding homosexual scandal. An intricate, extensive, clandestine correspondence, most of which eludes Boris and Athena's comprehension, seems to connect the story's two locations, Closter Seven and Hopballehus. If the Prioress has been apprised of the Count's windfall beforehand, this may explain her eagerness to dispatch Boris in the direction of Athena, whom she must know to be completely disinterested in sex and marriage. The Count's newly acquired fortune may also explain the extreme lengths to which Cathinka will later go, using lies, compulsion, alcohol, and drugs to force a marriage between the two youngsters. Both Boris and Athena, in other words, may be pawns in a dark, secretive game, unwilling and unwitting victims of an opaque conspiracy between older, unscrupulous characters, who seem primarily motivated to strengthen the association between two families that are already closely, perhaps too closely, connected. When they first meet, the Count greets Boris as "my child" (*SGT*, 124), he speaks of Boris's mother with suspicious fondness, and with a nickname derived from the Latin verb *abundo* (to overflow or exceed), he jokingly calls her "Abunde" (*SGT*, 126). Boris is surprised by his aunt's sudden eagerness to secure his and Athena's marriage, considering that "ever since their neighbor's daughter had grown up, his aunt and his mother, who were rarely of one mind, had been joining forces to keep him and Athena apart" (*SGT*, 117–118). Boris and Athena may indeed be half-brother and –sister, as Mishler (1985) suspects, yet to the Prioress and the Count the advantages of joining the two noble families, which the Polish legal settlement now makes possible, clearly outweigh the risk of transgressing against the incest taboo.

Jonathan Newell suggests that we imagine the weird not as an alternative to gothic but "as a tumour of sorts growing out of the gothic – composed of the same tissues but unfamiliar, alien and yet not-entirely-so, at once part of its progenitor and curiously foreign to it" (2020, 3). Lovecraft, too, acknowledges the kinship between gothic and weird, but he insists that "the true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule" (2004, 84). Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* can help us explicate this elusive "something more," which in my understanding makes "The Monkey" not only gothic but *also* weird. Fisher echoes Lovecraft's description of the weird, claiming that "the weird is that *which does not belong*" (2016, 10). The weird is the presence of that which should not be present, or the happening of that which should not happen. The weird involves a "sense of *wrongness*" (2016, 13), a "conviction that *this does not belong*" (2016, 13) that portends "the presence of the new" (2016, 13) and sometimes opens "an egress between this world and others" (2016, 19). Fisher continues to argue that

"a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate" (2016, 15). For Fisher, then, the weird elicits an epistemological crisis or cognitive dissonance that forces a questioning of the familiar and opens possible avenues towards alternative modes of thinking and understanding. The weird phenomenon, appearance, or event jolts us with a radical departure from our existing frameworks of comprehension, a shock of the new that manifests as unease but can also register as a form of ecstasy or "*jouissance*" (2016, 13). Fisher exemplifies his argument with black holes, those bizarre entities that twist space and time in unfathomable contortions that seem utterly contradictory to our common experience. Yet if black holes exist, like humans, as part of "the natural-material cosmos," then perhaps it is our worldview that is deficient and the universe itself that is "much stranger than our ordinary experience can comprehend" (2016, 15). Fisher, in other words, understands the weird as that which breaks our epistemic grasp, a "signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete" (2016, 13). What the weird breach exposes is not only that something is out of place or out of time, but rather how the habitual and prefabricated categorizations, delineations, and classifications through which we have made sense of the world and our own existence in it are no longer adequate and will no longer serve us.

Unlike classic gothic texts like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the title of Dinesen's story refers neither to one of its human protagonists nor to a haunted house or prominent architectural structure featured in the text. Instead, it refers to the Prioress's "little gray monkey which had been given her by her cousin, Admiral von Schreckenstein, on his return from Zanzibar, and of which she was very fond" (*SGT*, 109). While exotic pet keeping is en vogue among Closter Seven's elderly female clientele, the Prioress clearly enjoys a closer-than-normal relationship with her simian familiar, which the other inhabitants jokingly refer to as her "Geheimrat" (privy councilor) (*SGT*, 100). She allows her favorite considerable freedom of movement, and she does not always know its whereabouts:

> From time to time, particularly in the autumn, when nuts were ripening in the hedges along the roads and in the large forests that surrounded the convent, it happened that the Prioress's monkey would feel the call of a freer life and would disappear for a few weeks or a month, to come back

> of its own accord when the night frosts set in. The children of the villages belonging to Closter Seven would then come upon it running across the road or sitting in a tree, from where it watched them attentively. But when they gathered around it and started to bombard it with chestnuts from their pockets, it would roll its eyes and grind its teeth at them, and finish by swiftly mounting the branches to disappear in the crowns of the forest. (*SGT*, 110)

The monkey makes few direct appearances in the story, although it is shown in the Prioress's library "pulling out brittle folios a hundred years old, and scattering over the black-and-white marble floor browned leaves" (*SGT*, 109). Blending in with its surroundings, the monkey can often be sensed if not directly apprehended. When Boris first enters the Prioress's parlor, for example, the monkey is nowhere to be seen, but he notices "a certain strange and disquieting smell in, the room, mixed with that of the incense sticks, which were being burned more amply than usual" (*SGT*, 113). When Boris visits Hopballehus, Athena tells him that she has seen the monkey in the vicinity of her own home "sitting upon the socle of Venus's statue, in the place where a small Cupid, now broken, used to be" (*SGT*, 130). And later in the story, when Boris is driving home through the woods after his courtship call, he again intuits an unsettling presence:

> And suddenly it came upon him that somewhere something was not right, was quite wrong and out of order. Strange powers were out tonight. The feeling was so strong and distinct that it was as if an ice-cold hand had passed for a moment over his scalp. His hair rose a little upon his head. For a few minutes he was really and genuinely afraid, struck by an extraordinary terror. In this strange turbulence of the night, and the wild life of dead things all around him, he felt himself, his britzska, and his gray and black horses terribly and absurdly ["uhyggeligt," *SFF*, 111] small, exposed and unsafe. (*SGT*, 133)

If the weird involves "the conjoining of *two or more things which do not belong together*" (Fisher 2016, 10), the monkey constitutes the outlandish irruption of that which "should not exist, or at least [...] should not exist here" (2016, 15). A Zanzibari monkey, we feel, does not belong and is not at home in the story's landscape. A wild African creature is out of place and should not be running loose in the northern European forest. Following Fisher, however, we might argue that the monkey's gambols among the Prioress's fir trees expose a deeper weakness or wrongness in how we habitually conceptualize concepts

like "place" and "home." Previous critics have discussed the defamiliarization of spatial categories that takes place in "The Monkey." Mishler, for example, claims that "The Monkey" is the story that "most explicitly brings together Isak Dinesen's African and European experiences" (1985, 421). According to Ellen Rees, "'The Monkey' plays out against two distinct topographies, one depicted as concrete and substantial, the other a shadow land that is barely perceptible, and only accessible through talisman-like objects placed throughout the text" (2005, 22). Thus, when the Prioress serves a pudding sweetened with cloves from Zanzibar, or when she makes Boris ingest an aphrodisiac of pulverized rhinoceros horn, "African topography threatens to break through the façade of European culture" (2005, 27). For Annegret Heitmann, similarly, "The Monkey" is generally symptomatic of Dinesen's overall whole-world-oriented writing strategy, which consistently and by a variety of techniques works to underscore "the independence of distantly situated spaces" (2021, 26 [author's translation]). Monkeys are native neither to Germany nor to Denmark, but the Prioress's monkey makes itself at home at Seven as easily as do the "parrots and cockatoos, small dogs, graceful cats from all parts of the world, a white Angora goat, like that of Esmeralda, and a purple-eyed young fallow deer" (*SGT*, 109). The monkey's weird, incongruous presence, then, invites the realization that places are not, as we often but wrongly imagine, pure, static, closed, or self-identical. The identity of places, traditions, and cultural practices emerges not primarily or exclusively, as we might assume, when borders are established to delineate inside from outside, but rather through border-crossing practices like commerce, travel, migration, and colonialism. While Seven and Hopballehus may appear remote, isolated, and self-enclosed, we cannot conceive of what goes on in such places, or indeed in any place, without considering the deterritorializing forces that have long made Zanzibar part of "Lutheran [...] northern Europe" (*SGT*, 109) as well as vice versa.

