Isak Dinesen: Mask as Rôle

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ABSTRACT

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Isak Dinesen uses the mask as the principal disguise in order to lead her characters to the fulfillment of their destinies. In the final stages of this masking, the characters, if successful, become one with the assumed face. Choosing a mask is choosing a rôle and ultimately character, rôle and mask prove to be the same entity. Dinesen's characters, in choosing their rôles and masks, enter into the universe created by the storyteller herself. For Dinesen the telling of a tale parallels nothing less than the Divine Creation of heaven and earth ex nihilo. For the characters in her fiction the essential task is the discovery of rôles compatible with the harmonious design of the story-teller's universe. The characters may choose either to fulfill or to circumvent their destinies. If the characters are able to recognize the possibility of the self and other co-existing in fruitful tension, then they are at one with their destinies. Dinesen moves her characters through various stages, from uncertainty to an act of faith in the story as the principal force in shaping their destinies. Through the narrative framework of the tale, Dinesen uses mask as rôle to heighten life to a state of transcendent truth, and to raise man to a spiritual awareness of his destiny. As a result, art and life become balanced and interdependent. This balance is not an easy one to achieve but Dinesen attempts to resolve the dilemma of imposing rigidly and inexorably an artistic pattern upon her characters through the use of mask as rôle.

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Chapter I

Mask as Rôle

> So speaketh the Arbiter of the masquerade: 'By thy mask I shall know thee.'[1]
>
> -- Dinesen: "The Deluge at Norderney" from Seven Gothic Tales.

In their attempt to fulfill their rôles Dinesen's characters use masks as a principal disguise. In the final stage of this masking the characters, if successful, become one with the assumed face. Ultimately, character, rôle and mask prove to be virtually the same entity. Choosing a mask is choosing a rôle. The fusion of character, rôle and mask enables Dinesen to examine strategies that individuals use to fulfill or to circumvent their destinies. Of Dinesen's use of the mask Eric O. Johannesson notes:

> The tales woven around the motif of the mask . . . express the same basic theme, a central one in Dinesen's view of life: the need for a life of adventure, freedom, and imagination felt by those who for one reason or another are trapped, are unable to experience life fully.[2]

Dinesen's emphasis on masks as rôle is a reproach to contemporary bourgeois reality with its central concern for security, for sincerity, and for sentiment.[3] Donald Hannah, as well, views Dinesen's use of masks and her emphasis on the importance of rôle-playing as her main

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[1] Isak Dinesen, Seven Gothic Tales (1934; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 26.

[2] Erik O. Johannesson, The World of Isak Dinesen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961), p. 68.

[3] Marcia Landy, "Anecdote as Destiny: Isak Dinesen and the Storyteller," Massachusetts Review, 19 (1978), p. 396.

weapon against realism:

> It is this concept of the person's other self as an actor, staging a performance which determines Isak Dinesen's method of characterization. It follows the same lines traced out by the stories: these are not realistic, and neither is the characterization a psychologically-oriented realistic one. And this is so, despite the fact that many of her characters are really split personalities--but not split in a psychological sense. If her characters do have a kind of introspective quality, the analysis they conduct is of their acting procedures much more than it is an exploration of their process of thought.[1]

Isak Dinesen uses the mask in much the same way as does Luigi Pirandello. Although Pirandello derives his theory of the relationship between mask, reality and rôle-playing from Henri Bergson's conception of the nature of the existence of man in a discontinuous universe,[2] Isak Dinesen develops her theory of mask as rôle from personal experience in Africa. Africa provides Dinesen with a stage where opposites become reconciled, where rôles are imposed on others, and where fate and destiny converge into the acceptance of a creative imagination greater than her own. Pirandello allows his characters to become rôles and to assume masks.[3] The interchangeability of mask and rôle permits Pirandello to plumb the inner nature of man.[4] Dinesen, too, assigns her characters to rôles which in turn become masks. It is in this sense of reciprocity of mask/rôle that Isak Dinesen bears an affinity to Luigi Pirandello.

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[1]Donald Hannah, 'Isak Dinesen' and Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality (London: Putnam and Company Ltd., 1971), p. 158.

[2]See Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1928).

[3]Thomas Bishop, Pirandello and the French Theater (New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. xii.

[4]Luigi Pirandello, Naked Masks, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1952), p. xx.

Dinesen presents her characters from two perspectives. There are those who choose a rôle and play it so successfully that they become the rôle. The parts which these characters play are even suggested by their titles, "The Old Chevalier", "The Heroine", and "The Invincible Slave-Owners". There are those characters who are unable to play a rôle and who have no idea of God in the making of them. Dinesen describes the two types of characters in a passage about pride in Out of Africa:

> Pride is faith in the idea that God had, when he made us. A proud man is conscious of the idea, and aspires to realize it. He does not strive towards a happiness, or comfort which may be irrelevant to God's idea of him. His success is the idea of God, successfully carried through, and he is in love with his destiny. As the good citizen finds his happiness in the fulfilment of his duty to the community, so does the proud man find his happiness in the fulfilment of his fate.
>
> People who have no pride are not aware of any idea of God in the making of them, and sometimes they make you doubt that there has ever been much of an idea, or else it has been lost, and who shall find it again? They have got to accept as success what others warrant to be so, and to take their happiness, and even their own selves, at the quotation of the day. They tremble, with reason, before their fate.[1]

In several of the tales there is a point at which a character seems to perceive the meaning of life. The character is given a sign whereby he is shocked or struck with the realization that he must assume a new mask or rôle which, in turn, will help him along the path of his destiny. Such a sign Dinesen herself perceived in Africa.

Dinesen was slow to accept the harsh reality that she could no longer maintain her farm or worse still that she would have to leave Africa:

> During these months, I formed in my own mind a programme, or system of strategy, against destiny, and against people in my surroundings who were her confederates . . . . For in the

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[1]Karen Blixen, Out of Africa (1938; rpt. Great Britain: C. Nicholls and Company Ltd., 1980), p. 224.

> end I shall still come out triumphant and shall keep my farm and the people on it. Lose them, I thought, I cannot: it cannnot be imagined, how then can it happen?[1]

Yet, accept it she did, even considering the rebuff of fate as if she "had been in a strange manner honoured and distinguished."[2] A week after the death of her friend, Denys Finch-Hatton, Dinesen said that she had been looking for a sign, for some central principle to account for her run of bad luck. Surely all that she had endured could not be just coincidence. She wandered towards the boys' huts when Fathima's big white cock came strutting out before her. From the other side of the path came a little grey chameleon. The chameleon stopped dead at the sight of the cock. He was frightened but at the same time brave and to scare his enemy, he shot out his club-shaped tongue. The cock stopped, then swiftly and determinately he struck down his beak like a hammer and plucked out the chameleon's tongue.[3] This was the most spiritual answer to Dinesen's call:

> The powers to which I had cried had stood on my dignity more than I had done myself, and what other answer could they then give? This was clearly not the hour for coddling, and they had chosen to connive at my invocation of it. Great powers had laughed to me, with an echo from the hills to follow the laughter, they had said among the trumpets, among the cocks and chameleons, Ha, ha![4]

This story of the chameleon bears great importance in shaping Dinesen's philosophy of mask/rôle and destiny. The interplay of mask and rôle is well illustrated in the tale, "The Deluge at Norderney."

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[1] Ibid., p. 284.

[2] Ibid., p. 315.

[3] Ibid., p. 314.

[4] Ibid., p. 315.

Norderney is a fashionable seaside resort on the west coast of Holstein. A three days' storm bursts the dikes during that fateful summer of 1835 and the floods cause general disaster. Prominent among the rescuers is Cardinal Hamelcar von Sehestedt. He finds himself stranded in a hayloft with a wealthy old maiden lady, Miss Nat-og-Dag, "the last of the old illustrious race which carried arms two-parted in black and white, and whose name meant 'Night and Day'."[1] With Miss Malin is the Countess Calypso von Platen Hallermund, the niece of the scholar and poet of that name. A fourth member of the party is a young Dane, Jonathan Maersk, who had been sent to Norderney to recover from a severe attack of melancholy. As the flood waters rise, we learn that Miss Malin's madness takes the curious form of a firm faith in a past of colossal licentiousness. Jonathan Maersk tells his strange tale yet we are uncertain at the end of his story whether or not he is the son of the sea-captain or of the fabulous Baron Gersdorff. Miss Malin relates Calypso's story of a girl raised as a boy in the castle of Count Seraphina and how Calypso escaped from her prison to find refuge with Miss Malin. It is Miss Malin who proposes that Calypso shall marry the melancholic Jonathan. It is fate that has brought them together.[2]

Eric O. Johannesson sees Jonathan as typically bourgeois who rejects masks and masquerades.[3] Jonathan, once he realizes the emptiness and illusory quality of appearance, becomes aware that these masks and masquerades must be affirmed even if they are illusions. It

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 9.

[2] John Davenport, "A Noble Pride: The Art of Karen Blixen," The Twentieth Century, 49, No. 949 (March 1956), p. 272.

[3] Johannesson, p. 74.

is only through the affirmation and the preservation of such illusions that man can give rein to his creative imagination. Jonathan moves from the melancholy man of a Hamlet to Simon of Assens (Athens) who accepts his rôle in the hayloft. He had earlier retreated from the artificial world of illusion to become self-absorbed in melancholy. Now he can accept Calypso's existence and fulfill his rôle and create his own truth. He is able to support Miss Malin's lie that he has followed Calypso and wishes to marry her. The Cardinal performs the marriage ceremony but in reality the Cardinal is Kasparon, the Cardinal's valet, and the whole encounter with Calypso is a masquerade. Jonathan thus affirms the creative powers of the imagination by accepting the romantic illusion as reality. He is ready to fulfill destiny. Both Jonathan and Calypso refuse to accept the persona imposed on them by others. They represent an intermediate stage of the two types of people Dinesen described in Out of Africa.

Once the brief wedding ceremony is over, Miss Malin and the Cardinal resume their dialogue. It is in these discussions that the concept of mask and rôle figure most prominently. Earlier in the story Miss Malin had dismissed the idea that the Lord wants the truth from us. Miss Malin is a lover of disguises and says:

> My Lord. I, on the contrary, have always held that the Lord has a penchant for masquerades. Do you not yourself tell us, my lords spiritual, that our trials are really blessings in disguise? And so they are. I, too, have found them to be so, at midnight, at the hour when the mask falls.[1]

Miss Malin is stating that God has a taste for disguises and that He prefers to have his creatures respect His mask and their own rather

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 24.

than have them give back the truth to Him that He already knows. The one monarch nearest to the true spirit of God was the Caliph Haroun of Bagdad who loved the disguise. Through one's imagination the truth is disguised or masked, yet it is that mask which reveals the truth readily enough. The Cardinal understands Miss Malin's words and replies:

> The witty woman, Madam, chooses for her carnival costume one which ingeniously reveals something in her spirit or heart which the conventions of her everyday life conceal; and when she puts on the hideous long-nosed Venetian mask, she tells us, not only that she has a classic nose behind it, but that she has much more, and may well be adored for things other than her mere beauty.[1]

The Cardinal ponders the philosophy of his youth by saying:

> . . . when I was a young man . . . I reflected then that I might, had I been given omnipotence and a free hand, have made a fine world. I might have bethought me of the trees and rivers, of the different keys in music, of friendship, and innocence; but upon my word and honor, I should not have dared to arrange these matters of love and marriage as they are, and my world should have lost sadly thereby. What an overwhelming lesson to all artists! Be not afraid of absurdity; do not shrink from the fantastic. Within a dilemma, choose the most unheard-of, the most dangerous solution. Be brave, be brave! Ah, Madam, we have got much to learn.[2]

The Cardinal continues that there has been a fall, not of man but of the divinity for "We are now serving an inferior dynasty of heaven."[3] The Cardinal cannot think that the God who created the stars, the sea, and the desert, is the same God who is now upholding the King of Belgium, the Poetical School of Schwaben, and the moral ideas of the day. He states that the reign of King Louis Philippe in France cannot last because Louis has all the qualities of a good bourgeois, and none

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[1] Ibid., p. 26.

[2] Ibid., p. 55.

[3] Ibid., p. 56.

of the vices of a Grand Seigneur. Aristocracy have the tragic sense while the bourgeoisie do not because the former see the world as symbolic and therefore recognize in it a grandeur of which tragedy is a manifestation. In the bourgeois, however, a fact is just a fact and tragedy is therefore an unpleasantness which might have been avoided by better social arrangement or an improved technology.[1] The same fatality, which will become tragedy to the mere imitator or dull man lacking imagination, becomes exalted to the comic with the imaginative man who "fulfills his rôle proudly and with honour."[2] The Cardinal adds that there never was a great artist who was not a bit of a charlatan for "The quality of charlantry is indispensable in a court, or a theater, or in paradise."[3] King Louis Philippe has no drop of blood of the charlatan in him. He is genuinely reliable, all through. Miss Malin and the Cardinal, however, are masters of the mask and, in assuming various rôles, they meet their fate with dignity and honour.

The Cardinal unwinds the blood-stained bandage that has concealed his face, revealing the face of the Cardinal's valet and murderer, Kasparson. "I am an actor, Madame, as you are a Nat-og-Dag."[4] He relates to Miss Malin the story of his life. He is the bastard of Philippe Egalité. The King, Louis Philippe, whom he has been mocking, is his brother. That moment in which Kasparson killed the Cardinal was the mating of Kasparson's "soul with destiny, with

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[1]Robert Langbaum, "Autobiography and Myth in Out of Africa," Virginia Quarterly Review, 40 (1964), p. 71.

[2]Parmenia Migel, Titania: The Biography of Isak Dinesen (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 123.