Critical readers of "The Monkey" must inevitably grapple with the story's conclusion, where an outrageous supernatural substitution, transformation, or transmigration appears to take place:

> "No! No!" shrieked the old woman in a paroxysm of horror. The knocking went on. The monkey obviously had something in its hand with which it was beating against the pane. The Prioress got up from her chair. She swayed in raising herself, but once on her legs she seemed alert and ready to run. But at the next moment the glass of the window fell crashing to the floor, and the monkey jumped into the room. Still holding her frock with both hands, and bending double, as if ready to drop on all fours, madly, as if blinded by fright, she dashed along the wall. But still the monkey

> followed her, and it was quicker than she. It jumped upon her, got hold of her lace cap, and tore it from her head. The face which she turned toward the young people was already transformed, shriveled and wrinkled, and of dark-brown color. There was a few moments' wild whirling fight. Boris made a movement to throw himself into it, to save his aunt. But already at the next moment, in the middle of the red damask parlor, under the eyes of the old powdered general and his wife, in the broad daylight and before their eyes, a change, a metamorphosis, was taking place and was consummated.
>
> The old woman with whom they had been talking was, writhing and disheveled, forced to the floor; she was scrunched and changed. Where she had been, a monkey was now crouching and whining, altogether beaten, trying to take refuge in a corner of the room. And where the monkey had been jumping about, rose, a little out of breath from the effort, her face still a deep rose, the true Prioress of Closter Seven.
>
> The monkey crawled into the shade of the back of the room and for a little while continued its whimpering and twitching. Then, shaking off its misfortunes, it jumped in a light and graceful leap onto a pedestal, which supported the marble head of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and from there it watched, with its glittering eyes, the behavior of the three people in the room. (*SGT*, 161–162)

This catastrophe shockingly ruptures the otherwise predominantly realistic mode of narration in *Seven Gothic Tales*, confronting characters and readers with a weird "suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature" that Lovecraft considers "our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the dæmons of unplumbed space" (Lovecraft 2004, 84).[11] While the Prioress and the monkey have hitherto seemed separate creatures, they now appear deeply and ambiguously implicated in each other's existence, even to the point where it becomes uncertain when if ever readers have encountered "the true Prioress of Closter Seven" (*SGT*, 162). The Prioress and the monkey, it seems, coinhabit or co-constitute each other, as already foreshadowed by the Count's reference to certain Janus-faced "Wendish idols [...] of which the goddess of love had the face and facade of a beautiful woman, while, if you turned her around, she presented at the back the image of a monkey" (*SGT*, 130–131).

11 The other major occurrence of the unexplained supernatural in *Seven Gothic Tales* is the ghostly materialization of Fanny and Eliza De Coninck's hanged pirate brother Morten in "The Supper at Elsinore."

The cryptic denouement to "The Monkey" has inspired interpretations based on Freudian psychoanalysis (Hees 1984, 12), feminist identity politics (Rorai 2005), Lacanian poststructuralism (Aiken 1990, 144–153), Derridean deconstruction (Gheorge 1990, 203–214), queer theory (Heede 1998), and animal rights discourse (Lönngren 2015, 153–158). In my understanding, "the philosopher Immanuel Kant" (*04*, 1962) metonymically represents the deeply rooted and powerful belief in human/nonhuman binarism, which is the "wrongness" (Fisher 2016, 45) that the story seeks to address. In Kant's philosophy, rational thought, self-consciousness, and moral freedom are the unique and unifying characteristics that decisively separate "man" from all other beings. "The fact that the human being can have the 'I' in his representations,' Kant writes, "raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth" and makes him "an entirely different being from things, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes" (2006, 127). Among the hallmarks of the weird mode are its "estrangement of our sense of reality" (Noys and Murphy 2016, 117) and what S. T. Joshi calls its capacity for the "refashioning of the reader's view of the world" (1990, 118). As Fisher argues, weird texts depict what should be inconceivable, given what we think that we know about the universe, and when the impossible or incomprehensible does happen, it renders the lifeworld itself strange and obliges one to abandon or revise one's habitual ways of perceiving and conceiving the world. The monkey cannot and should not emerge from inside the Prioress, and vice versa. However, the wrongness with which it *does* emerge from within her, and vice versa, means that Kant, his predecessors, his followers, and the rest of us were and are wrong to consider humans essentially separate from nonhumans in the first place. Watching the monkey metamorphose into the Prioress produces a characteristic mixture of horror and blissful *jouissance*. It is both terrible and pleasurable, because it disorders fundamental "categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world" (Fisher 2016, 15). The library-intruding and book-destroying Zanzibari monkey smashes the convent's window and mounts the European humanist philosopher's marble bust with mocking glee, expressing the weird's characteristic "enjoyment in seeing the familiar and the conventional becoming outmoded" (Fisher 2016, 13).

4 Impenetrable Darkness

Nazi-occupied Denmark's isolation during World War II forced Dinesen to reverse her usual compositional method, and therefore *Gengældelsens Veje* (*The Ways of Retribution*) first appeared in Danish in 1944 and was later

anglicized as *The Angelic Avengers*, published in Britain by Putnam and in the US by Random House in September 1946. Although the novel was well received by critics and selected for the prestigious American Book-of-the-Month Club in January 1947, Dinesen downplayed the novel's achievement and stubbornly concealed her authorship. Even when hard pressed, she hid behind the mysterious French *nom de plume* "Pierre Andrézel," goading readers into a guessing game that strangely mirrors the detection work that takes place in the novel, and objecting strenuously when critics sought to reveal the person behind the mask. In a 1956 interview with Eugene Walter of the *Paris Review*, however, Dinesen finally admitted responsibility for the novel:

> *INTERVIEWER*: I really have about a million things I want to ask, if you permit. For instance, *The Angelic Avengers*.
>
> *DINESEN*: (Laughing). Oh, that's my illegitimate child! During the German occupation of Denmark I thought I should go mad with boredom and dullness. I wanted so to be amused, to amuse myself, and besides I was short of money, so I went to my publisher in Copenhagen and said, look here, will you give me an advance on a novel, and send me a stenographer to dictate it to? They said they would, and she appeared and I started dictating. I had no idea at all of what the story would be about when I began. (Brundbjerg 2000, 203–204)

Recalling Mary Shelley's characterization of *Frankenstein* as "my hideous progeny" (Shelley 2012, 169), Dinesen's metaphor highlights her most financially successful book's slippery, indeterminate, and miscegenate nature, and it foreshadows critics' difficulty in pinning a convincing generic label on *The Angelic Avengers*. Irregular, ungainly, and immoderate, *The Angelic Avengers* has generally been placed among Dinesen's minor works, as a book with "little or no value as literature" (Hannah 1971, 49), a "refreshingly silly" text (Thurman 1982, 306), a tongue-in-cheek pre-postmodern "pastiche" (B. F. Rostbøll 2013, 341), or a thinly veiled allegory of life in German-occupied Denmark (e.g. Wivel 1987, 131–132).[12] Inspired by The Danish Language and Literature Society's 2013 publication of its critically annotated edition of *Gengældens Veje*, scholars have begun to reconsider the novel's status among Dinesen's works and in Danish

12 When Dorothy Canfield Fisher used her allegorical reading of *The Angelic Avengers* to gain the novel inclusion in the American Book-of-the-Month Club, Dinesen privately objected that "[t]he point of view taken by Mrs. Canfield: that the book does, in some way, symbolize the Danish-German contest [...] is totally absurd" (*KBD*, 1:461).

and international literature more generally. Kirstine M. Kastbjerg, for example, considers the novel's key role in "the development of a Danish Gothic tradition" (2013, 301) that also includes B. S. Ingemann and H. C. Andersen. In the most detailed analysis of the novel to date, Barbara Tesio-Ryan attempts to rehabilitate it as an "unfairly marginalized" (2019, 244) work whose social critique "links together the damage of colonialism and the results of a repressive Western patriarchal society" (2019, 189).

The original Danish dust cover of *Gengældelsens Veje* made references to Poe, Stevenson, and the popular Norwegian pulp writer Stein Riverton, while also claiming, spuriously, that "this novel rests on real events that are described in French police reports in 1840–1841" (*GV*, 316 [author's translation]). The Book-of-the-Month-Club, in turn, proclaimed Dinesen "the greatest Gothic novelist of our time," touting *The Angelic Avengers* as "[a] spellbinding story of fascinating romance, chilling mystery and perilous adventure that sets two friendless young women in a house of unspeakable evil" (qtd. Tesio-Ryan 2019, 115). Set in Britain and France, Dinesen's "potboiler" (Kastbjerg 2013, 309) careens promiscuously among genres, channeling inspiration from Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1796), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn* (1936) as well as less familiar governess novels, sensation fictions, detective stories, ghost tales, and gothic thrillers (Brix 1949, 231–258; Glienke 1977; H. Mogensen 1983, 82–90; Agger, 1988; Schmidt-Madsen 2012, 109–126). Labelled a book of "romance, mystery, diabolism and horror" by *The New York Times* (qtd. Tesio-Ryan 2019, 116), Dinesen's *bricolage* exploits the lurid topics of white slavery and sexual trafficking, which were often used in lowbrow crime and suspense fiction. In addition, constant transatlantic cross-references intertwine European locations and characters with the Caribbean, as Dinesen recycles voodoo lore popularized by William B. Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) and by subsequent representations of African Creole witchcraft and sorcery in travel writing, nonfiction, pulp fiction, and low-budget horror movies.[13]

13 Dinesen often disparaged the literary value of *The Angelic Avengers*, but her letters reveal that she also believed that the novel possessed certain cinematic qualities. "I think myself that the book might have chances with the movies," she writes to her British publisher Constant Huntington in September 1945, "and it would amuse me very much indeed, could this be worked. So I beg you to consider the problem, and to do all you can for it. It would be the greatest fun to me to go to England to see it being rehearsed" (*KBD*, 1:425). Despite interest from several studios (Keller 1999, 235–242), a film version of *The Angelic Avengers* was never made, but a one-hour radio dramatization, starring Ann Blyth as Lucan and Margaret Phillips as Zosine, was produced and aired by CBS (Studio One 1948).

At the outset of the novel, Lucan Bellenden, the orphaned daughter of a well-known British "man of science" (*AA*, 4), ekes out a lowly existence as governess to a wealthy gentleman's blind son. When her employer offends her with an indecent proposal, Lucan makes a nocturnal escape to seek out her school friend, Zosine Tabbernor. The rich but spendthrift Mr. Tabbernor suffers a bankruptcy soon after Lucan and Zosine's reunion, and when he flees his creditors to the Caribbean, the two virtual "twins" (*AA*, 22) find themselves adrift in a volatile world. A seemingly fortunate turn of fate brings them into contact with the retired clergyman Mr. Pennhallow, who lives a scholarly life with his sister in the pair's idyllic French country house, Sainte-Barbe, where he hopes to finish "a great philosophical and religious work" (*AA*, 95). When the girls cross the English Channel and take up residence with their new "foster-parents" (*AA*, 99), *The Angelic Avengers* takes a horrid turn. Through hints, suggestions, and discoveries, the girls come to see Pennhallow's pastoral retreat as a "murder-house" (*AA*, 251), and they gradually realize that the bookish vicar's benevolent guise conceals a larger-than-life figure of almost incomprehensible maliciousness.

In *Shadows on the Grass*, Dinesen points out that her "highly illegitimate child" was composed during World War II and "as was probably inevitable under the circumstances developed into a tale of darkness" (*OA*, 452).[14] *The Angelic Avengers*, I suggest, explores "darkness" as a racial, ethical, and epistemological category. Remarkably, the novel incorporates a transported dark-skinned woman – Zosine's father's "coal-black" (*AA*, 36) nurse and maid, Olympia – as its most compelling and energetic character. Early on, readers learn that Zosine "as a child had been to the West Indies" (*AA*, 24), that her father "owned great properties in the West Indies [that] his father and his grandfather had owned [...] before" (*AA*, 23), and that "Zosine's own mother [...], a Frenchwoman by birth, [...] had come from Santo Domingo" (*AA*, 24). Although he now resides in England, the "tremendously rich" (*AA*, 23) Mr. Tabbernor has arranged his country estate, Tortuga (the Spanish word for turtle), as an exoticized and orientalized "earthly paradise of a unique and fantastic nature" with "[m]any tropical trees and shrubs [...] brought from far away and [...] planted in the park" along with "hothouses with rare flowers and fruit, and a big glass house with small monkeys and parrots" (*AA*, 24).[15] In addition,

14 In the Danish version of the text, *Skygger paa Græsset*, Dinesen uses the term "Gyser" ("thriller") (*SGE*, 85).

15 With its incongruous mélange of "artificial" elements and "multitude of fresh and fantastic details" (*AA*, 29), Tortuga can be understood as a *mise-en-abyme* representation of *The Angelic Avengers* itself.

Zosine and her father still employ Olympia, an "exotic and wonderful person" (*AA*, 36) from Santo Domingo (Hispaniola), an island where "black people make magic in the black night" (*AA*, 59).

In Chapter 11, Olympia emerges as the narrator of her own gruesome testimony, recounting her dehumanizing treatment at the hands of white colonizers and slave owners in the years preceding abolition. Olympia has experienced the dark underside of polite plantation society, which hypocritically venerates white female chastity while reducing African women to sexual playthings. Following colonial custom, Olympia was first presented as a concubine to the oldest son of her owner when she was fourteen. Later, a "white man [...] but [...] grey to look at" who had "with great power in him" (*AA*, 59) came to her island and wrested control of Olympia's voodoo cult:

> Aye, he was an awful man! He was after human flesh, like the leopards in Africa at night. [...] he had acquired a taste for human flesh, and his mouth was ever watering for it.
> [...]
>
> He now said to us, "I have been to Africa, to the very places where your own fathers lived. I have known your own tribe, as it is before kind white people help it to get to America. I have learned your old magic, and have seen bigger snakes there than you have ever set eyes on. Now I am Papa le Roi." (*AA*, 59)

A former "slave-trader" (*AA*, 58) now "too old to sail in the slave traffic" (*AA*, 59), the white "devil of a priest" (*AA*, 62) began using black children, including Olympia's, in unspeakable rituals to satisfy his cannibalistic cravings:

> "But when, early in the morning," Olympia cried out in a dreadful voice, "I came back to my own house, my child was not there. I then remembered that it was my own baby, which I had borne from my body, and it seemed to me only the more lovely because it was black. Then the old white priest's words of the goat without horns rang awful in my ears. I wept and wailed in that hour of dawn, so loud that all the black men and women from the house came and stood round me." (*AA*, 60–61)

In Dinesen's novel, the ever-fascinating trope of cannibalism, which has so often been used to justify the conquering and civilizing of "savage" natives by the dominant Western world, is recuperated and used to characterize the colonizers themselves. Olympia, however, has parlayed her suffering at the hands of white flesh eaters into tremendous physical and mental fortitude. Indecorous,

vociferous, and opinionated, dismissive of Christianity and forthright in her corporeality, Olympia flaunts her opposition to the ideals of domestic Victorian womanhood. Long exiled in Europe, she remains in her own words "a wild woman" (*AA*, 57), staunchly committed to her old pagan gods and hellbent to avenge the crimes suffered in her youth: "I must go on shrieking in this way," she says, "until I have got the gray Papa le Roi killed" (*AA*, 59). Olympia disappears from the plot after Mr. Tabbernor loses Tortuga, and nothing is told of her situation or activities for a long time. At the end, however, she charges back into the novel with great strength, launching a last-minute *deux ex machina* rescue of the girls, who have fallen into the Pennhallows' clutches.