[3]Seven Gothic Tales, p. 59.

[4]Ibid., p. 72.

eternity, with the soul of God."[1]

Why did Kasparson kill the Cardinal? Kasparson replies:

> I told you: I am an actor. Shall not an actor have a rôle? If all the time the manager of the theater holds back the good rôles from us, may we not insist upon understudying the stars? The proof of our undertaking is in the success or fiasco. I have played the part well.[2]

Miss Malin asks Kasparson why he wanted this rôle so much. He confides, "Not by the face shall the man be known, but by the mask. I said so at the beginning of the night."[3] Kasparson's philosophy asserts that reality is a creation of the imagination, and that a character shall be judged by his mask and the manner in which he accepts his rôles in fulfilling his destiny. Kasparson states that the Cardinal would have applauded him for the way in which he portrayed the Cardinal. Kasparson cleaves to God because he is the only being toward whom he need not, cannot, must not, feel pity. He had to play this last rôle in the guise of the Cardinal and he will be remembered by the peasants whom he has saved.[4] The tale ends as the flood waters make their last fatal rise to engulf the young couple, who are asleep, and the old Miss Malin cries, "Fils de St. Louis, montez au ciel!"[5] They play their appointed rôles out to the end.

"The Invincible Slave-owners" is another tale which further explicates Dinesen's theory of the mask as rôle. The young Mizzi

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[1] Ibid., p: 74.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 75.

[4] Davenport, p. 272.

[5] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 78.

captures Axel's attention when she first arrives at the hotel. She is dressed like a child but the main source of Mizzi's distinction is an exemplary governess, Miss Rabe, who makes Mizzi seem like a princess. Axel falls in love with Mizzi but overhears a conversation between her and, Miss Rabe, who is actually her sister, Lotti. The two sisters have entered a masquerade because they wish to project an image of nobility in the face of destitution. The sisters take turns at playing mistress and servant and, what would normally turn out as a love story with Axel proposing to Mizzi, results in an unexpected dénouement: Axel is an observer of the human condition and he has noticed that the pretty Mizzi is incapable of living a day without an attendant at her heels; "Mizzi's whole existence was based upon the constant, watchful, indefatigable labour of slaves."[1] Axel wonders whether his personal love and care would be sufficient for Mizzi and could replace her need for the service of slaves which seemed for her a necessity of life. Once Axel discovers the truth he rejects his romantic notions, "The idea of making love to one of the two was as absurd, as scandalous, as that of making love to one of the Siamese twins."[2] The only way he can serve her is through the rôle of a servant or slave. On the morning of Mizzi's departure, Axel announces himself at the hotel as Frantz, a servant of Mizzi's, come to accompany the ladies home. Mizzi must fall into this game of pretense; "He saw Mizzi change colour and grow deadly white; her mouth itself faded away, so that they thought she was going to fall. But with an effort she held herself straight, came down

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[1] Isak Dinesen, Winter's Tales (1942; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 136.

[2] Ibid., p. 142.

the last two steps and stood face to face with him."[1] She might have killed him, for she was furious and without fear, but she permitted him to walk with her, with his umbrella protecting her from the drizzle, all the length of the platform of the train station. During this walk the relationship between Axel and Mizzi is set. Axel realizes and understands that the slave-owner's dependency upon the slave is strong as death and as cruel as the grave. The slave holds his master's life in his hand, as Axel holds his umbrella:

> Axel Leth, with whom she was in love, might betray Mizzi; it would anger her, it might sadden her, but she was still, in her anger and melancholy, the same person. But her existence itself rested upon the loyalty of Frantz, her servant, and on his devotion, assent and support.[2]

We see in "The Invincible Slave-owners" how pretense becomes reality. As her lover, Axel would have brought Mizzi into the full flower of womanhood. Instead Mizzi gives him a rose. The relationship between master and servant, like sexual love, is the union of opposites, one depending on the other for existence. Both Mizzi and Axel remain true to the combined ideal of innocence and aristocracy. The mask becomes the reality through the rôles they play. Axel wonders what will become of the two sisters "who had been so honest as to give life the lie, the partisans of an ideal, ever in flight from a blunt reality, the great, gentle ladies, who were incapable of living without slaves."[3] The sisters' rôles would become reversed: "Very likely next year the parts would be interchanged; Lotti's would be the slave-owner and Mizzi the slave. Lotti might then become an invalid lady of rank, in a

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[1] Ibid., p. 145.

[2] Ibid., p. 147.

[3] Ibid., p. 151.

bath-chair, since that rôle could be played without the jewels or feathers, the want of which Mizzi had deplored in the woods."[1] In the waterfall, Axel sees the water rushing each second over the precipice and disappearing in order that the whole waterfall might be always the same. He understands the sisters' flight in order to achieve stillness, in order to turn their lives into an unchanging symbol. This static flight is the principle of beauty that transforms the waterfall into a marble cataract.[2] It is the interchanging rôles of the mask of slave and slave-owner that transform Mizzi's and Lotti's situation in life into a higher reality.

Through the act staged between the actual man and a rôle he assumes, Dinesen presents us with the real person very clearly. It is as though the real person has been relegated to the wings and the rôle he is playing relegated to center stage. Thus, the mask metaphorically belongs to the group of concepts which imply that artists discover a more fully integrated vision than exists in reality. For Dinesen the mask implies a way out of the closed world of the ego into an objective vision communicable to others.

Like Mizzi in "The Invincible Slave-owners", Heloïse in "The Heroine" appears as a symbol before she becomes a person. Heloïse is ready to assume the rôle imposed by others. The tale is set during a time of war. It is parabolic in nature and relates the story of a group of refugees detained at the French-German border during the Franco-Prussian War. The German officer offers the refugees their

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Robert Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 167.

freedom if a beautiful French actress, Heloïse, agrees to appear before him nude. To the refugees the young woman seems "like a lioness in a coat of arms . . . the ideal figure of a 'dame haute et puissante'."[1] They who took shelter behind her are horrified at the soldier's insult:

> As to Heloïse herself, the insult changed her as if it set fire to her. She turned straight upon the insulter, and Frederick had never seen her so abundant in vitality or arrogance; she seemed about to laugh in her adversary's face. The sordidness of the world, he thought with deep ecstatic gratitude, did not touch her; she was above it all. Only for a moment her hand went up to the collar of her mantilla, as if, choking under the wave of her disdain, she must free herself of it. But again the next moment she stood still; her hand sank down, and with it the blood from her cheeks; she became very pale. She turned to her fellow-prisoners, and slowly let her gaze run over their white, horrified faces.[2]

Heloïse announces that the refugees themselves must decide whether they will purchase their salvation at the officer's price: "Their salvation is, to each one of them, more important than mine. Let them decide for themselves if they will buy it at your price."[3] One by one the refugees make a heroic refusal of Heloïse's sacrifice. They are given their freedom to Luxembourg and as the refugees are about to leave, one of the soldiers hands Heloïse a big bouquet of roses. He salutes and says, "The Colonel asks Madame to accept these. With his compliments. To a heroine."[4] Heloïse's pride and glory is theirs. Frederick Lamond remembered this incident all his life and had often pondered the nature of heroism: "There was, within the phenomena of the heroic mind, still something left uncomprehended, an unexplored, a

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 73.

[2] Ibid., p. 78.

[3] Ibid., p. 79.

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

mysterious area."[1] His search for understanding is fulfilled many years later when on a visit to Paris, he is taken by a friend to see a show of scantily-clad dancers called "Diana's Revenge". At the climax of the performance Diana appears with nothing on at all. Diana is Heloïse, again the central figure of a communion, "As she stepped forward bending her golden bow, a noise like a long sigh went through the house."[2] Frederick meets her after the performance and learns the nature of Heloïse's heroism. Through a piece of charlatanism she had designed to make heroes of others:

> And, good God, they were running a risk then, too, and a worse one than they ever knew themselves . . . Yes, a worse risk to them . . . For they would have made me do as the German demanded. They would have made me do it, to save their lives, if he had put it straight at them at first, or if they had been left to themselves. And then they would never have got over it. They would have repented it all their lives, and have held themselves to be great sinners. They were not the people for that kind of business, they, who had never before done a mean thing in their life. That is why it was a sad thing that they should have been so badly frightened. I tell you, my friend, for those people it would have been better to be shot than to live on with a bad conscience. They were not used to that, you see; they would not have known how to live with it.[3]

It was the officer through his sexual instinct and Frederick through his feeling for symbols who sensed that the permanent essence of Heloïse lay in her nudity.[4] Heloïse explains the transience of human beauty, "and yet it is then that one realizes how time flies. It is we who feel it, the women. From us time takes away so much. And in the

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[1] Ibid., p. 83.

[2] Ibid., p. 85.

[3] Ibid., p. 86.

[4] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 169.

end: everything."[1] To have undressed would have been easy for Heloïse. Yet she assumed her rôle which the refugees imposed upon her and through this mask as rôle she inspired the refugees to offer to die for her.

Frederick had written a book on the doctrine of atonement and he learns the true implication of his work, that it is not the Crucifixion itself that saves the world but the effect that the Crucifixion makes that offers salvation to man. Heloïse's sacrifice is like the Crucifixion in that it means nothing for her to die. The sacrifice is one which shows us what we must be prepared to do for values we cherish. The mask Heloïse wears and the rôle imposed by this mask enables Heloïse to bring others to an awareness of their own values.

Robert Langbaum suggests in The Gayety of Vision that Dinesen uses the concept of the mask as rôle to pursue a vision of life which constantly attempts to mediate basic opposing tendencies:

> We understand that the volume Seven Gothic Tales has all along been asking the following questions. How do we navigate between experience and tradition, between fact and myth, and among conflicting facts and myths, to achieve an identity; and where, among the different aspects we show to people, and among the metamorphoses we pass through in the different stages of our life, is our identity?[2]

"The Dreamers" is a tale which reveals to us what happens to a woman who has outlived her mythical identity. Once Pellegrina Leoni is given life by Dinesen through the story, she dons many disguises and assumes many rôles. She can make no firm commitment to others for "She would never let herself become tied up in any of her rôles."[3]

Lincoln Forsner knows Pellegrina as Olalla, a prostitute in a Roman

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 89.

[2] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 96.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 347.

brothel. Freidrich Hohenemser knows her as Madam Lola, a milliner in Switzerland, and a revolutionary who had persuaded him to assassinate the Bishop of St. Gallen. The Baron Guildenstein knows her as Madame Rosalba. Pellegrina had decided to bury Pellegrina forever:

> I will not be one person again, Marcus, I will be always many persons from now. Never again will I have my heart and my whole life bound up with one woman, to suffer so much.[1]

Once Pellegrina is unmasked, she must choose death for such is the value that the illusory quality of the mask places on the creative imagination. Mira Jama, the storyteller in "The Dreamers", can no longer tell tales:

> I have become too familiar with life; it can no longer delude me into believing that one thing is much worse than the other.[2]

Lincoln Forsner asks him, "what do you do in the meantime to keep so good a face toward it [world]?"[3] Mira's answer is to dream. In life Mira has lost the capacity of fear but not so in his dreams. In his dreams, "the world creates itself around [him] without any effort on [his] part."[4] For Pellegrina to face Pellegrina again means suffering and painful recognition of the loss of the artistry of a great singer. When the three men have caught up with her in the snowy hills, each wishes her to acknowledge who she is! Forsner stares at her and cries, "Tell them who you are!" At that she jumps from the cliff:

> . . . exactly like a black martin when you see it throw itself out from a slope or a roof to get off the ground and take flight. For one second she seemed to life herself up with the wind, then, running straight across the road, with all her

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[1] Ibid., p. 345.

[2] Ibid., p. 274.

[3] Ibid., p. 275.

[4] Ibid., p. 276.

might she threw herself from the earth clear into the abyss, and disappeared from our sight.[1]

Once Pellegrina's friend, Marcus, relates the true story about her life, she revives. For a brief moment Pellegrina accepts once again life's illusions. Marcus introduces her to the three gentlemen as Donna Pellegrina Leoni and she plays out her last rôle. Her face becomes a constellation of stars and her whole body vibrates:

> 'Oh,' she cried, 'Look, look here! It is Pellegrina Leoni--it is she, it is she herself again--she is back. Pellegrina, the greatest singer, poor Pellegrina, she is on the stage again, To the honor of God, as before. Oh, she is here, it is she--Pellegrina, Pellegrina herself!'[2]

Marcus strikes the side of her stretcher with his walking stick, playing his part in the drama and says, "Donna Pellegrina Leoni, . . . En scène pour les deux." In one mighty movement, she lifts her body:

> A strange sound, like the distant roar of a great animal, came from her breast. Slowly the flames in her face sank, and an ashen gray covered it instead. Her body fell back, stretched itself out and lay quite still, and she was dead.[3]

As long as Pellegrina is able to assume her masks, she can be creative in body and spirit. She may play many rôles, and may play them well, but once the character lies naked and bare, faced with the ultimate reality that she no longer is the great artist, Pellegrina, physical death follows.

Kasparson and Miss Malin as well as Calypso and Jonathan in "The Deluge at Norderney" meet death with dignity. They of their own accord have unmasked themselves, accepting their fate. Pellegrina is unmasked by others. Forsner tells Mira Jama that had Pellegrina lived she might

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[1]Ibid., p. 327.

[2]Ibid., p. 352.

[3]Ibid.

have become a dancer of Mombasa or might have decided to stay with the war-like tribe of the highland natives:

> In the end, I have thought, she might perhaps have . . . decided to become a pretty little jackal, and have made herself a den on the plain, or upon the slope of a hill. I have imagined that so vividly that on a moonlight night I have believed that I heard her voice amongst the hills. And I have seen her, then, running about, playing with her own small graceful shadow, having a little ease of heart, of little fun.[1]

Mira replies that he has heard her cry: "She barks: 'I am not one little jackal, not one; I am many little jackals'." Mira Jama, the old storyteller himself, has accepted his rôle in life:

> I have been trying for a long time to understand God. Now I have made friends with him. To love him truly you must love change, and you must love a joke, these being the true inclinations of his own heart.[2]

The mask philosophy presented in "The Dreamers" places a high value on illusions and dreams, inferring that reality is of a lesser order. The artist of the mask has unlimited power and projects a world where all is possible and as an artist he has unlimited freedom to transform it.

The masks and rôles Dinesen's characters assume enable them to explore their deepest needs and desires and to arrive at more fundamental insights about behaviour. Her tales thrive on the identification of conflict and opposites. Metamorphosis and ambiguity prevail in order to enhance the multiple possibilities open to human beings in their quest for meaningful action.[3] The person best equipped

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[1] Ibid., p. 354.

[2] Ibid., p. 355.

[3] Johannesson, p. 80.

to open up these possibilities is the artist himself.[1] Thus, the technique of mask as rôle enables Dinesen to explore her theory of the rôle of the artist as storyteller. Through this rôle, the artist can perceive the masks that pervade reality. It is the artist's function,

> . . . as the arbiter on reality, to make these masks apparent as masks, in a way that leads not to any explicable truth behind the masks, but rather to an acceptance of the presence behind the masks of a truth which we are not privileged to understand. Thus, mask stands between truth and reality, and the art that makes these masks apparent is a higher reality because it is closer to truth.[2]

The true artist, then, knows that mask/masquerade and reality are antithetical and he attempts to keep them separate by infusing his masquerade with a higher reality that is in direct contrast to the reality of the senses. Mask as rôle identifies the reality and as we move from reality to mask, we move closer to truth. The mask which is commonly thought to conceal truth actually passes for it by showing us the oneness of opposites.[3] It is the rôle of the artist to turn reality into mask and masquerade once he has perceived the masquerade behind the reality.

In summary, Isak Dinesen's emphasis on masks in rôle-playing underscores the boundaries and the constraints under which human beings live. The mask, like the story, stresses the nature and necessity of form and artifice, and the reality of social forms as opposed to romantic notions of authenticity. Mask as rôle in Dinesen helps to deflect the reader's attention from motive and action. Dinesen's main concern is to examine the means individuals use to meet or to thwart

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[1] Landy, p. 397.

[2] Thomas R. Whissen, Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics (New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1973), p. 23.

[3] Ibid., p. 69.

destiny. She often provides her characters with a moment of truth in which they realize that they must assume new masks and rôles in order to fulfill a given destiny. This moment of awareness comes to the four characters in "The Deluge at Norderney" as the flood waters rise and they must then drop their masks. Frederick in "The Heroine" realizes the true implications of Heloise's act only when he sees her on stage many years later. Pellegrina Leoni in "The Dreamers" meets her destiny when unmasked by her suitors. Severals characters, other than those cited in this chapter, experience a similar sense of awareness of the meaning of life. In "Sorrow-acre" Adam reflects on the tune of the garden-room and conceives of his rôle in Anne-Marie's suffering. He sees how he fits into a total whole and learns that man is one with his destiny. The Baron in "The Old Chevalier" realizes that he has in some way shared in Nathalie's destiny and she in his when Nathalie asks for twenty francs. In "The Poet" Mathieson's revelation comes too late and, as a result, he meets his death, the indelible mask. For Boris and Athena in "The Monkey" the moment of awareness comes once they witness the metamorphosis of the Prioress to monkey to Prioress. It is in this sense of sudden revelation that the chameleon bears importance in shaping Dinesen's vision of life. Dinesen's characters are not cocks or Dinesens but chameleons, with the ability to change their masks and rôles in the scheme of their destinies. This linking of mask and rôle is in keeping with Dinesen's respect for the sense of the dramatic in her tales.

> To be great we must seem so. Seeming that goes on for a lifetime is no different from reality.[1]
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> -- Yeats: The Man and the Masks.

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[1]Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1948), p. 173.

Chapter II

The Art of the Storyteller

'Verily, verily,' he cried,
'all my life I have loved the Word.'[1]
-- Dinesen: "Converse at Night in Copenhagen" from Last Tales.

Isak Dinesen is first and foremost a storyteller. For her the telling of a tale parallels nothing less than the Divine Creation of heaven and earth ex nihilo. The storyteller is a Creator who calls into being a complete universe. The artist as Creator invokes not simply a stage, but a scenario, and she weaves a complex tapestry composed of character, auditor, and the artist herself. The auditor is no mere eavesdropper but a recipient of the Word and as such is bound into the laws of the fictional world. The immutable nature of the Word is evidenced in the tale, "Sorrow-acre."

Here a young man, Adam, is appalled by his uncle, who has told Anne-Marie, the mother of a condemned youth, that her son shall be set free if she can mow a field between sunrise and sundown. The task is one for three men yet the woman agrees. The Lord's rsponse to Adam's plea for mercy is, "I gave Anne-Marie my word." Adam states that this word was a whim, given in caprice and entreats his uncle to retract his word, thereby annulling the agreement. In answer the Lord responds:

> You will have learned in school, . . . that in the beginning was the word. It may have been pronounced in caprice, as a whim, the scripture tells us nothing about it. It is still

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[1] Isak Dinesen, Last Tales (1957; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 333.

> the principle of our world, its law of gravitation. My own humble word has been the principle of the land on which we stand, for an age of man. My father's word was the same before my day.[1]

Adam continues:

> This woman is ready to die for her son; will it ever happen to you or me that a woman willingly gives up her life for us? And if it did indeed come to pass, should we make so light of it as not to give up a dogma in return?[2]

Although a ready sympathy is aroused by the view expressed by Adam, the reader is gradually forced from this identification with one character to a clearer perception and imaginative understanding of the old Lord's rôle and everything it represents.[3] The old and new order are contrasted:

> 'You are young,' said the old lord. 'A new age will undoubtedly applaud you. I am old-fashioned, I have been quoting to you texts a thousand years old. We do not, perhaps, quite understand one another. But with my own people I am, I believe, in good understanding. Anne-Marie might well feel that I am making light of her exploit, if now, at the eleventh hour, I did nullify it by a second word.'[4]

To modify his Word would rob Anne-Marie of her rôle. The Lord must secure her significance by sustaining the scenario he has called into existence. Although we are ultimately made to look upon the old Lord's rôle with a maturing sympathy and a gradually quickened understanding, the method of storytelling is used in order to weight the scales against the Lord. By presenting the reader with the conflicting issues in concrete terms, Dinesen heightens the reader's understanding of the part

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 58.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] Hannah, "In Memoriam Karen Blixen", p. 593.

[4] Winter's Tales, p. 59.

the Lord plays in the tale and the ideals he represents.[1] The qualities that Dinesen attributes to the Lord compel the reader's admiration. She does not individualize him in the tale for he remains from beginning to end "the old Lord." The Lord's character clarifies what he stands for, the embodiment of the duties and responsibilities of the great landowners of the past. To Adam the old Lord's Word is only a dogma and a whim. To the Lord his Word is the principle of the land upon which the maintenance and continuation of a whole order and way of life rests. Dinesen has each of the characters playing their rôles which are fitted into the design depicted at the beginning of the story. The unity between the Lord and his people has been maintained. By focusing the reader's attention on the rôle of the Lord's Word within the narrative framework of "Sorrow-acre", Dinesen connects the experiences of the character, of the auditors, and the artist.

The emphasis on dialogue between author and audience and among the characters is a paradigm of community. According to Marcia Landy:

> The ear, hearing, represents a more active and shared experience than the eye which represents a more abstract and differentiating experience and thus is more isolating. . . . Dinesen's reflexiveness about the art of storytelling is as integral to her tales as is the content which explores reciprocity.[2]

"The Deluge at Norderney" is a tale that nourishes and maintains the importance of the oral tradition and the validity of social discourse. The story is set in Northern Europe during the first quarter of the last century at a seaside resort. The floodwaters lash down upon the Westerlands, breaking the dikes, and hurling the fury of the

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[1] Hannah, "In Memoriam Karen Blixen", p. 594.

[2] Landy, p. 391.

gods on man as Yaweh did in the flood. Many years afterwards, the story of the half-mythical figure who had helped the terror-stricken people in their distress was remembered and recounted. Against this backdrop, Dinesen relates the events which had actually occurred. Four people who had been recently rescued from the ruins of Norderney by Cardinal Hamilcar von Schestedt sit in the stern of a small boat. The first is Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag, a lady of strictest virtue but who believed herself to be one of the greatest female sinners of her time. Her companion is a girl of sixteen, the Countess Calypso von Platen Haalermund. The third person is a young Dane, Jonathan Maersk, who had been sent to Norderney by his doctor to recover from a severe attack of melancholy. The fourth is Miss Malin's maid who lay terrified at the bottom of the boat. These people are by no means safe. As the boat bounces upon the waves, its occupants spot in a hayloft five persons who had remained behind in the rising waters in order to salvage some of their livestock. The boat cannot handle more than five people. The Cardinal chooses to give up his seat in the boat. Miss Malin, her companion, and Jonathan Maersk choose to remain with him. Each of the four think of the rising waters and imminent death and wonder, "How will these people do to die with?"[1]

Neither Miss Malin nor Calypso is afraid in the face of death:

> While we are young the idea of death or failure is intolerable to us; even the possibility of ridicule we cannot bear. But we have also an unconquerable faith in our own stars, and in the impossibility of anything venturing to go against us. As we grow old we slowly come to believe that everything will turn out badly for us, and that failure is in the nature of things; but then we do not much mind what happens to us one way or the other. In this way a balance is obtained.[2]

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

According to Walter Benjamin, the authoritative rôle of the storyteller derives from a knowledge of the rôle death plays in determining life's choices:

> . . . death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is a natural history to which his stories refer back.[1]

"The Deluge at Norderney" shows the relationship between natural disaster, storytelling and death. Death is a great teacher, and the storyteller is a sage who had counsel for many situations. Benjamin further finds:

> . . . it is granted for him [the storyteller] to reach back to a whole lifetime . . . . His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller, he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura about the storyteller, in Leskov as in Hauff, in Poe as in Stevenson. The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself.[2]

It is through the art of telling his tale that each of the characters in "The Deluge at Norderney" mates his soul with destiny. Dinesen shows that these people, each by his own being, sanctifies the being of the other. The Cardinal explains:

> Nothing sanctifies, nothing, indeed, is sanctified, except by the play of the Lord, which is alone divine . . . . Not the bishop, or the knight, or the powerful castle is sacred in itself, but the game of chess is a noble game, and therein the knight is sanctified by the bishop, as the bishop by the queen. Neither would it be an advantage if the bishop were ambitious to acquire the higher virtues of the queen, or the castle, those of the bishop. So are we sanctified when the hand of the Lord moves us to where he wants us to be. Here he may be about to play a fine game with us, and in that game I shall be sancified by you, as you by any of us.[3]

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 94.

[2] Benjamin, p. 109.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 15.

The characters each have parts to play in the universe that Dinesen has called into being. Each must remain within the confines of his rôle and become at one with it. By recognizing and fulfilling the rôles that the artist has designed for him, a character thus remains within the play of the Lord. Man's greatest happiness comes from believing that there is an author and a play and that the rôle he is to assume is the only possible one for him. The characters proceed to construct stories about themselves, each sharing in the experiences of the other. The final phases of the story "The Deluge at Norderney" end not with the deaths of the characters but with the end of their own tales:

> In developing this conjunction between death and storytelling, Dinesen often uses masks, disguises, and dramatic roles in order to understand the relationship of nature and artifice. As in the pastoral, masks and disguises signal changed social relations, changed attitudes, and particularly the humanly constructed nature of social roles and of creativity in contrast to natural phenomena.[1]

As the deep blue waters rise into the loft, Miss Malin slowly draws her fingers out of Kasparson's hand, places one on her lips and says, "À ce moment de sa narration . . . Scheherazade vit paraître le matin, et, discrète, se tut."[2]

"The Cardinal's First Tale" under the subheading "Tales from Albondocani" from Last Tales further illustrates Dinesen's belief that the telling of a tale parallels the act of Divine Creation of the universe. The only way Cardinal Salviati can answer the lady's question, "Who are You?" is by telling a story. In the midst of his tale the Cardinal asks the lady:

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[1] Landy, p. 395.

[2] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 79.

> . . . who, Madam, is the man who is placed, in his life on earth, with his back to God and his face to man, because he is God's mouthpiece, and through him the voice of God is given forth? Who is the man who has no existence of his own--because the existence of each human being is his--and who has neither home nor friends nor wife--because his hearth is the hearth of[1] and he himself is the friend and lover of all human beings?

The lady's reply to this question is "the artist", to which the Cardinal adds that it is also the priest. The Cardinal is well qualified to talk about the poet-priest relationship because he was trained to be both. He and his twin brother were intended at birth to be one an artist and the other a priest. The death of one brother in a fire and the resulting confusion of identities led to the other's being educated officially for the priesthood but unofficially as an artist.[2]

According to Thomas Whissen:

> Through this man [the Cardinal] Isak Dinesen is able to express not only the Apollonian-Dionysian tension in both artist and priest but also to reveal how both share, along with the aristocrat, a separation from ordinary society as well as an obligation to a destiny that differs significantly from that of the rest of humanity. In fulfilling their own destinies, these are the[3] only persons who consciously lead others to fulfil theirs.