The novel's moral heart of darkness is Olympia's nemesis, Mr. Pennhallow, whom Kastbjerg calls "a study of evil unmatched in Danish literature" (2013, 340). A consummate dissembler and exploiter, the softspoken but charismatic Reverend Pennhallow manipulates religious, pedagogical, and patriarchal discourses to position himself as "tutor" and "shepherd" (*AA*, 81) to "our little white lambs" (*AA*, 100). A "little, dusty, old man" who lives among "dry and dusty books," Pennhallow grants the girls entrance to "the temple of learning" (*AA*, 95) even as he recruits them as unwitting contributors to his own nefarious schemes. When Olympia unexpectedly reappears at Sainte-Barbe, however, she immediately recognizes Pennhallow as the diabolical slave-trading, child-sacrificing, and human-flesh-eating Papa le Roi:

> Olympia suddenly stopped her wild war dance and stood immovable, like a majestic, dark statue. Then she took a step toward the man before her, and stared at him. "It is Papa le Roi!" Olympia once more roared from the middle of the floor, swinging her arms, and throwing her body forward and back. "It is the gray man from the woods who has come back!" […]
>
> "Where do you come from?" she cried in a deep, ringing voice. "You gray man who ate my child! You were as old as you are now, fifty years ago. Could you no longer lie still in your grave?" (*AA*, 259)

At this point, Lucan and Zosine have already learnt that the satanic parson, aided by his wife, who is really his sister, occupies the center of an obscure yet powerful crime syndicate and/or religious sect. Driven by a fanatical misogyny, and using a network of widely dispersed accomplices and disciples, Pennhallow has been trafficking young women into prostitution and using them in "unnatural transactions […] stained with blood" (*AA*, 151). Pennhallow's misdeeds express a repetition compulsion that collapses distinctions between past and present, black and white, the West Indies and Europe. Evil in *The Angelic Avengers* is a persistent force, the appetite for sacrificial "goat[s] without horns"

(*AA*, 265) is insatiable, and Pennhallow's outrages against young European girls perpetuate a seemingly never-ending cycle of violence and victimization:

> The master has had the young girls here that they talked of. He has also sold them. I do not know what it means, I did not know that one could sell white people. But it must be possible to do, and he has done it. The girl in the boat, of whom they spoke, came from here. It is not true that there have only been three girls here. There have been many, many, and he has sold them all. What happened to her has happened to them. (*AA*, 174)

Lucan and Zosine are horror-struck when they discover that history moves circuitously rather than linearly, that the same cruel acts are perpetrated recurrently and habitually, and that slavery, cannibalism, and human sacrifice persist at the heart of advanced and civilized Europe even after "[t]he humane feelings of our century [...] have abolished the trade with Negro slaves" (*AA*, 150).

More work could be done to develop transatlantic, postcolonial, and intersectional interpretations of Dinesen's only full-length novel, weighing its use of racialized discourse against its lurid sensationalism, its wartime allusions, and its remarkably explicit thematization of imperial expansion, slavery, and sexual violence. What particularly interests me in this context, however, is the sheer *weirdness* of the universe that Dinesen constructs and the characteristic, pervasive sense that in *The Angelic Avengers* "there is always something that is not quite right – yet it is difficult to grasp what it is" (Tesio-Ryan 2019, 217). Dinesen's pulp fiction text is set half a century after the French Revolution, in an age devoted to reason, progress, and science. Lucan has been brought up among enlightenment *philosophes* who value transparency and insight, and when we first encounter her, she tutors a blind boy:

> Lucan's father had been a scientist, a highly gifted botanist, ahead of his time, and therefore but little appreciated by it, and opposed by certain of the clergy. He had many friends among French and German scholars. One of them was the French man of science. Dr. Braille, who invented the system of writing for the blind. Lucan had seen the famous man in her home, and had listened as he developed his ideas. (*AA*, 4)

The Angelic Avengers appears to yield the clarity and closure that would satisfy "the orthodoxy of the man of science" (*AA*, 273). At the end of the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Pennhallow escape their humiliating unmasking in front of Olympia and the girls by committing suicide. When Lucan begs the gun-toting

Olympia to pardon Pennhallow, first he and later his sister/wife/doppelganger hang themselves with the same ropes that they had prepared for the girls. As detective fiction conventions dictate, the criminal conspiracy is unraveled and culprits including the corrupt local police officer, Emmanuel Tinchebrai, are unmasked and apprehended. Zosine discovers her kinship with the aristocratic de Valfonds dynasty, and Lucan's admirer, Sir Noël Hartranft, is conveniently released from a prior engagement. As the narrative reverts to the reassuring logic of the Radcliffean female gothic, identities are clarified, long-estranged families are reunited, and class relations are realigned when both heroines enter (perfunctory) marriages with eligible bachelors.

The novel, however, contains a residual surplus of darkness, strangeness, and otherness that is never fully illuminated by its pat conclusion.[16] Realms and powers that will appear "fantastic and almost insane" (*AA*, 251) remain, in other words, which resist clarification and raise questions about the explanatory power of the western enlightenment's empiricist, rationalist, positivist discourses. "[A] real angel, and at the same time something of a devil" (*AA*, 24), Olympia draws her powers from obscure sources and unknown agencies, with whom she communicates "in a strange, guttural language" (*AA*, 267). In general, Olympia reveals little about the origins or nature of her extraordinary powers, preferring to guard Santo Domingo's ancestral secrets. She claims, however, to have discerned the girls' predicament at Sante-Barbe by summoning a ghostly community of dead enslaved Africans:

> The old woman's black face suddenly became empty and expressionless. It was as if a door had been shut. "Who of you," she said, "knows our ways? Black people have got their own souls and their own noses. Of that we will not speak. And this time," she added, more to herself than to Zosine, "somebody from the old time came and helped me. They came from far away to show me the road. The Negro to whom I was married came, yes, my own baby laughed and jumped a little ahead of me where I walked. But why they came I do not know. And at last, tonight, I smelled your danger and your fear. And do you think that any human being could then have kept me back or made me turn? But all this is nothing for nice young ladies to ask about, or listen to." (*AA*, 251)

16 In a letter to Robert K. Haas, Dinesen acknowledges that "the romances of the two girls, and the happy ending of the novel" appear "a bit anticlimactic" but adds that "somehow I rather prefer the book to end in this way. It is not meant to be an orthodox crime novel, where the whole plot finishes with the discovery or punishment of the murderer. I see it more as a kind of 'hold-all,' where romance, crime and idyll are all blended" (*KBD*, 1:435).