When the lady sighs at the lot of the artist, the Cardinal tells her not to pity him:

> The servant was neither forced nor lured into service. Before taking him on, his Master spoke straightly and fairly to him. 'You are aware,' he said, 'that I am almighty. And you have before you the world which I have created. Now give me your opinion on it. Do you take it that I meant to create a peaceful world?' 'No, my Lord,' the candidate replied. 'Or that I have,' the Lord asked, 'meant to create a pretty and neat world?' 'No, indeed,' answered the youth. 'Or a world

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[1] Last Tales, p. 21.

[2] Thomas R. Whissen, "The Bow of the Lord: Isak Dinesen's Portrait of the Artist," Scandinavian Studies, 46 (Winter 1974), p. 48.

[3] Ibid., p. 48.

> easy to live in?' asked the Lord. 'O good Lord, no!' said the candidate. 'Or do you,' the Lord asked for the last time, 'hold and believe that I have resolved to create a sublime world, with all things necessary to the purpose in it, and none left out?' 'I do,' said the young man. 'Then,' said the Master, 'then, my servant and mouthpiece, take the oath!'[1]

The artist as God's mouthpiece is given a small portion of the Lord's omnipotence when he calls his story into existence. The story the Cardinal has told the lady frightens her, for in it she sees that the characters within its framework appear less human to her. The Cardinal replies:

> You will see the characters of the true story clearly, as if luminous and on a higher plane, and at the same time they may look not quite human, and you may well be a little afraid of them. That is all in the order of things.[2]

With the new art of narration of the day, the Cardinal sees that it is fashionable for artists to keep the characters close to the reader and as a result this new art and literature will be ready to sacrifice the story itself:

> The individuals of the new books and novels--one by one--are so close to the reader that he will feel a bodily warmth flowing from them, and that he will take them to his bosom and make them, in all situations of his life, his companions, friends and advisers. And while this interchange of sympathy goes on, the story itself loses ground and weight and in the end evaporates, like the bouquet of a noble wine, the bottle of which has been left uncorked.[3]

This literature of individuals is a noble art but at its best it is a human product. The divine art is the story which becomes the unifying and harmonious element among human beings: "In the beginning was the story. At the end we shall be privileged to view and review it--and

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[1] Last Tales, p. 21.

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

[3] Ibid.

that is what is named the day of judgement."[1]

Dinesen, as storyteller, relates a tale and renders an account as accurately and meticulously as possible and calls on the characters to be true to the story or not. In this sense of reporting, Dinesen shares Harold Pinter's view regarding drama. According to Esslin, Pinter:

> . . . rejects the author's right to creep inside his characters and pretend to know what makes them act, even how they feel. All he can do is render an account, meticulously accurate, of the movement that takes place; give a description of the situation at the beginning, before the intrusion; and note the changes that have taken place at the end.[2]

In the Aristotelian sense, Dinesen subordinates character to action. Character is revealed by the action but is of lesser importance.[3] Her tales are a tribute to the old order, that of an age long passed yet hopefully not forgotten. She avoids the psychological probing of character and motive as outlined by the Cardinal. Her tales reflect awareness of the ancient tragedies where emphasis is placed not on character but on plot. Thus, it is the essence and plan of the story that gives the characters choice.

The rôle of the storyteller is a difficult one. The lady utters, "What you call the divine act to me seems a hard and cruel game, which maltreats and mocks its human beings."[4] The Cardinal states that however hard and cruel it may seem "we, who hold our high office as keepers and watchmen to the story, may tell you, verily, that to its

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[1]Ibid., p. 24.

[2]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), p. 35.

[3]Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 13.

[4]Last Tales, p. 25.

human characters there is salvation in nothing else in the universe."[1] It is only the story which has the authority to answer the cry of "Who am I?" uttered by its characters.

When the lady finally asks the Cardinal if he is sure it is God whom he serves, he replies, "that, Madame, is a risk which the artists and the priests of the world have to run."[2] The Cardinal reminds the woman that stories have existed as long as speech has existed and just as water is necessary to physical life, stories are necessary to the intellectual and spiritual life of man. "For Dinesen, the story is the fountainhead of all creation."[3] In creating imaginative and enduring characters, the artist is not exceeding God's imagination but rather entering into it.

A dialogue similar to the one in "The Cardinal's First Tale" between the servant and Master is presented to us in "The Young Man with the Carnation". Charlie Despard is at a point where he is ready to accept the Lord's covenant. The Lord's preliminary questioning is rendered by Isak Dinesen in the manner of God's dialogue with Job.

> 'Who made the ships, Charlie?' he asked. 'Nay, I know not,' said Charlie, 'did you make them?' 'Yes,' said the Lord, 'I made the ships on their keels, and all floating things. The moon that sails in the sky, the orbs that swing in the universe, the tides, the generations, the fashions. You make me laugh, for I have given you all the world to sail and float in, and you have run aground her, in a room of the Queen's Hotel to seek a quarrel.'[4]

In his imaginary dialogue with God, Charlie realizes he must write

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[1] Ibid., p. 26.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Whissen, Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics, p. 106.

[4] Winter's Tales, p. 27.

stories for the Lord's sake. The Lord says, "I will make a covenant between me and you. I will not measure you out any more distress than you need to write your books."[1] Charlie gains insight into his own identity and accepts his God, his world, and his rôle in life. Distress, anguish, despair are the artist's lot in life. Charlie is part of that harsh and cruel world of the artist. Charlie asks the Lord, "Nay tell me, now that we are at it . . . am I, while I write of the beauty of young women, to get, from the live women of the earth a shilling's worth, and no more?"[2] The Lord answers, "But you are to write the books, . . . for it is I who want them written. Not the public, not by any means the critics, but ME!"[3] When Charlie asks the Lord if this is a certainty, the Lord replies that Charlie will not be certain of it at all times. God has the greatest imagination. The Almighty uses his power to impress upon Charlie that as an artist there is always risk but that as long as the artist remains true to God's design then his stories are raised to a higher plane. Without the benefit of remorse the artist is less likely to take his rôle for granted.

The Lord tells Charlie to be content with <u>that</u>. Denied the pleasures of ordinary human intercourse, the artist must find compensation in his creations. This longing the artist experiences can be described in a longing for union with God, a oneness with the essence of creation.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 27.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 28.

[4] Whissen, <u>Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics</u>, p. 51.

"A Consolatory Tale" which concludes Winter's Tales shows a more confident but questioning Charlie Despard fusing his ideas with those of an equally adept storyteller, Aeneas Snell. By identifying the artist with the Lord in the story of Job, Isak Dinesen further isolates him from society and establishes him as a person of extraordinary obligations.[1] Charlie explains his theory about storytelling to Aeneas:

> I have behaved to my reader . . . as the Lord behaves to Job. I know, none so well, none so well as I, how the Lord needs Job as a public and cannot do without him. Yes, it is even doubtful whether the Lord be not more dependent upon Job than Job upon the Lord. I have laid a wager with Satan about the soul of my reader. I have marred his faith and turned terrors upon him, caused him to ride on the wind and dissolved his substance, and when he waited for light there was darkness. And Job does not want to be the Lord's public any more than my public wishes to be so to me.[2]

The artist, as a man, is not spared Job's lot. The artist bears a double burden. One has to do with the measure of distress that the Lord has promised to dispense so that the artist may create his stories. The other is the Lord's injunction to Charlie in "The Young Man with the Carnation" not to expect answers. God bestows the gift of creativity on the artist and the artist, in turn, creates his fictional world. Just as the characters in a story have the obligation of discovering their rôles in the fulfillment of their destinies, the artist has the obligation of creating a story which leads characters to this discovery.

In "Converse at Night in Copenhagen" both the poet and the monarch bear the burden of responsibility to man and God that is not shared by either man or God. The poet, Johannes Ewald, confides in his monarch that he wishes to use his state of heavenly bliss reflected on earth.

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[1] Whissen, "The Bow of the Lord: Isak Dinesen's Portrait of the Artist", p. 51.

[2] Winter's Tales, p. 292.

> [This reflection] is called mythos! My mythos! It is the earthy reflection of my heavenly existence. Mythos, in Greek, means speech, or, since I was never good at Greek, . . . and since great scholars may consider me mistaken--you and I, at any rate, for tonight will agree to take it in such a sense. Highly pleasant and delightful is speech, Orosmane. We have experienced it tonight. Yet, previous to speech, and higher than speech, we acknowledge another idea: logos. Logos, in the Greek, means Word, and by the Word all things were created.[1]

The poet or artist accepts his rôle in life: "That is the one task allotted to me, to fulfill during my time and my course on earth. From His divine Logos--the creative force, the beginning--I shall work out my human mythos--the abiding substance, remembrance."[2]

The comprehension of this obligation is terrifying. It is this revelation that Charlie Despard achieves in "The Young Man with the Carnation". According to the poet there are three kinds of happenings: "The first, bonheur parfait . . . is this: to feel in oneself an excess of strength."[3] The second is par la grâce de Dieu. This is perfect happiness: "to know for certain that you are fulfilling the will of God."[4] The last is the 'grand jeté', the cessation of pain. "The stillness that now filled the room was not the absence of speech; it was the vital affirmation superseding words."[5] Johannes Ewald, masquerading as Yorick, speaks of the pact or oath that the artist must make with God before he can produce art. The Lord offers the poet or artist or priest a bit of omnipotence and a measure of distress in return for the

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[1] Last Tales, p. 333.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 338.

[4] Ibid., p. 339.

[5] Ibid., p. 348.

submission of the artist.[1]

> 'Crushing in its weight,' says the poet, 'is my own covenant with the Lord, yet it is, at the same time, highly gay and glorious! For if I do not hold onto it myself, no adversity and no distress shall compel me, but it is I who shall compel adversity and distress, poverty and sickness, and the harshness even of my enemies, and free those to harbor with me for my benefit. And all things shall work together for good to me!'[2]

This element of distress that God places on the artist or storyteller is reaffirmed by the great artist Geheimrat Wolfgang Herr Cazotte in "Ehrengard". Whatever quality or condition God bestows on the artist is never negative. It is the responsibility of the artist to fashion art from the raw material God has given him through His creation. It is the responsibility of the artist to heighten his consciousness of the life he is already living.[3] This is the essence of the Lord's message to Charlie Despard, "Be content with <u>that</u>." This resignation will lead the artist beyond the story, to the blank page, where the silence speaks:

Thomas R. Whissen explains the story of the blank page as such:

> No mythos can reflect the infinite possibilities of the Logos. The most the Mythos can do is call attention to something beyond itself: and it is this something that Isak Dinesen means, I think, by the blank page. This is why she makes the artist subservient to the tale and the tale subservient to the effect. The line from Logos to Mythos must, as long as man is mortal, pass through the artist and his art. But the ultimate effect of what the artist does through his art must be to reconcile Mythos and Logos to the exclusion of everything else.[4]

No matter which aspect of Dinesen's style as storyteller is

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[1] Whissen, <u>Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics</u>, p. 55.

[2] <u>Last Tales</u>, p. 334.

[3] Whissen, <u>Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics</u>, p. 31.

[4] Ibid., p. 106.

explored, one must always return to this concept of the blank page. The illiterate old woman who has been educated in the act of storytelling by her grandmother explains:

> 'With my grandmother,' she said, 'I went through a hard school. 'By loyal to the story,' the old hag would say to me. 'Be eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story.' 'Why must I be that, Grandmother?' I asked her. 'Am I to furnish you with reasons, baggage?' she cried. 'And you mean to be a story-teller! Why, you are to become a story-teller, and I shall give you my reasons! Hear then: Where the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence. Whether a small snotty lass understands it or not.'[1]

The old woman continues:

> . . . we old women know the story of the blank page. But we are somewhat averse to telling it, for it might well, among the uninitiated, weaken our own credit. All the same, I am going to make an exception with you, my sweet and pretty lady and gentlemen of the generous hearts. I shall tell it to you.[2]

The old woman is saying that the storyteller has the obligation of fashioning a tale after the Divine act of creation. If the imagination of the artist conflicts with the imagination of God, the artist loses control of the story. Isak Dinesen's tales are the result of a completely disciplined and conscious artistry. All irrelevant detail is either eliminated or is later shown to be an integrated part of the total design. The narrative pattern of the story and the life which is thereby described become one and the same thing. The silence or blank page of which the old woman speaks is the point at which the

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[1] Last Tales, p. 100.

[2] Ibid.

interdependent rôles and the audience merge.[1]

> Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in story-telling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes.
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> -- Plato: "The Republic," Book II.[2]

[1] Whissen, Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics, p. 101.

[2] Bernard F. Dukore, Dramatic Theory and Criticism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), p. 12.

Chapter III

Marionettes

> Like the marionettes of the night before, they were within stronger hands than their own, and had no idea what was going to happen to them.[1]
>
> -- Dinesen: "The Roads Round Pisa" from Seven Gothic Tales.

Isak Dinesen likens her characters to marionettes, to dolls, to soldiers, to some mechanical or artificial figure awaiting the hand of destiny. On first reading Dinesen, we feel that the artist is manipulating the strings of the characters' destinies, but ultimately there is a revelation that the characters have been, in fact, ironically pulling their own strings in an attempt to discover their own destinies. In "The Roads Round Pisa" there is a sudden interlude in which two leading characters visit a puppet-show. At the end of the presentation the witch appears and says:

> The truth, my children, is that we are, all of us, acting in a marionette comedy. What is important more than anything else in a marionette comedy, is keeping the ideas of the author clear. This is the real happiness of life . . .[2]

Even were we to accept the abrupt and unexplained simplicity of the witch's analogy, unresolved questions remain. What happens when, as the witch suggests, the ideas of the author are no longer clear, or when the actors are in revolt and no longer recognize the need for either author or allotted rôle, and when each insists on heeding his own caprice?