Whether Pennhallow is in fact Papa le Roi or rather, as he maintains, a nephew who has inexplicably inherited his uncle's hoarse voice, zombielike pallor, and "taste for human flesh" (*AA*, 59), remains, like much in the novel, nebulous. Less a person than a manifestation of "horrid darkness and loathsomeness" (*AA*, 225), Pennhallow embodies an ancient, timeless, and shadowy malevolence that has spawned and spread throughout the world. Pennhallow descends from a long lineage of Faustian transgressors guilty of "inconceivable misdeeds" (*AA*, 288), and in a manner worthy of Boris Karloff or Bela Lugosi he is often shown "dressed in [...] a queer, old-fashioned style" (*AA*, 81) and poring over tomes of mystical lore. To Lucan and Zosine, it appears that their foster-father has "gone through a number of successive existences," that "he knows things hidden to all other people" (*AA*, 96), and that he is "keeping a watch, waiting for something, quite quietly" (*AA*, 100). The old vicar speaks to his young wards in oblique allegories, explaining how "the python, to swallow its prey, must pour it over with its slime" (*AA*, 218). He performs hypnotizing music that unnervingly hints at his familiarity with a "lasting dark reality" (*AA*, 167) of "inexplicable things" (*AA*, 221):

> At rare intervals, late at night, in the long dining-room, he took out a queer, old- fashioned flute, and played on it. There were ancient, sweet melodies on his programme, and some strange exotic tunes as well. He was no virtuoso, but his playing had a peculiar, unaccountable charm, which made the girls listen in breathless silence and sigh deeply when it ceased. (*AA*, 97)

In addition, he produces "strange pictures" that seem like ritualistic invocations of eldritch powers:

> They might, they thought, have been drawn by a person in a dream or a nightmare. There were human figures in them, but they were supplied with new fantastic features and limbs unknown to the girls. Zosine once said that they were like some old, dark idols which the Negroes on Santo Domingo had carved in black wood, and which Olympia had brought with her. (*AA*, 211)

Like Olympia, the "old mother" (*AA*, 261) to whom he is strangely bound across time and space, Pennhallow seems to occupy some inaccessible domain between the human and the nonhuman, life and death, nature and the supernatural. He lives, it seems, on the threshold, in awareness, anticipation, and preparation of some numinous presence or imminent diabolical irruption, "his

eyes [...] distant and gaz[ing] at faraway objects, as if they had a double bottom to them" (*AA*, 82), as if "he were looking at things far away" (*AA*, 161). Pennhallow's eerie calm and uncanny ability to reembody himself in successive incarnations raises troubling questions about his demise. *Uhygge* creeps back into the story when even after his death, Zosine still seems troubled by his presence: "Was the old man's low, luring voice drawing her with him? She felt that she grew pale, and that something in her face terrified the others" (*AA*, 295).

The European enlightenment celebrated vision as what René Descartes called "the most comprehensive and noble" of the senses (qtd. Jay 1994, 21). *The Angelic Avengers* alludes to the enlightenment's "ocularcentrism" (Jay 1994, 20) with constant references to eyes, looks, gazes, and stares. During their stay in London, the girls feel acutely on display, subjected to the "scrutinizing" (*AA*, 78) glance of their employment agent, "a long, thin and bald gentleman with a pair of strong spectacles" (*AA*, 77), and the desirous gazes of young men in the streets, which make them "put down the veils of their bonnets whenever they walked out" (*AA*, 79). From their first encounter, likewise, the Pennhallows seem to stamp the girls with "the brand of their evil eyes" (*AA*, 179). Mrs. Pennhallow possesses "a long, deep and scrutinizing glance" (*AA*, 214), and she develops a "habit of staring at Lucan's pretty face" (*AA*, 107) as if vampirically "trying to draw the beauty from [Lucan's] face into her own" (*AA*, 98). Among her brother/husband's features, moreover, "it was his eyes which made the deepest impression on those he looked at. They were light, clear, watchful and piercing" (*AA*, 82).

Beginning with the girls' first arrival in the Pennhallows' "murder-house" (*AA*, 251), however, Lucan in particular is conscious of more-than-visible presences, intuiting "something that [she] could not explain to herself [...] a secret inhabitant on whom she had never set eyes" (*AA*, 116). Subsequent events convince Zosine that "the hidden secret inmate of Sainte-Barbe" (*AA*, 160) is Rosa, a Scottish girl who disfigured herself when forced into prostitution and was subsequently killed by Pennhallow's henchmen:

> "I am always thinking of Rosa now," [Zosine] said after a while. "Wherever I am, I feel that she relies on me. She was friendless, in the hands of monsters, but she would not give in to them. When the other girls talked to her, she struck them. I have dreamed of her, and on waking up in the morning I have seen a red ring round my wrist. It was the mark of Rosa's fingers, where she had held on to me." (*AA*, 202–203)

Elsewhere in the novel, Noël Hartranft also feels that his life has been shaped by inscrutable otherworldly forces, while the village simpleton Clon mumbles fearfully about controlling beings "whom he calls 'the others'" (*AA*, 289). Pennhallow, in turn, appears "to be lost in the view of strange and wonderful

things, far away and invisible to others" (*AA*, 84). When he confronts Olympia, he speaks obliquely of an unnamed all-powerful "master" (*AA*, 264) who directs and controls their movements much as a puppeteer manipulates his puppets:

> Why, do you think, were you allowed to find your way to this house, and to be with me and her at this hour? On that dark road, who was your leader? In your own heart you guessed, then, and you know now, that he is ready to grant you a sweeter ecstasy and a deeper pleasure than you have ever experienced. He is waiting for you. Is he to wait in vain? (*AA*, 265)

According to Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, the weird tale represents "the impulse to remind readers of the strangeness of the world and the limits of our understanding of it" (2011, XVII). Carl Freedman similarly argues that weird fiction is "fundamentally inflationary in tendency," aiming "to suggest reality to be richer, larger, stranger, more complex, more surprising – and indeed, 'weirder' – than common sense would suppose" (qtd. Noys and Murphy 2016, 118). Jeffrey A. Weinstock, in turn, defines weird fiction as "stories that undercut anthropocentrism by thematizing the insufficiency of science and human reason to comprehend the universe" (2016, 82–83). Enjoying an odd, liminal status in Dinesen's oeuvre and the critical discourses that surround it, *The Angelic Avengers* is the author's only full-scale novel, her most commercially successful publication, and her most sustained, pulpy investment in weird *uhygge*. To assume that Dinesen wrote the novel only for commercial reasons or "to provide myself and my countrymen with a bit of fun in a [...] funless time" (*KBD*, 1:425) is in my view to neglect the text's achievement as a perplexing "tale of darkness" (*OA*, 452) that eschews traditional literary monstrosities and common notions of the supernatural and demonic to let readers perceive "the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim" (Lovecraft 2004, 108). An "illegitimate child" (*OA*, 452), an "unclassifiable" (Tesio-Ryan 2019, 199) text, and in every way "[a] curious book" (Bleiler 1983, 7), *The Angelic Avengers* posits a lifeworld imbued with irreducible alterity. It produces the disquieting feeling that we can never truly and fully know or understand which forces, entities, or energies actually govern what happens in the universe. Things are not as they appear on the surface, below which terrible realities lie concealed.

The novel's perhaps weirdest moment occurs when Olympia tells the girls about the deity worshipped by Haitian voodoo cultists:

> Now there is something of which you do not know, on our island, on Santo Domingo. We have got our own customs there, at night, in the woods. We have a big snake, magic, things altogether outside your understanding.

> We met in the woods, and sung and danced, we sacrificed young goats to the big snake. And the one who knows the snake best and is aware of what it wishes, and whom we must all obey when he commands, is there called Papa le Roi. (*AA*, 58)

As Seabrook explains, the "big snake" is Damballa Oeddo, the "ancient African Serpent God" most prominent among the voodoo "lois, spirits, saints and mystery-powers which personify forces of nature" (1929, 317). Associated with idolatry, cannibalism, and human sacrifice, Damballa slithers through many twentieth-century voodoo fictions (e.g. Quinn 1930; Bedford-Jones 1932; Possendorf 1935). In *The Angelic Avengers*, the "big snake" remains offstage, hovering on the brink of visibility, but Dinesen keeps readers aware of its presence through constant references to serpentine shapes and figures. The big snake can be sensed if not fully understood, for example, in Olympia's movements, which are characterized by "a strange, serpentine, swaying grace" (*AA*, 36), and in her nightmares of a "big snake that sucks my milk" (*AA*, 61). The snake reveals itself in a similar glimpse when Pennhallow "caught sight of [Zosine's] pale face, and for a second his eyes glinted. Zosine never forgot this glint [...] and later she thought, 'It was the eyes of a snake which realizes that it has missed its stroke'" (*AA*, 215). It stirs, too, when mundane physical objects such as ropes seem to take on an uncanny vivacity:

> A low moan broke from her lips. At last Zosine walked up to the chair. With a shiver, as if it had been a long, dead snake, she lifted up the rope and let it run through her hands. It seemed as if she could not again let go of it. "Oh, come back, Zosine," Lucan said. Zosine followed her slowly, but she took the rope with her. It trailed after her along the kitchen floor. (*AA*, 241)

Snakes, of course, are traditional symbols of evil, but in *The Angelic Avengers* the plethora of coiling shapes – in the book's narrative, its characterizations, its descriptions, and even on the cover page of the first Danish edition (*GV*, 318) – point toward an alien, inhuman mysteriousness inherent in the very fabric of things. To borrow China Miéville's formulation, paragraphs such as the above manifest a characteristically weird "swillage" of "awe and horror from 'beyond' back into the everyday" (2009, 511). Here as in other weird stories, there is a pervasive sense of a dreadful, intrusive, unknowable otherness underlying everything, of in- or antihuman "lurking worlds and beings behind the ordinary surface of life" (Lovecraft 2004, 114). The "big snake," it seems, is everywhere and nowhere, its power never visible as such yet constantly discernible

through unsettling cracks and tears in the fabric of normality. Some mysteries, it appears, can never and perhaps should never be solved. As Olympia puts it to the girls, some questions are "nothing for nice young ladies to ask about" (*AA*, 251), and certain phenomena will forever remain "things altogether outside your understanding" (*AA*, 58).

5 Conclusion

In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh critiques mainstream realist fiction, a genre that enjoys considerable cultural prestige but is predicated on a worldview whose core assumptions – that culture is separate from nature, that environmental processes are stable and predictable, that we can fully understand and control what happens in the world – seem increasingly out of step with "a time when the wild has become the norm" (2016, 12). As other critics (e.g. Heise 2018) have noted, however, Ghosh remains disappointingly reluctant to abandon "the mansion in which serious fiction has long been in residence" for even shorter visits to the "humbler dwellings" (Ghosh 2016, 24) or "outhouses" (2016, 66) of genre fiction. The power of Ghosh's polemic is limited by his decision to restrict his discussion to what he deems "serious fiction," a category from which he excludes not only science fiction but also the fantastic, gothic, horror, comics, and all other literary forms with a speculative orientation and/or a broader popular appeal.

The term "Anthropocene," which has established itself as the preferred shorthand for our own present epoch, is rife with paradox and irony, since its "thematization […] is as much about the decentering of humankind as it is about our rising geological significance" (N. Clark 2014, 25). My argument in this chapter chimes with observations by Timothy Clark, who believes that "the main artistic implication of trying to represent the Anthropocene must be a deep suspicion of any traditionally realist aesthetic" (2013, 81), Emily Alder, for whom weird fiction's "overturning of human assumptions of supremacy and centrality" signifies a potentially "progressive ecological move" (2020, 13), and Brad Tabas, who argues that "[l]iving in the Anthropocene implies that we are no longer at home, or that our home is no longer comfortable but filled with terrors and depths that are perhaps best captured by the metaphysics of […] weird fiction" (2015, 17). As Gerry Canavan and Andrew Hageman put it,

> the awful and ambiguous worlds of weird fiction feel eerily similar to our rising ecological awareness, in which the entire world seems to have

> become uncanny [...]: we are now, all of us, in the dark about the precise nature of the world in which we live, still waiting for the empirical data, charts, and statistical trend-lines to confirm what we all know, that things just aren't the way they used to be, something has gone *wrong*. (2016, 10)

The many myths and fables that surround, border, and frame Dinesen's person, life, and authorship themselves read like weird tales, fraught with strangeness and incongruity that sometimes verge on the mystical, supernatural, or occult, and supported by highly stylized photographs by Rie Nissen, Cecil Beaton, Richard Avedon, Rigmor Mydtskov, and Carl van Vechten.[17] Dinesen herself coins one potent legend in an April 1926 letter to her brother Thomas, when in the throes of a deep existential crisis she claims "that Lucifer is the angel whose wings should be hovering over me" (*LA*, 246). In *The Pact: My Friendship with Isak Dinesen*, Thorkild Bjørnvig elaborates on this alleged "kinship with the Devil" (1983, 62), citing personal conversations in which Dinesen claimed to have made a pact with Lucifer, exchanging her sexuality for her extraordinary storytelling powers. Another younger acquaintance and follower, the academic and esotericist Aage Henriksen, purported that Dinesen put a spell, mark, or curse on him during an encounter in February 1958. The enfeebled bedridden writer, Henriksen claimed, gripped his neck with a preternatural force that blocked his kundalini flow and gave him a chronic migraine that could only be partially alleviated with lifelong yoga exercises and transcendental meditation (1988, 166–169).[18]

In addition to such stories *about* Dinesen, there are narratives *by* Dinesen that are often labeled gothic or fantastic but, as I have suggested, perhaps better understood as (also) weird, in that they consistently place us in unknown territory, amidst strange company, or on unstable ground, challenging us to reconsider presuppositions concerning human identity, agency, intentionality, knowledge, and control. Wrestling with "(un)earthly belonging" (Turnbull

17 See Juhl 2017 for a photographic biography and Aiken 1996 for a detailed analysis of how Dinesen constructed her photographic persona.

18 Consider also this passage by the American writer Wallace Stegner, fictionalizing his 1954 meeting with Dinesen in his novel *The Spectator Bird*: "A woman in a floppy hat stood up beside a raised, slanted hotbed. She had a trowel in one hand and a stone or clod in the other. [...] She was brown-faced and brown-handed, as if Kenya had permanently altered her Danish skin. Though she was smiling, no teeth showed in her smile: she merely bent her lips. Her eyes were dark, alive, and noticing. She stood very still. Witch, for sure. Shape-shifter. If you held a mirror behind her it would reflect not a little brown woman but a monkey, one of those ambiguous old-woman monkeys of her tales, or perhaps a still bird with a curved bill" (1976, 191).

2021, 275), Dinesen's stories capture moods and feelings of wrongness that have become all but impossible to ignore in the crisis-ridden twenty-first century. The worlds of her stories, indeed, feel weirdly compatible with our rising ecological anxiety in a rapidly changing and darkening world, where humans "are not running the show, at the very moment of their most powerful technical mastery on a planetary scale" (Morton 2013, 164). Luckhurst (2017) calls one of his essays "The Weird: A Dis/Orientation." If Dinesen's stories persistently *dis*orient, however, they can perhaps also *re*orient us towards alternative, more honest, and potentially productive cognitive templates and ways of acknowledging and encountering an *uhyggelig* world that is not (and probably never was) geared towards human welfare and comfort, amidst increasingly uncontrollable forces that will shape our lives whether we like it or not. Today, when there is no stable status quo, the weird anomalies imagined by Dinesen can be understood not as escapist extravagances but as calls for a renewed engagement with reality. If we have truly entered the age of "global weirding" (Friedman 2010; Canavan and Hageman 2016), weird writers, in whose company Dinesen surely belongs, will prove good to think with.

Conclusion

It is now firmly established and widely recognized that we are living in an extraordinary period marked by rapidly escalating socioecological crises. Shattering every temperature record and shocking even hardened environmental scientists, 2023 was marred by prolonged wildfires, extreme heatwaves, and devastating flash floods and storms. "Climate breakdown has begun," warned UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. "Our climate is imploding faster than we can cope, with extreme weather events hitting every corner of the planet" (qtd. Goar 2023). Copernicus, a scientific organization that belongs to the EU's space program, found that June 2024 was hotter than any other June on record and was the 12th consecutive month with temperatures 1.5 °C greater than the 1850–1900 average (Copernicus 2024). Melting icecaps, rising and warming seas, vanishing islands, climate refugeeism, plastic waste, water shortages, ocean acidification, coral bleaching, hypoxic dead zones, soil erosion, rainforest destruction, desertification, mass extinction, and air pollution are among the myriad interconnected issues that assault us daily in the news and elsewhere. Scientists still debate the extent to which climatic disruptions and changing patterns of land use directly contributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, but solid evidence links the outbreaks of zoonotic viruses to rainforest destruction and habitat perturbation. Researchers warn that the risk of viral sharing will increase if environmental deterioration continues and accelerates (Tollefson 2020).