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 209.

[2] Ibid., p. 199.

If the characters attempt to circumvent the hand of fate, there would be no perfect happiness. According to the witch, happiness is made possible to the characters through their ability to discover and to enact the particular rôles it is their destiny to play. Such discovery and enactment of rôles in the scheme of destiny is evident in the tale, "Sorrow-acre".

Anne-Marie in "Sorrow-acre" faces her destiny with courageous acceptance and dignity. At the begining of the tale, there is a sense that something is inevitable and that the feudal landowner determines Anne-Marie's destiny. As the story unfolds, however, the reader becomes aware that Anne-Marie herself has been in control and that she is able in some way to carry out the almost impossible task of clearing a hay field in one day. The Lord of the manor perceives circumstances as a Divine scheme which he readily accepts. He tells his nephew, Adam:

> Tragedy should remain the right of human beings, subject, in their conditions or in their own nature, to the dire law of necessity. To them it is salvation and beatification. But the gods, whom we must believe to be unacquainted with and incomprehensive of necessity, can have no knowledge of the tragic. When they are brought face to face with it they will, according to my experience, have the good taste and decorum to keep still and not interfere.[1]

The young Adam eventually recognizes Anne-Marie's courage and acknowledges the rôle that he and his uncle must play in the drama. Once more the tune of the garden-room rings in Adam's mind: "Mourir pour ce qu'on aime / C'est un trop doux effort . . ."[2] Anne-Marie's seemingly futile undertaking displays the triumph of heroism over pain and suffering. Adam sees:

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 63.

[2] Ibid.

> . . . the ways of life . . . as a twined and tangled design, complicated and mazy; it was not given him or any mortal to command or control it. Life and death, happiness and woe, the past and the present, were interlaced within the pattern.[1]

Anne-Marie plows the large field, with the Lord looking on, and she succeeds in finishing her work. She thus frees her son from the death sentence, but she herself dies from the effort. She fulfills her tragic rôle by sacrificing her life for her son's. To have lessened the terms of her task would, as Adam's uncle explained, have mocked her efforts and deprived her of a rôle she had determined to fill.

In "The Monkey", Boris and Athena come to realize their rôles through the manipulative efforts of their aunt, the Prioress. In a desire to reshape destiny, she ironically provides the framework for the realization of their fate. At the beginning of the tale Boris feels that he can use his Aunt Cathinka's wisdom and experience to escape prosecution for his homosexual encounters by entering into marriage with a suitable partner: "I should like to marry, and I hope that you will give me your advice and help."[2] Eventually Boris discovers that he is not in control but that the Prioress is using him to fulfil her own ends:

> . . . and then all at once he got such a terrible impression of strength and cunning that it was as if he had touched an electric eel. Women, he thought, when they are old enough to have done with the business of being women, and can let loose their strength, must be the most powerful creatures in the whole world.[3]

In choosing Athena for Boris' wife, the Prioress is exploring a desire to be free from her own cage-like existence. She wishes to experience

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 113.

[3] Ibid., p. 119.

vicariously the erotic desires of youth: "She kept her eyes on him, kindly. They took possession of him as if she had actually been drawing him to her bosom, or even within the closer circle of her heart."[1]

At first impulse the name of Athena Hopballehus sounds absurd, yet upon reflection Boris begins to like the idea of the match: "As his mind turned from this unaccountable veering on the part of the old lady to the effect which it might have upon his own destiny, he found that he did not dislike the idea."[2] Although Boris does not wish to alter his bachelorhood status, he realizes he can no longer hold fast the moment. Most humans strive to cling to the existing state of things but Boris himself must now accept change. He sees God as one who loves change and Boris judges paradise as a whirlpool of change, "Only you may yourself, by that time, have become one with God, and have taken a liking to it."[3] Thus, Boris reflects with deep sadness all the young men who had been, through the ages, perfect in beauty and vigour, and who had been changed against their wishes. He feels an affinity with these young lads for now he, too, in an attempt to cling to the moment, realizes that he is up against a 'force majeure'. He senses that there are forces over which he has no control manipulating his fate at this point in time. "In his mind he saw himself, in his white uniform, as a marionette, pulled alternately by the deadly determined old lady and the deadly determined young lady. How was it that things meant so much to them."[4]

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[1]Ibid., p. 115.

[2]Ibid., p. 118.

[3]Ibid., p. 122.

[4]Ibid., p. 138.

In "The Monkey" Dinesen sketches a unique portrait of female adolescence juxtaposed against a spirited old crone, both of whom wish to control Boris' fate. It is the Prioress who provides Boris with a love potion so that he can seduce Athena. Clinging to the latest incestuous desire for her father, Athena fights Boris like a wild beast. This loss of innocence is depicted in cruel and violent terms. Athena rejects Boris' sexual assault, adhering to the heroic atmosphere of childhood where she had been glorified both as son and daughter in the Count's imagination. She does not attack with feminine wiles but with the fierceness of a she-bear and carnivorous beast.[1] Athena will ultimately accept her fate, but it is submission with a vengeance. Athena confronts the adult world through external forces working upon her. She is reluctant to do so, for she has espoused an uncompromising world of youth and innocence which has further isolated her from an external reality of things. Athena must eventually lose childhood with its heroic idealism and fantasies, and complete the painful but necessary initiation into the adult world.[2] The strings of Athena's fate are in the hands of both the Prioress and Boris.

Like Athena, Boris, too, finds himself placed between two opposing forces, the Prioress determined that the two should marry, and Athena determined not to marry him. The Prioress plans the seduction scene. She exclaims to Boris, "My child, my dear child, . . . nothing, nothing must stand in the way of your happiness!"[3] Boris is set for his part,

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[1]Robin Lyndenberg, "Against the Law of Gravity: Female Adolescence in Isak Dinesen's 'Seven Gothic Tales'," Modern Fiction Studies, 24, No. 1 (Spring 1978), p. 525.

[2]Ibid., p. 523.

[3]Seven Gothic Tales, p. 139.

because the deepest and truest thing in Boris' nature is his great love of the stage and all its ways: ". . . he carried the stage with him in his heart . . . . To him the theater was real life. As long as he could not act, he was puzzled by the world and uncertain what to do with it; but as an actor he was his true self . . . ."[1] Boris lays his mask with great care in front of his mirror and dons a black uniform, for he always preferred the rôle of the unhappy, to that of the successful, lover. Athena accepts the Prioress' invitation to dinner out of a sense of duty, for instinctively she had always known that "in a benevolent way the old lady had wanted to put her in a cage."[2] The rôles of the Prioress and her pet monkey become interchangeable. The Prioress is not only caged physically within the convent walls, but she is caged emotionally and sexually through the suppression of her adventurous desire for freedom and love. It is this type of repressed existence that the Prioress wishes to impose upon Athena. Whereas the traditional Gothic heroine displays passivity and helplessness of spirit, Dinesen's heroine is noble and disciplined like a soldier. Athena embodies the hard, shining amber of the Somali women Dinesen observed in Out of Africa:

> The Somali system was at once a natural necessity and a fine art, it was both religion, strategy, and ballet, and was practised in all respects with due devotion, discipline, and dexterity. The great sweetness of it lay in the play of opposite forces within it. Behind the eternal principle of refutation, there was much generosity; behind the pedantry what risibility, and contempt of death. These daughters of a fighting race went through their ceremonial of primness as through a great graceful war-dance; butter would not melt in their mouth, neither would they rest till they had drunk the heart's blood of their adversary; they figured like three

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[1] Ibid., p. 140.

[2] Ibid., p. 142.

> ferocious young she-wolves in seemly sheep's clothing. The Somali are wiry people, hardened in deserts and on the sea. Heavy weights of life, strenuous pressure, high waves, and long ages, must have gone to turn their women into such hard, shining amber.[1]

According to Robert Langbaum:

> "The Monkey" develops the theme of desexualization through even larger contrast--the contrast between the nineteenth century and the whole European tradition back through the Middle Ages to Greece; the contrast between Christianity and paganism; the contrast between Europe and Africa. "The Monkey" is the story of Seven Gothic Tales in which Africa figures most overtly.[2]

During the seduction supper the Prioress assumes the mannerisms and habits of the monkey. She scratches herself daintily here and there with her delicately pointed little finger. She nibbles at her cloves. She licks her lips. The metamorphosis becomes complete the following day once she realizes that the seduction scene has failed. She bargains and manipulates to the end. She reminds Boris that only marriage can save him from the Court Chaplain who is ready to prosecute him regarding his homosexual encounters, as "one of the corrupters of youth."[3] The Prioress seems to have shrunk, telling Athena that notwithstanding the night before, Boris, out of a sense of duty, will still marry her. Yet Athena "like a Samson" in her strength is not beaten. When the Prioress suggests that Athena may be with child and without marriage, the child a bastard, Athena agrees to marry Boris but threatens, "But, Madame my Aunt, when we are married, and whenever I can do so, I shall kill him."[4] At this point the monkey knocks on the glass and fills the Prioress with

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[1] Out of Africa, p. 158.

[2] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 81.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 149.

[4] Ibid., p. 160.

terror. The monkey breaks through the window and the Prioress with a most surprising swiftness heaves herself up along the frame of the door, shivering and grinding her teeth, "The face which she turned toward the young people was already transformed, shriveled and wrinkled, and of dark-brown color . . . and before their eyes, a change, a metamorphosis, was taking place and was consummated."[1] The young couple bear witness to an incredible sight:

> 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 crouched 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 Cloister Seven.[2]

Their witnessing of the horrifying though hilarious metamorphosis in which the old Prioress and her spritely monkey change bodies shocks the young girl out of her proud but barren isolation. The forces of fate affect Athena. She now realizes that Boris is a being outside herself and "from now, between, on the one side, her and him, who had been present together at the happening of the last minutes, and on the other side, the rest of the world, which had not been there, an insurmountable line would be drawn forever."[3] Athena is awakened to the erotic in man and far from isolating her from the world, her creative spirit reveals to her the possibilities that reality offers:

> Dinesen's adolescent heroine need not compromise her private dream-life by surrendering to a more limited reality because she is most often surprised and seduced into the world

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[1] Ibid., p. 162.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

through its unimaginable sensuality and complexity.[1]

Some of Dinesen's characters fight against destiny and often try to set the strings of fate in motion to their own cadence rather than to seek out the rhythmic dance of a creative force superior to their own. "The Immortal Story" and "The Poet" show how expertly Dinesen uses character revelation within her narrative framework.

In "The Immortal Story" the tea-trader, Mr. Clay, wishes to play the puppeteer and bring literature to life, for he "had come to have faith in his own omnipotence."[2] Mr. Clay in his desire to read something other than his account books begins to relate an old story to his clerk, Elishama. It is the tale of a rich old gentleman who can no longer satisfy his wife and who entreats a sailor to come home with him. The old gentleman wishes to have a child, so he leads the sailor to his wife's room where the sailor spends the night. Mr. Clay is surprised that Elishama knows the story. Elishama informs him that the tale never happened to anyone, but that all sailors know it and tell it because each of them wishes that it had happened to himself. Each sailor relates the tale as if it were so. If at any moment a sailor thought that such an experience were possible, he would never have told it. Mr. Clay decides to turn this piece of make-believe into fact. Elishama's mission is to set the story to life. Elishama presents his friend's mistress, Virginie, with the drama: "It is a comedy . . . A drama or a tragedy: It is a story."[3] She replies:

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[1]Lyndenberg, p. 527.

[2]Isak Dinesen, Anecdotes of Destiny (1958; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 157.

[3]Ibid., p. 182.

> The old man has got strange ideas of a comedy . . . In a comedy the actors pretend to do things, to kill one another or to die, or to go to bed with their lovers. But they do not really do any of these things. Indeed your master is like the Emperor Nero of Rome, who, to amuse himself, had people eaten up by lions. But since then, it has not been done, and that is a long time ago.[1]

Virginie is enraged when she learns she must enact the drama in Mr. Clay's house, for that house was the only thing left her by her father when she was a rich, pretty and innocent girl, "Yes . . . Virginie est fine, elle s'y comprend, en ironie!"[2] Mr. Clay had brought about her father's death. How she had dreamed of re-entering that house! She agrees: "Virginie's love of the dramatic art, inherited from her father and encouraged by him, came to her in her hour of need."[3] If she is not what she appears to be, that is fine:

> She had been engrossed in the thought of her enemy, and she had become engrossed in the vision of herself. It was not till she heard steps in the corridor outside that she gave any thought to the third party in the story, her unknown guest of the night. Then for a second a little cold draft of contempt for Mr. Clay's hired and bribed puppet ran through her mind.[4]

The puppeteer, Mr. Clay, is pleased with his dolls. They are behaving well:

> You are, in reality, two young, strong and lusty jumping-jacks within this old hand of mine.[5]

He finishes:

> When I am gone . . . and when you two are left to yourselves, and believe that you are following the command of your own young blood only, you will still be doing nothing,

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[1] Ibid., p. 182.

[2] Ibid., p. 188.

[3] Ibid., p. 212.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 215.

> nothing at all, but what I have willed you to do. You will be conforming to the plot of my story. For tonight this room, this bed, you yourselves with this same young hot blood in you--it is all nothing but a story turned, at my word, into reality.[1]

But Mr. Clay is not omnipotent and he cannot control the strings of his marionettes. Povl, the young sailor, sees Virginie not as a whore whom he has bought for five guineas, but as a young spirit of seventeen, one whom he loves and one whom he wishes to take away with him. The woman reminds him of his bargain with the old man. He will leave but will remember her as the most beautiful girl in the world. At the end of the story Mr. Clay himself assumes the countenance and appearance of a puppet:

> The old man's eyes were slightly open--pale, like pebbles --but his thin lips were closed in a little wry smile. His face was gray like the bony hands upon his knees. His dressing-gown hung in such deep folds that there hardly seemed to be a body in it to connect this face and head with these hands. The whole proud and rigid figure, envied and feared by thousands, this morning looked like a jumping-jack when the hand which has pulled the strings has suddenly let them go.[2]

The ultimate irony of statement occurs when in reply to Elishama's suggestion that now Povl can tell the whole story to others, Povl says:

> Tell it? . . . To whom would I tell it? Who in the world would believe it if I told it?[3]

The hands of fate deal more sharply with Councilor Mathiesen in "The Poet". He is a prominent figure who had lived in Weimar and who had valued those two years when he had lived in the atmosphere of the great Geheimerat Goethe. He had often met Goethe on his morning walks. Mathiesen was a judge of art and recognized that he himself was not a

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 225.

[3] Ibid., p. 229.

poet, but nevertheless looked to poetry as an ideal and the means through which one could achieve immortality. He finds a surrogate in a young man, a district clerk called Anders Kube. He is deeply convinced that he has to protect his protégé and save him from his unconscious restlessness and melancholy. The poet's restless spirit is stifled by the Councilor's rigid conception of the ideal life style for an artist.[1] Like the Prioress, Mathiesen feels he must provide the poet with the stability that marriage may provide, and chooses Fransine whom he sees as "a short, slight young woman who looked like a doll; not like the dolls of the present day, which are imitations of the faces and forms of human babies, but like the dolls of old days which strove, parallel with humanity, toward an abstract ideal of female beauty."[2] When the Councilor secretly observes Fransine and sees her fiery dance, he realizes she would not be the perfect partner for his poet and rather than subdue his restlessness she would further unleash his adventurous and restless spirit. He therefore decides to keep both of them by marrying Fransine himself. The poet would remain his protégé and friend of the house. Although the pair would remain loyal to him, the poet's helpless passion for his benefactor's wife might make the poet immortal. The Councilor confides his feelings to an old friend, Count Augustus von Schimmelmann, who "was by nature of a heavy and melancholy disposition. He wanted to be happy but he had no talent for happiness."[3]

The Councilor presents his suit to Madam Fransine Lerche who

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[1]Ted Billy, "Werther Avenged: Isak Dinesen's 'The Poet'," West Virginia University Philological Papers, 24 (1977), p. 64.

[2]Seven Gothic Tales, p. 368.

[3]Ibid., p. 380.

accepts. Although the three spend many hours in the garden, this is no idyllic Eden. Anders decides to kill himself on Fransine's wedding day. He works on his last great poem and shares it with Fransine. She had an extreme disregard for the truth: "Women wanting to be happy, are up against a 'force majeure'. Hence they may be justified in taking a short cut to happiness by declaring things to be, in fact, that which they want them to be."[1] Fransine wishes to keep Anders as her friend for she does love him and "if she were to lose him she would die."[2] The Councilor eavesdrops on the couple in the temple on the eve of the wedding day. Anders declares his love for her but wishes to be left alone. Fransine runs away. The Councilor faces Anders and shoots his protégé. The serpent has invaded Paradise. The Councilor moves like a snake in the ground and dreams of Weimar. He thinks of the tragedy he had once tried to write and how he had hoped of maneuvering it into the hands of the Geheimerat. He thinks in his reverie of King Lear who had been alone upon the heath. What is it that had made King Lear safe. Yet, it comes to him, "The Old King had been in the hands, whatever happened to him, of the great British poet, William Shakespeare."[3] The Councilor had tried to order the lives of others. The Councilor is the 'real' poet who prevents the imaginative spirit from realizing its potential by subordinating its possibilities to self-indulgent feelings and self-deceptions. Fransine stares at the old man's body. In an instant she realizes what has happened and knows she must vindicate her lover. At this point she is no longer a doll, or puppet, or marionette

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[1] Ibid., p. 398.

[2] Ibid., p. 403.

[3] Ibid., p. 415.

but an individual concretized into action with a will of her own. The Councilor touches her bare foot and utters:

> 'My poor girl, my dove, . . . listen. Everything is good. All, all!
> Sacred, Fransine, . . . sacred puppets.'
> He had to wait for a minute, but he had more to say to her.
> He said, very slowly: 'There the moon sits up high. You and I shall never die.'[1]

The girl flings the stone down at him and cries, "You poet!" With deception, hypocrisy, and deceit gone, all that remains on the ground is a bundle of old clothes. As Mathiesen falls into the abyss of death, there echo in his mind Fransine's last words, "You poet!"

The Councilor has tried to order life, to expect existence to conform to his conception of reality. He fails to recognize his own rôle and thus brings about his own death in his attempt to mold the lives of others to his design:

> The Councilor's aesthetic design cannot subjugate or logically circumscribe the irrational forces of life, as signified by the rebellion of human instinct in Anders and Fransine. Existence is not governed by the heart or the head. It is an irresistible flux of organic activity that cannot be petrified by man's feeble theories.[2]

Baron von Brackel's story to the narrator in "The Old Chevalier" illustrates yet another way in which one of Dinesen's characters reacts to the hands of fate. The Baron's youthful vanity had been taught a lesson. His mistress had tried to poison him, "Only she did not want to kill. . . . out of a feeling of justice or revenge. She wishes to destroy . . . so that she should not have to lose [him] and to see a

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[1] Ibid., p. 419.

[2] Billy, p. 67.

very dear possession belong to her rival . . . ."[1] As he sits on a seat of the Avenue Montaigne in Paris, with all pride and happiness in ruins about him, a girl approaches him. Hers is not the conventional advance: "She looked like a person out on a great adventure, of someone keeping a secret."[2] The night that follows is like a ritual, something made holy by the woman called Nathalie. She is like a work of art:

> And underneath all this Eve herself breathed and moved, to be indeed a revelation to us every time she stepped out of her disguise with her waist still delicately marked by the stays, as with a girdle of rose petals.[3]

The young man had met reality just a short time earlier in the ugly shape of his former lover. Now he wishes to take refuge in fantasy. He is absorbed in his own emotional world: "No miracle was incredible to me as long as it happened to myself. It is when this faith begins to wear out, and when you conceive the possibility of being in the same position as other people, that youth is really over."[4] He had never in any other love encounter experienced the same feeling of freedom and security as he had with Nathalie. There was something heroic about the girl. Late into the night the Baron awakes with a strong feeling of misapprehension, "I am to pay for this; what am I to pay?"[5] Suddenly reality is revealed. The girl asks for twenty francs:

> A great clearness came upon me then, as if all the illusions and arts with which we try to transform our world, coloring and music and dreams, had been drawn aside, and reality was

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 89.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 94.

[4] Ibid., p. 98.

[5] Ibid., p. 101.

> shown to me, waste as a burnt house, This was the end of the play. There was no room for any superfluous word.[1]

This is the first moment since the Baron had met Nathalie that he sees her as a human being, within an existence of her own, and not as a gift to him. He had accepted the rare jest that had been offered him and both he and Nathalie had played their parts. It was up to the Baron to keep the spirit of the game until the end. Nathalie's demand for twenty francs was well within the spirit of the night. The Baron recalls:

> In the palace which he builds, for four hundred white and four hundred black slaves all loaded with jewels, the djinn asks for an old copper lamp; and the forest-witch who moves three towns and creates for the woodcutter's son an army of horse-soldiers demands for herself the heart of a hare. The girl asked me for her pay in the voice and manner of the djinn and the forest-witch, and if I were to give her twenty francs she might still be safe within the magic circle of her free and graceful and defiant spirit.[2]

The Baron realizes that he is the one who is not in tune with the hand of fate. He feels the weight of the cold and real world upon him. After he pays the twenty francs, the Baron reflects that it might have occurred to him to invent something which would have kept Nathalie safe and still allowed him to have her for himself. He should have given her the money and said, "And if you want another twenty, come back tomorrow night."[3] He could not because this girl Nathalie had called upon all the chivalrousness of his nature and to him chivalrousness means ". . . to love or cherish, the pride of your partner, or of your adversary,

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[1] Ibid., p. 102.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 103.

as you will define it, as highly, or higher than your own."[1] He had met his Nemesis and the Goddess had charged him twenty francs. He recognizes in this encounter with Nathalie that he had somehow played a rôle in her destiny and in his. In some way he had moved the strings of fate.

The De Coninck sisters in "The Supper at Elsinore" portray two old melancholiacs who as such make others happy but who are "creatures of playfulness, charm and tears, of fine fun and everlasting loneliness."[2] They symbolize those who long to be free and adventurous yet are locked and caged and content only in the news of the adventurous exploits of others. They are like birds whose wings have been clipped: "Time had played a little cruelly with [Fanny]. . . . Her birdlike lightness was caricatured into abrupt little movements in fits and starts."[3] Eliza "was as fair as her sister was dark, and in Elsinore, where at the time a fashion for surnames had prevailed, they had called her 'Ariel', or 'The Swan of Elsinore'."[4] Realities carried no weight for them. They lived in dreams and romantic adventures and for them only possibilities had interest. When their brother returns to Elsinore, they join him at dinner. They listen to his account of his marriages and his adventures. They answer his questions as they had done as youngsters: "When they were children the young De Conincks had lived under a special superstition, which they had from a marionette comedy. It came to this: that the lies which you tell are likely to become truth. On this

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 219.

[3] Ibid., p. 238.

[4] Ibid., p. 243.

account they had always been careful in their choice of what lies they would tell."[1] The elder sister, realizing that their brother is to leave them, again shouts, "But you mean to go away again and leave me. You! You have been to these great warm seas of which you talk, to a hundred countries. You have been married to five people – Oh, I do not know of it all! It is easy for you to speak quietly, to sit still. You have never needed to beat your arms to keep warm. You do not need to now!"[2] There is still grandeur in these two old women who in their sterile existence find some meaning by devoting themselves only to dreams. The importance of dreaming as a means of fulfilling destiny is evidenced in the portrayal of Mira Jama in "The Dreamers".

Mira Jama is a storyteller who has lost the capacity of fear. He has become too familiar with life. It can no longer delude him into believing that one thing is much worse than the other. He exclaims:

> Yes, by the Grace of God, . . . every night, as soon as I sleep I dream. And in my dreams I still know fear. Things are terrible to me there. In my dreams I sometimes carry with me something infinitely clear and precious, such as I know well enough that no real things be, and there it seems to me that I must keep the thing against some dreadful danger, such as there are none in the real world. And it also seems to me that I shall be struck down and annihilated if I lose it, though I know that you are not, in the world of the daytime, struck down and annihilated, whatever you lose. In my dreams the dark is filled with indescribable horrors, but there are also sometimes flights and pursuits of a heavenly delight.[3]

As a dreamer, however, he can accept the horrors and joys of existence and can once more enjoy the art of storytelling. His tales are now tempered with humour in order to make people laugh:

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[1] Ibid., p. 257.

[2] Ibid., p. 269.

[3] Ibid., p. 276.

> To love [God] truly you must love change, and you must love a joke, these being the true inclinations of his own heart. Soon I shall take to loving a joke so well that I, who once turned the blood of all the world to ice, shall become a teller of funny tales, to make people laugh.[1]

According to John Davenport, Dinesen in the romantic sense is out of key with her age. Her technique makes her able to express a great humour. Her verbal skill makes the oddest situations credible and her subtly satirical eye sees the vulgarity of man and his environment through a quizzing-glass at once elegant and moral.[2] The employment of puppet-show characters enables Dinesen as storyteller to create a detachment from her characters and to relate the action with no involvement on the part of the writer. Dinesen's technique of using marionettes to elicit humour in a looking-glass world resembles Bergson's views on the use of puppets to evoke laughter. It is through laughter and humour that the characters themselves as well as the audience prove capable of better accepting the absurdities that life offers. Bergson states:

> The scenes are innumerable in comedy where a person believes he is speaking and acting freely; where, consequently this person retains the essential quality of being alive, whereas, from a certain point of view, he appears to be only a toy in the hands of another, who is amusing himself with him.[3]

Lady Flora Gordon in "The Cardinal's Third Tale" presents us with an example of the ways in which God stages a comedy to bring the characters to a higher level of awareness. Lady Flora, because of her wittiness, realizes she has been a fool in God's comedy, that she has

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[1]Ibid., p. 355.

[2]John Davenport, "A Noble Pride: The Art of Karen Blixen," The Twentieth Century, 49, No. 949 (March 1956), p. 269.

[3]Dukore, p. 742.

lacked faith in her story, and she ultimately acquiesces to an imagination far greater than her own. Although she had travelled in many countries, she had never visited Rome. The story sets Lady Gordon in Rome where she comes not for its beauty or the holiness of the Eternal City but out of "her deep distrust of all that its name implies . . . ."[1] Cardinal Salviati pitied her but at the same time respects her for "in everything she said and did there was nobility and truthfulness."[2] An old Prince of the Church had implored the Cardinal not to let her leave Rome as she came. Father Jacopo, Lady Flora's friend, often discussed Lemuel Gulliver's Travels with her. She knew the book by heart and "made use of it to deride in the Almighty's work of creation."[3] Father Jacopo had met Lady Flora at an inn in Tuscany on his way to Rome. He had fallen ill with fever and she had nursed him until he had regained his strength. She decided to continue to Rome with him. She tried in all ways to give offense, but however coarser her speech, or her attempt to scandalize a servant of the Church, she did so to no avail. Father Jacopo realizes in Lady Flora an arrogance and an utter loneliness and feels that out of her isolation may come her salvation. He speaks of the likeness between all things but that likeness does not mean that they all should be treated in the same way:

> In this sense of the word, Milady, likeness is love. For we love that to which we bear a likeness, and we will become like to that which we love. Therefore, the beings of this world who decline to be like anything will efface the divine signature and so work out their own annihilation. In this way did God prove His love of mankind: that He let Himself be made in the likeness of men. For this reason it is

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[1] Last Tales, p. 75.