Pursuing literary studies in an age of cascading environmental crises can appear superfluous and indulgent, somewhat like fiddling while Rome burns. This only appears to be the case, however, if we assume that nature and culture are separate domains, and if we accept the modern tendency to view environmental issues as challenges that are addressed and ultimately resolved exclusively through science, technology, and policy. In the rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of the environmental humanities, it is a core premise that environmental crises pose challenges that are not only technical and political but also cultural and imaginative. As Sverker Sörlin states, work in the environmental humanities suggests that "in a world where cultural values, political or religious ideas, and deep-seated human behaviors still rule the way people lead their lives, produce, and consume, the idea of *environmentally relevant knowledge* must change" (2012, 788). Narrative has become a focal point for such discussions, as many environmental humanities scholars recognize a crisis of narrative subtending today's environmental crisis. "Stories are the way that humans make sense of change," Mike Hulme writes, and therefore

"the importance of story-making and story-telling [...] needs elevating alongside that of fact-finding" (2011, 178). Dipesh Chakrabarty agrees that "an essential ingredient of the process by which humans make sense of crises in public life – or feel inspired to work towards solutions – is stories: narratives we tell ourselves in order to find our bearings in a new situation. [...] Our success in developing a globally concerted response to the climate crisis [...] will depend on the degree to which we can tell stories that we can all agree on" (2015, xiii–xiv). To bring about meaningful change, we must story otherwise, replacing the dominant narrative that places humanity outside of nature and treats economic growth as an endless pursuit with new narratives about the good life. We remain saddled, however, with too many stories of human exceptionalism, unlimited expansion, and technological mastery, tales echoing a "dominant narrative of reason" (Plumwood 2002, 5) that no longer serve our or the planet's best interests but are still powerful enough to motivate and shape human behavior. Amidst an onslaught of increasingly dire news about the state of the world, the environmental imagination struggles to surpass tragic, apocalyptic, dystopian, and declensionist storylines, as we too often resort to narrative templates that "aspire to unsettle the status quo, but by failing to outline a persuasive alternative, [...] end up reconfirming it" (Heise 2015).

To respond to this narrative crisis, some environmental humanities scholars have chosen to work with emerging creative writers who craft fresh stories that can help us navigate the shifting realities of environmental precarity. Arizona State University's Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative, for example, studies whether and how climate fiction can mobilize new actors, enable productive strategies towards climate change, facilitate conversations about (un) desirable futures, and become "stepping-stones to action" (Dell and Eschrich 2018). So far the ICF has arranged three climate fiction writing contests producing three volumes of short stories with the title (borrowed from Margaret Atwood) *Everything Change* as well as two volumes exploring the promise of solar energy.[1] Other scholars have turned creative storytellers themselves, supplementing critical analysis with inspiring fabrication of narratives. Donna Haraway, for example, concludes *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* with "the Camille Stories: Children of Compost" (2016, 134–168), a lighthearted piece of "speculative fabulation" (2016, 134) envisioning how multispecies life might survive and even flourish on an irrevocably damaged planet.

1 All these texts are freely available at https://csi.asu.edu/.

Ecocritics contribute to the restorying process by paying close attention to emergent genres like cli-fi and solarpunk, which draw on contemporary science to activate readers' emotional brains and transport them to worlds where they can lose themselves and imaginatively experience what it is like to live with climate change.[2] Yet ecocriticism also provides a wide range of tools that enable reassessment of older writers and texts, from the Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh* to Native American creation myths, from the Hebrew Bible to Homer's *Odyssey*, from Renaissance poetry to Romantic period travel writing, from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Such inquiries matter because they dispel the myth that environmental consciousness began with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), with the "Earthrise" photo of Earth seen from space (1968), or with first celebration of Earth Day (April 22, 1970). They highlight how cultural values shape perceptions of human-nonhuman relationships, and they contextualize our own predicament within much longer trajectories of environmental knowing and questioning. They make available the countless ways in which writers in different periods from different cultural traditions have articulated, reflected upon, worried about, and challenged human relations with the more-than-human world. They broaden and diversify discussions, discovering unfamiliar interlocutors in strange places and enlisting well-known acquaintances as much-needed allies (and sometimes adversaries) in urgent conversations.

Can stories make a difference in the world? Dinesen's densely intertextual and self-reflexive tales routinely blur the distinction between fact and fiction, reality and storytelling. Characters in her tales, that is, often seem to live in and through stories, existing less as free, authentic, self-determining agents than as marionettes that acquire life, for better or worse, through the discourses that surround them.[3] Even characters who themselves devise stories perform actions and move within worlds that seem strangely scripted and choreographed. Stories circumscribe characters' destinies, for example, in the ambiguously titled "The Poet," a story particularly riddled with references to a

2 Manjana Milkoreit, for example, considers cli-fi an "imagination tool" that "could be very important in [...] shaping our collective imaginations of possible, plausible, desirable, and undesirable futures, thereby helping us reflect not only on the nature of climate change, but on the meaning of human life and social existence in a changing climate" (2016, 176–177).

3 See Henriksen 1988, 18–45 for a classic discussion of Dinesen's obsession with marionettes. Dinesen's characters, Dag Heede writes, "appear in no way as inventors and rulers of speech, but their 'core' of intertextuality and mosaics of quoted discourses rather give the impression that they themselves are products, 'effects' rather than producers of speech. Discursive currents 'speak' through persons who do not 'have their say' but come into being through the lines that produce them" (2001, 226 [author's translation]).

multitude of mostly nineteenth-century German and Danish texts. The lower-class clerk and aspiring writer Anders Kube and the young ballet-dancing widow Fransine Lerche are caught up in the manipulative story that Anders' middle-aged benefactor, the failed playwright and poet Councilor Mathiesen, tries to write on the basis of his familiarity with the poems and stories of his great intellectual hero, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as other romantic writers. Mathiesen, for whom "[o]utside of poetry there was [...] no real ideal in life" (*SGT*, 362), first intends to let Anders marry Fransine, on the assumption that marriage will keep his restless and melancholy protégé in the provincial backwater of Hirschholm. Mathiesen then changes his mind and decides to marry Fransine himself, primarily because he believes that she and Anders have fallen in love, and because he now trusts, based on his reading of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), that "hopeless passion" (*SGT*, 377) in a romantic ménage á trois will inspire Anders to new poetic flights. Extending his "romance called 'Anders and Fransine'" (*SGT*, 370), Mathiesen then concocts a disastrous plan to have Fransine denude herself to Anders in a piquant nocturnal scene that he hopes will bind the two together in a melancholy platonic relationship. Far from original, this scheme replicates the *clou* of a scandalous popular novel, Karl Gutzkow's *Wally die Zweiflerin* (1835), which in turn borrows from "an old German poem in which Sigune in this way reveals herself to Tchionatulander" (*SGT*, 400). Eventually Anders and Fransine rebel against their roles in Mathiesen's plot, yet when the Councilor is expiring, his death appears to him like a scene in a story told by Shakespeare or Goethe:

> He was not only at Weimar. No, it was more than that. He had got inside the magic circle of poetry. He was in the world of the mind of the great Geheimerat. All this still landscape around him, also this great pain which washed over him from time to time, they were the accomplishments of the poet of Weimar. He himself had got into these works of harmony, deep thought, and order undestroyable. (*SGT*, 416–417)