[2] Ibid., p. 76.

[3] Ibid., p. 78.

> wise and pious to call attention to likenesses, and Scripture itself will speak in parables, which means comparisons.[1]

For a character to circumvent his fate is to efface the signature of God. Anne-Marie in "Sorrow-acre" realizes God's design. Mira Jama in "The Dreamer" fights self-annihilation by becoming a teller of humourous tales. Father Jacopo realizes that Lady Flora's great sin is not that she has ever refused to give, for her generosity to the poor was quite evident; it is that she refuses to receive. After sitting for a long time in the basilica of San Pietro, Father Jacopo feels that this is the place to bring Lady Flora. She spends more than three hours in the church. She stands before the statue of St. Peter himself in contemplation. For days afterward she visits the Church and the priest would often see her gazing upon St. Peter. Her sojourn in Rome over, she plans to leave. She baits the priest to the end:

> For indeed you permit yourself to believe that the hocus-pocus of your Rome, its holy water and rosaries and saints' bones--in the twinkling of an eye, and whether I myself consent or not--shall change me into a meek little lamb within Saint Peter's fold. . . . in order to please you, and in gratitude for your kind guidance in Rome, I am still willing to go down on all fours. On my knees --. . . I shall ascend your holy stair, the Scala Santa! And you will see for yourself, then, that while my weight may have polished or worn your steps a bit, I myself . . . shall be no softer and no more polished on the top of the stair than I was at the bottom of it! Come, my kind and wise friend, I shall order my carriage, and we will go there at once, and together![2]

Lady Flora is determined not to change her beliefs. She is willing, however, to pretend to accept the "hocus-pocus" that faith entails, but the powers of God prevail. Father Jacopo is filled with doubt and wonders at the wisdom of trying to make this unbelieving and

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[1] Ibid., p. 85.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

haughty woman a member of the faithful. In the last chapter or epilogue of the story Cardinal Salviati hears from Lady Flora herself. The Cardinal has paid a visit to the Bath of Monte Scalzo, in Ascoli and encounters Lady Flora who was then named Diana by her friends. One evening she tells him what had happened to her after she had last seen Father Jacopo. The evening before she left Rome, she drove to St. Peter's. Lights were burning in front of St. Peter's figure. A young man came into the church, passed by her, and kissed the foot of the statue. She could not explain what made her follow his example but she stepped forward and kissed St. Peter's foot. Weeks later she discovered a sore on her lip. She knew the name of the disease. The words of Father Jacopo come to her:

> A rose of Sharon, . . . Aye, and does not the rose clearly exhibit to our eyes the signature of the workshop from which she is issued? And does not the heap of wheat, too, exhibit it?[1]

She continues:

> I stood, Your Eminence, before the glass and looked at my mouth. Then I bethought myself of Father Jacopo. To what, I thought, does this bear a likeness? To a rose? Or to a seal?[2]

Lady Flora learns of the solidarity of mankind and acquires a love of life.[3] She becomes aware of the likenesses of things and can accept life's paradoxes. The same powers to which Dinesen had cried to Africa to send a sign, had indeed laughed at Lady Flora and forced her to an awareness of some mighty power greater than hers. The contrasts that Dinesen observed between the modern world and Africa shaped her vision

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[1] Ibid., p. 85.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

[3] Johannesson, p. 125.

as an artist. The marionette device of characterization makes it possible for her to express her innermost thoughts.

In conclusion, Dinesen as storyteller, deliberately withdraws the camera a certain distance at the risk of dehumanizing her characters in order that the figures or characters themselves might be seen not as a mosaic of microscopic images but in a single glance as heroic archetypal wholes. Dinesen's passion for the artistically artificial and deliberately stylized world of the puppet-stage presents the view that the world of the theatre is a truer and more meaningful world than that of everyday life and that everyday life is enhanced and made richer when it rises to the heights of drama. The marionettes in Dinesen's tales are aware of some rôle in life that they should be playing or seeking to play. These rôles need not be happy ones, indeed, they may be harsh or tragic, but the characters must remain faithful to them. The use of the marionette image enables Dinesen to explore the nature of each "puppet" personality and to separate appearance from essence.

> For each one of us has his own reality to be respected before God, even when it is harmful to one's very self.[1]
>
> --Pirandello: Six Characters in Search of an Author.

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[1]Pirandello, p. 234.

Chapter IV

The Quest for Harmony

> 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![1]

Dinesen uses music and dance as images of harmony in her tales. It is often through these images that disparate elements of the story are shown to be a harmonious whole. Individually the characters and other components of the tale may be seen as disjointed segments just as music and dance themselves may appear defective when any element is isolated from the spectacle. The dance is not the performer alone. It embraces the choreographer, the composer, the musician, as well as costumes, music, instruments, everything which comprises the spectacle. Sometimes even the participants fail to recognize the interplay of parts that manifest harmony. When they do, they are, in part, blinded to the harmonious nature of the performance. Such characters are frustrated, unable by circumstance or disposition to discover their missing counterparts. On the other hand, what often appears as a discordant note is, in fact, the counterpoint to a Divine motif. The story of Calypso in "The Deluge at Norderney" serves as a good example of the quest for harmony or totality so characteristic of Dinesen's storytelling.

Count Seraphina's rejection of Calypso's womanhood almost succeeds

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[1] Last Tales, p. 4.

in convincing her of her invisibility. Unless she can create herself in her own human and female image, she is incomplete.[1]

> In this dark castle the annihilated girl would walk about. She was the loveliest thing in the place, and would have adorned the court of Queen Venus, who would very likely have made her keeper of her doves, dove as she is herself. But here she knew that she did not exist, for nobody ever looked at her. Where, my Lord, is music bred--upon the instrument or within the ear that listens?[2]

Calypso wanders around the palace in her isolation and discovers a large painting portraying centaurs and satyrs following, adoring, and embracing young girls of her own age. She identifies with the nymphs:

> She looked at them for a very long time. In the end she returned to her mirror and stood there contemplating herself within it. She had the sense of art of her uncle himself, and knew by instinct what things harmonized together. Now a hitherto unexperienced feeling of great harmony came upon her.[3]

Calypso realizes that to deny others and to deny herself is equivalent to the denial of life. She is able to transcend self-denial through others and to experience plenitude.

In a more tragic vein, Alkmene, in the story of that name, is unable to recognize the part that she plays in life's spectacle and lives an existence of religious penance and renunciation. To Alkeme, dancing and singing symbolize the freedom and potentiality of the imagination. Alkeme's free spirit, however, is held in check by forces outside her control.

Alkmene is adopted by the parson, Jens Jespersen and his wife, Gertrud. She is a child of striking, noble beauty and arrives at the

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[1] Landy, p. 401.

[2] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 45.

[3] Ibid., p. 48.

parsonage "as white as marble from cold and fatigue."[1] Gertrud is concerned about two things. First, the child had arrived without a shift and second, the child knows no fear. As the tale unfolds, the shift becomes a symbol for the restrictions the parson and his wife and later a young student, Vilhelm, place on Alkmene. Gertrud makes it "her first duty as a mother to teach her child, as in the fairy tales, to know fear."[2] Gertrud shortens the child's name to Mene and when one of the old pastors gets hold of the name Alkmene, he exclaims, "Mene mene tekel upharsin!"[3] Gertrud's and Jens' desire to control Alkmene is symbolized in this reference to Daniel 5: 25-28. Mene recalls the Aramaic warning of doom, and the words, which were once interpreted by Daniel to the Babylonian King, prophesy the outcome of the story. Alkmene's desire to dance and sing will never be realized. Alkmene might have brought Gertrud, Jens, and Vilhelm to an understanding of life and unity, yet they do not accept the revelation she offers and, as a result, they remain divided from one another, and from God.[4]

Gertrud's love becomes even more restrictive. Although Alkmene's movements are like those of a dancer, and she wishes to dance, this creative act is not permitted to her. In the parsonage all dancing is prohibited. To Gertrud "the act of the dance was somehow connected with the theatre and with the child's early years, of which she was very jealous, so that she would not hear or think of them. Alkmene, then,

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 198.

[2] Ibid., p. 199.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 181.

was never allowed to dance."[1] As a result, Alkmene attempts to run away. On the second occasion Vilhelm finds Alkmene pursuing a bank of gypsies and he accompanies her to the parsonage. On their way back they begin to sing. At this moment they are one in harmony with the landscape which serves as a setting for the dance. The singing symbolizes Alkmene's potential for freedom and stresses the importance of being true to one's nature. Vilhelm reminds Alkmene that Jens and Gertrud love her, but she does not want love on their terms. The love Jens and Gertrud offer is suffocating and restrictive. The final bond is sealed through Alkmene's confirmation in the church. She is not tied to her parents through moral obligation. Alkmene offers to run away with Vilhelm. She says to him, "We can go on the high roads together. And then . . . I shall do something, so that we shall not have to beg. I shall learn to dance."[2] Again, Alkmene points the reader to the potential for unity and harmony between human beings and nature. Vilhelm, her only true friend, abandons her for he cannot reveal his feelings and he dutifully leaves for his uncle's. When Vilhelm returns he cannot propose to Alkmene because he has repressed his feelings too long and is ever bound by a sense of duty to his uncle.

Alkmene asks Vilhelm to take her to Copenhagen where she reveals she wishes to witness the decapitation of a murderer. To Alkmene, the execution is "a warning to the people who may be near to doing the same thing themselves, and who will be warned by nothing else. Now the sight of this man's death will hold them from becoming like him."[3] She adds,

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 202.

[2] Ibid., p. 211.

[3] Ibid., p. 218.

"For God alone knows all, . . . And who can say of himself: of this deed I could never have been guilty?"[1] With the death of the parson, total responsibility for Gertrud rests with Alkmene. The one way she can rid herself of this burden is by killing Gertrud. Alkmene must witness this execution since in her imagination she has killed Gertrud and attendance at the spectacle is an atonement for sin. Vilhelm and Alkmene are divided in the fact of death. Although Vilhelm has supported her, he cannot find a word to say to Alkmene. When he at last suggests that they might have a life together, Alkmene says, "Nay, . . . I have learned now that there are so many ways of looking at things, You, you speak about my life now. But before, when it was time, you did not try to save it."[2] Vilhelm could have been the instrument of Alkmene's salvation. He had refused. She had offered to sing and to dance so that they could explore together the possibilities that life had to offer. He had refused. Although they see evil together, unlike Boris and Athena in "The Monkey" who were joined in their mutual guilt, Alkmene and Vilhelm are divided and no rebirth shall take place. Vilhelm's and Alkmene's conversation on their way back to the parsonage reveals that redemption is not possible. There will be no singing or dancing. The parts can no longer fit into the whole. To Vilhelm's declaration of love for Alkmene, Alkmene utters:

> Love? They all loved Alkmene. You did not help her. Did you not know, now, all the time, that they were all against her, all? . . . They were the strongest. It could not be otherwise when they were so good, when they were always right. Alkmene was alone. And when they died, and made her watch it, she could see no way out, but she must die, too. . . . And can

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 220.

you not, not even now say: Poor Alkmene?[1]

There is too much hate within Alkmene's and Vilhelm's expression of love. Alkmene, having been denied the rôle as one of the principal dancers, still sustains her crucial position in the dance. As a choreographer she unites potentially disjointed elements bringing them together into an artistic union. Even an execution in another city becomes part of the spectacle.

Sixteen years later Vilhelm visits Alkmene's farm. Alkmene is away but Gertrud is there. Gertrud and Alkmene have exchanged roles. Vilhelm feels that the sheep and landscape "have taken Gertrud back to her childhood and early youth . . . her daughter with her had taken the place of her mother."[2] Gertrud speaks of Alkmene's parsimony. The rich woman on the lonely farm had become a kind of myth to the country. Gertrud confides "that Mene was too sparing on her own behalf. She was kind to her mother; he must not but think so, but she was so hard on herself."[3] The closing words present us with Dinesen's powerful stroke of irony. "Vilhelm," Gertrud utters, "Do you know? She has got no shift on!"[4] The young Alkmene who could have sung and danced in an idyllic Eden in magical innocence is to serve out her existence as an old, lonely, parsimonious woman thought to be mad by her countrymen. Alkmene has become Gertrud in order to turn her murderous desire upon herself. The men in her life have failed Alkmene: her natural father,

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[1]Ibid., p. 221.

[2]Winter's Tales, p. 223.

[3]Ibid., p. 224.

[4]Ibid.

the old professor who cared for her as a very young child, her adopted father, and Vilhelm. Alkmene assumes the male rôle so that Gertrud now plays not only daughter but also female to Alkmene's male.[1] The desire to dance symbolizes Alkmene's desire to live. This desire turns in on itself and Alkmene's capacity to love transforms itself into the capacity to hate. In "Alkmene" the unity of experience is not located in the character, but in the knowledge of the narrator who, by showing unrealized alternatives, points the reader to the potential of unity.[2]

Alkmene recognizes that taking a lead rôle may in itself be the result of defective vision. The principal character is not any more important than other components in dramatic composition. Alkmene becomes a choreographer and comprehends the entire spectacle, devising the script, assigning the rôles, and arranging all components into an organic whole.