In "Tempests," which was the last story that Dinesen published, "reality and fantasy become strangely interwoven" (*AD*, 85) in a complex and far-reaching pre-postmodern *mise en abyme*. The nineteen-year-old Norwegian girl Malli Ross grows up missing her dead Scottish father, but a female tutor teaches her English and in her house "a meeting took place, fateful for the girl: one day she also read Shakespeare" (*AD*, 72). Like a human marionette, Malli is animated when the eccentric theater director Valdemar Soerensen incongruously casts the large-bodied girl as the spirit Ariel in his production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Soerensen worships Shakespeare, and like Councilor Mathiesen

he dreams of fusing art and life, or he recognizes that the two can hardly be separated in the first place: "Here was a mighty undertaking: the whole world, the everyday common life, lifted onto the stage and being made one with it. Thy will be done, William Shakespeare, as on the stage so also in the drawing room!" (*AD*, 94). Malli comes to life and takes flight through stories devised by Shakespeare and orchestrated by the Prospero-like Soerensen, and she seems in some ways to have little existence prior to or independent of these stories.[4] As she immerses herself in her fictional character, events in the world strangely begin, like the very title of Dinesen's story, to mimic and echo words written on the page. The decisive turning point of "Tempests" occurs when Malli saves the cargo and crew of the ship *Sofie Hosewinckel*, which is owned by the wealthy Hosewinckel family of Christianssand. Yet this deed worthy of "a heroine" (*AD*, 78) or "an angel" (*AD*, 83) is a reenactment of the events that inaugurate *The Tempest*, and as Malli later explains, "*I thought that the storm was the storm in the play* The Tempest *in which I was then soon to play a part, and which I had read more than a hundred times. Therein I myself am Ariel, a spirit of the air, and a mighty magician, Prospero, is my master*" (*AD*, 131). Throughout the story, Malli speaks in Shakespearean blank verse quotations, and when she is asked to entertain during a celebration, she breaks "into her own song, Ariel's song" (*AD*, 92). When she seeks to resolve her main dilemma, whether to marry the wealthy but dull Arndt Hosewinckel, she relies on another story told by to her by Arndt's father about the magical properties of his ancestor Jens Aabel's Bible.

In his prize-winning novel *The Overstory*, ecofiction writer Richard Powers lets a character declare that "[t]he best arguments in the world won't change a person's mind. The only thing that can do that is a good story" (2018, 488). Lawrence Buell sums up a broad consensus among ecocritics, when he proclaims that "[t]he success of all environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on 'some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science' but on 'a state of mind': on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives" (2005, 1).[5] Dinesen

4 Tone Selboe characterizes Malli as a "character constituted by quotations" and "an echo of other's enunciations" who "in relation to other characters in the text *repeats* lines that have previously been uttered" [...] (1996, 120 [author's translation]).

5 Timothy Clark, however, warns against the "delusions that the sphere of cultural representations has more centrality and power than in fact it has" (2015, 21). Placing excessive amounts of trust in the power of art, literature, and cultural representations, he argues, underestimates the extent of the challenges that we face in the Anthropocene, and it concedes too readily to the enormously powerful interests vested in perpetuating the destructive status quo. To "exaggerate the importance of the imaginary," Clark cautions, "is in itself, to run the risk of consolidating a kind of diversionary side-show, blind to its relative insignificance" (2015, 21).

agreed that stories hold a great deal of power in human lives. "If a sufficiently attractive illusion can be created," she writes in "On Modern Marriage," "the reality automatically follows" (*OMM*, 37). The impact of a "truly great poetic work," she suggests in correspondence with Ole Wivel, "will be felt much more profoundly in society than among those who read it. [...] Let a people believe that the wondrous exists among them, and they will each be led one small step closer to salvation" (*KBD*, 2:310 [author's translation]). And in "Oration at a Bonfire, Fourteen Years Late" (1953), she cites the Danish writer Paul la Cour: "To be a poet is not to make a poem, but to find a new way to live" (*DG*, 87).

Yet if stories have such potential, it matters a great deal *what* stories are told and *how* we read them. Hannah Arendt writes in "Truth and Politics" that Dinesen "not only was one of the great story-tellers of our time but also – and she was almost unique in this respect – knew what she was doing" (2000, 572). Dinesen herself, however, worried that "the Danish readership, which has not the slightest tradition for this kind of fantastical – or nonsense – type of literature, will ask with some indignation: what is the meaning of all this?" (*KBD*, 1:134 [author's translation]). What Dinesen "was doing," I have argued in this book, can be illuminated with concepts like "ecological thinking" (Morton 2010, 4) and "counterdiscursive ecopoiesis" (Zapf 2016, 59). The question "what is the meaning of all this?" can be contemplated anew, in other words, by hypothesizing that Dinesen's texts map the possibility of ecologically-oriented attunements towards time, animals, plants, bodies, families, and the human place on Earth. According to Peter Barry, ecocriticism is often "a matter of approaching perhaps very familiar texts with a new alertness to [...] a dimension which has perhaps always hovered about the text, but without ever receiving our full attention before" (2002, 258). This book has responded to such a hovering, using a range of ecocritical terms to propose new ways of thinking about Dinesen and her significance in the context of environmental crisis. Dinesen's writing derives its considerable ecological power less from a programmatic green politics or an overriding ambition to valorize nature and the natural, I have argued, than from its estrangement, queering, or weirding of prominent myths, mentalities, and narrative templates that enable disconnected, exploitative, and environmentally damaging modes of thinking and behavior.

According to Félix Guattari, "[w]e cannot conceive of solutions to the poisoning of the atmosphere and to global warming due to the greenhouse effect, without a mutation of mentality, without promoting a new art of living in society" (1995, 20). Detesting "propaganda" (*KBD*, 1:100) of every kind, Dinesen resented being hitched before moral, religious, political, or other wagons. In the last years of her life, when interest in her work was spreading and

critical studies were beginning to appear, she often intervened in discussions with critics and objected to what she perceived as farfetched or unwarranted interpretations.[6] While contemporary responses to Dinesen often veer between consumerist captivation and censorious moralization, I have instead studied her stories as manifestations of ecological power, providing valuable inspiration for urgent acts of self-interrogation and reorientation, and in so doing I have consciously offended against her demand that we treat her narratives as "nothing more or less than stories" (*KBD*, 2:369 [author's translation]). Dinesen could not possibly predict the scope and depth of our current predicaments, but in the words of her younger acquaintance and writer colleague Jørgen Gustava Brandt, she was "very old-fashioned, completely up-to-date, and far ahead of her time" (1953, 302 [author's translation]), and her tales address a range of concerns whose significance has only increased in the twenty-first century. Dinesen's texts do tell stories, but they tell familiar-seeming stories strangely, and therein lies all the difference. They offer no readymade solutions to pressing problems, but they skew, alter, and redirect perspectives in ways that may make it somewhat easier to discern how we "Earthlings" (Latour 2007, 75) might restory the tale of human civilization in the Anthropocene.

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6 In a March 1955 letter to Aage Henriksen, for example, Dinesen objects to the Protestant theologian Johannes Rosendahl's recently published Christianizing interpretation of her texts: "[H]e treats my 'authorship' with far too much solemnity. Or rather, he treats it with far too much solemnity in a manner that is incomprehensible to me, as if the things my characters do or say could be – or were – done or said by myself" (*KBD*, 2: 273–274 [author's translation]).

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Index

Danish writer Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen (1885–1962) was a colonial plantation manager, big-game hunter, animal rights activist, nature conservationist, flower gardener, and much more. Most importantly, Dinesen wrote thought-provoking, mind-bending, boundary-shifting tales that can help us think constructively and creatively about many facets of life on our troubled planet. *Isak Dinesen's Ecological Power* reexamines Dinesen in the context of 21st-century debates about time, animals, plants, gender, families, the idea of nature, and the very question of what it means to be human in a more-than-human world. We urgently need to power our societies and imaginations in new ways, and this book reconsiders Dinesen's stories as an inexhaustible and so far largely untapped source of ecocultural energy.

Peter Mortensen (Ph.D. The Johns Hopkins University) is Associate Professor and Head of English at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University. He has published widely in the fields of literary studies and ecocriticism, and he is the co-editor, with Hannes Bergthaller, of *Framing the Environmental Humanities* (2018).

ISBN-978-90-04-72443-3

9 789004 724433

ISSN 1572-4344
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