Although Alkmene's free spirit is held in check by external forces, the imagination of the De Coninck sisters in "The Supper at Elsinore" is thwarted by characteristics inherent in their natures. The De Coninck sisters in their youth "could sing duets like a pair of nightingales in a tree." Now these melancholics are subject to extremes of temperament, of despair and pride, and seem "unable to keep from one extremity as from the other."[4] At fifty-three Fanny's "birdlike lightness was caricatured into abrupt little movements in fits and starts. But she

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[1]Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 185.

[2]Landy, p. 401.

[3]Seven Gothic Tales, p. 218.

[4]Ibid., p. 219.

had her brilliant dark eyes still, and was, all in all, a distinguished, and slightly touching, figure."[1] The youngest sister, Eliza, is still strikingly lovely. As a youth, the way she danced and moved elicited an atmosphere of suspense. "If at this time she had indeed unfolded a pair of large white wings, and had soared from the pier of Elsinore up into the summer air, it would have surprised no one."[2] It is significant that Dinesen, in choosing music and dance to further explicate her philosophy of being in harmony with the play of the Creator, also uses bird imagery to suggest flight into the imaginative world. In the end, however, the sisters do nothing. As they grow older, the two seem to cut figures in stone. Eliza had a secret which had kept her alive. Her brother's ship had been named "La Belle Eliza".

> To this purpose--had [Eliza] grown up as lovely in Elsinore. A ship was in blue water, as in a bed of hyacinthe, in winds and warm air, her full white sails like to a bold chalk-cliff, baked by the sun, with much sharp steel in boards, not one of the broadswords or knives not red, and the name of the ship fairly and truly 'La Belle Eliza'.[3]

The idea of freedom is compared to dancing on the waves: "Oh, you burghers of Elsinore, did you see me dance the minuet once? To those same measures did I tread the waves."[4] Fanny implores her brother, Morten, to take her with him but "the chair between the sisters was empty and at the sight Fanny's head fell down on the table."[5] She looks at her sister dragging the streamers of her cap downward. Eliza lifts

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[1] Ibid., p. 238.

[2] Ibid., p. 243.

[3] Ibid., p. 261.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 269.

her pale eyes, stares at Fanny, and says, "To think . . . to think, with the halter around my neck, for one minute of 'La Belle Eliza'."[1] In the end the sisters are left with dreams. There is no dance or music for them. Whatever harmony they seek can be found only vicariously in the pleasures of others.

The lady in "The Cardinal's First Tale" is awakened to the ways in which seemingly disconnected parts comprise a Divine motif. The lady says to the Cardinal:

> 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.[2]

The Cardinal has shown her the image of herself and even in the expression of this gratitude, her voice takes on the quality of the voice of a violin like a bow across strings. The character here is not the musical motif but part of the instrumental process which unwillingly submits to the comprehensive genius of a master. The Cardinal through his tale illustrates that both artist and priest are mouthpieces of the Lord. "For the man of whom I speak . . . within the play and strife of this world, is the bow of the Lord."[3] The lady interprets the bow as the means by which an arrow strikes the heart. The Cardinal has used the word in a different sense, as a 'jeu-de-mots'. He has in mind:

> . . . that frail implement, mute in itself, which in the hand of the master will bring out all music that stringed

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[1] Ibid., p. 270.

[2] Last Tales, p. 4.

[3] Ibid., p. 22.

instruments contain, and be at the same time, medium and creator.[1]

The choreographer and the storyteller are one. The tale in the hand of a master storyteller becomes the medium and the instrument whereby all harmony is produced. When the artist or storyteller enters the world of imagination, he is in tune with God's creative design and becomes his mouthpiece.[2] Music pervades the inset story of "The Cardinal's First Tale" and serves as an analogy to both mind and spirit and the part each plays in the totality of existence.

At the beginning of the tale the young Benedetta is a girl of fifteen "with rich gifts of heart and mind, and magnificently innocent."[3] She is given in marriage to Prince Pompilis who is thrice her age. A child is born to them but the infant has only one eye. Doctors advise the Prince to allow a few years to pass before the birth of another child. The Prince retreats to a palatial villa, leaving his young wife in the hands of a maiden aunt while placing his son with a tenant family on another estate. The Princess, during the three years of separation from the Prince, learns to dream. She discovers the library which "became a bower above a fountain nymph, shaking down on its own the sweet fruits that her heart demanded."[4] Benedetta has a sure and sweet voice and the Prince appoints an old singing master for her. Benedetta "gave herself up to music, as she had given herself up to books; her nature at first listened, now it sang."[5] Benedetta's

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Whissen, Dinesen's Aesthetics, p. 41.

[3] Last Tales, p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 7.

imaginative spirit expresses itself through music. In music, she can discover "a reasonable human language, within which things could be truthfully expressed."[1] This ability to dream or to sing or to dance signifies a flight into the creative imagination. It is through hearing the voice of Marelli sing Metastasio's masterpiece, "Achilles in Sycros", that Princess Benedetta experiences a rebirth,

> . . . 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.[2]

The inevitable love which develops between the Princess and Marelli is "of a seraphic order and went to a tune."[3] All his life Marelli remained true to the dark-eyed lady of Venice. His voice changed. It was not just a celestial instrument but became the "voice of the human soul."[4] Once Prince Pompilio returns to his wife, Benedetta submits to the advice of her family physician and does not sing. "In order to be secure against temptation she dismisses her old singing-master."[5] The physical act of singing is not necessary, for her body and spirit are one with Marelli and the child conceived in her imagination is his. "The child to come was to be son of his mother, and the godson of the Muses."[6] She would call him Dionysis, "in reminiscence of the God of inspired ecstasy, for a name is a reality, and a child is made known to

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 8.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 9.

[6] Ibid., p. 11.

himself by his name."[1] Benedetta gives birth to twins, Dionysis and Atanasis, but six weeks after their birth, one of the infants perishes in a fire. The Prince declares the survivor to be Atanasis but Benedetta in her heart thinks him to be Dionysis, the child of Marelli. The theological and musical setting help to expound the idea that the castrato might, through a woman's love, be endowed with manhood and become the spiritual begetter of her child. The story is elevated into a poetic representation of the highest Western idealism, regarding the idealism of body and soul and the possibility of spiritual love.[2]

Musical harmony reflects a totality of experience for many of Dinesen's characters. The night that Baron von Brackel spends with the prostitute, Nathalie, in "The Old Chevalier," is a night of harmonious splendour. Nathalie's "voice was so merry, so pure, like the song of a bird in a bush, and of all things music at that time went most directly to my heart."[3] He had experienced a benediction from above. The union of body and spirit is again seen in theological and musical terms, "Her song increased the feeling I had, that something special and more than natural had been sent to me."[4] To the Baron, "She had a great sense of music . . . . Her voice knew more than she did herself."[5] Nevertheless the Baron's choreography disintegrates. His splendid vision of ideal womanhood and ascent into harmony crumble before Nathalie's mundane scenario. A twenty franc fee proves the more enduring image.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 27.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 92.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 100.

The Cardinal tells Miss Malin in "The Deluge at Norderney" that nothing is sanctified in life except by the play of the Lord. The play refers to the design of the story but it also applies to the music of the Lord. The Cardinal continues:

> You speak like a person who would pronounce half of the notes of the scale--say do, re, and mi--to be sacred, but fa, sol, la, and ti to be only profane, while, Madame, no one of the notes is sacred in itself, and it is the music, which is alone divine.[1]

In "The Deluge at Norderney" each character has devised a separate scenario. The principal vision is the one which can comprehend the disparate elements bringing them together into a single spectacle. To understand one part achieves little if anything. It is only by seeing the parts in relation to the whole that the components are truly comprehensible.

For Pellegrina Leoni in "Echoes" music is the mediator between earth and heaven. It provides her with an image of the connection between all things. Pellegrina has lost her singing voice in a theatre fire in Milan but like a phoenix she rises through the ashes to rediscover the pleasure of music through her pupil, Emmanuele. As she listens to the choir in a small village, "one single clear boy's voice took up the opening notes of the Magnificat. All alone, abandoned by the other voices and leaving them behind, it rose to the low ceiling of the church and reverberated from it."[2] Pellegrina's "body fell from her like a garment, because her soul went straight upwards with the tones. For the voice that gave them out was known to her. It was the voice of

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

[2] Last Tales, p. 166.

Young Pellegrina Leoni."[1] She is filled with immense joy. After a long time she cried in her heart, "O Sweet. Sweetness of life! Welcome back."[2] Her voice had taken abode in the breast of this peasant boy. Emmanuele was a brand plucked out of a fire for the child was found unhurt the morning following a mountain slide which had crushed his house with its stables and outbuildings. Pellegrina reflects that Emmanuele could have been born at the hour of the Opera fire in Milan. "Was, then, that fire in reality kindled by my own hand? And was the flaming death of the old Phoenix and the radiant birth of the young bird but one and the same thing?"[3] For Pellegrina the scenario is the projected reality of her vision. Resurrection is possible for her through the experience of music with Emmanuele. She, therefore, offers to tutor the boy free of charge. After the second lesson Pellegrina feels she is "like a virtuoso who takes up a unique instrument--he knows it all through; his fingers are one with its strings and he will not mistake it amongst a thousand, yet he cannot tell the volume of its capacity, but must be prepared for anything."[4] At the end of the third lesson Emmanuele tells Pellegrina that he knows who she is. These words which Pellegrina had dreaded for thirteen years lose their bitterness in the mouth of the child. Emmanuele's uncle, Luigi, had been Pellegrina's servant in Milan. Luigi had told Emmanuele, "People believed Pellegrina Leoni to have died, but it is not so, for she cannot die."[5] It is the

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[1]Ibid., p. 167.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 170.

[4]Ibid., p. 173.

[5]Ibid.

mythical identity in the singing voice that the two share that is immortal and not their separate naturalistic identities. Pellegrina loves the boy and they appear to become one in spirit.

> The boy abandoned himself to her tenderness as he did to her teaching, without surprise or reserve. In spite of the wildness of their embraces there was ever in them great dignity and deep mutual reverence; the giving and receiving was a mystic rite, and an initiation.[1]

Pellegrina comes to realize that she is guilty of literal, psychological and ritual cannibalism. The voice of the old seafarer, Niccolo, whom she had met her first evening in the village returns to her. Niccolo had survived at sea by eating the human flesh of his dead companion. Pellegrina had tried to show Emmanuele courage by pricking three of his fingertips till she drew blood: "She wiped the three drops of blood off of her small handkerchief, one by one, then, as she looked at the three little scarlet spots she lifted the handkerchief to her lips."[2] The next day Emmanuele does not appear for his lesson. Emmanuele rejects her and calls her a vampire. He cries out, "I thought that I should die if I were to leave you. Now I know that I should die if I went back to you."[3] His wail of farewell is "Dido's lament, Alceste's heroic sacrifice, in Pellegrina's voice."[4] He hurls a stone at her and she feels the warm dampness of her blood as it trickles over her forehead and her left eye. She has been feeding on him in order to restore her own youth and to resurrect the Pellegrina she had once known. Pellegrina tries to respond but "what should have been the roar of a

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[1] Ibid., p. 176.

[2] Ibid., p. 180.

[3] Ibid., p. 186.

[4] Ibid.

lioness was the hissing of a gander and a pain in her throat and chest."[1] The drawing of each other's blood is a symbol of the bond between them. Pellegrina had heard the echo of her own voice in Emmanuele's. They have mingled identities and Pellegrina learns that she cannot feed on other human beings. She realizes at last:

> Oh, my child, dear Brother and Lover. Be not unhappy, and fear not. It is all over between you an me. I can do you no good and I shall do you no harm. I have been too bold, venturing to play with human hands on an Aeolian harp. I beg pardon from the northwind and the southwind, from the east and westwind. But you are young. You will live to weigh more than I do, half as much again, and to prove yourself the Chosen and Elect; you may live to give to your town a priest-saint of her own. You will sing too. Only, dear heart, you will have to work hard to unlearn what you have learned from me--you will have to take great care so as not, when you are singing the gospel, to introduce effects.[2]

She will carry the mark of Cain for she has tried to destroy another human being. She dared to interfere with the harp of the Lord. She concludes, "And the voice of Pellegrina Leoni will not be heard again."[3] She cannot be the great diva ever again, and the hopelessness of her situation leads her to resume her nameless wanderings dealt with in "The Dreamers". Pellegrina is carrying out a part in an even larger spectacle, that of creation.

Although Pellegrina attempts to bury the voice and soul of Pellegrina Leoni, it is only through music that she can experience a resurrection of the spirit. Once her identity has been discovered by three of her lovers in "The Dreamers", Pellegrina must face death. Marcus Cocoza introduces her as Donna Pellegrina Leoni, the greatest

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[1] Ibid., p. 187.

[2] Ibid., p. 189.

[3] Ibid., p. 198.

singer in the world. She is nervous and reviews the second act of Don Giovanni with him. Pellegrina is named after the aristocratic Donna Anna in Mozart's musical opera Don Giovanni. The musical composition of Don Giovanni serves to reveal the principal characters under the stress of different emotions, and above all, their relationships to the irresistible Don. Don Giovanni's true nature is revealed through his relationships with the other characters in the opera.[1] Donna Pellegrina Leoni's true nature is also revealed through her associations with Marcus and the three gentlemen, each of whom has known her as different people.

Pellegrina's "whole body vibrated under her passion like the string of an instrument."[2] It is Pellegrina herself that Pellegrina Leoni can honour God. She cannot escape her fate. Just as Don Giovanni meets his fate through the intervention of some supernatural force, Pellegrina meets her fate through some force greater than her own. She is once more the great singer whose pure tones harmonize with those of her Creator and she faces death with hope and love.

In music the clearly articulated subordinate parts are tied by harmonic relationships and together they form a diversified but organic unity. Music and dance serves to explicate Dinesen's notions concerning harmony with the Creative Imagination and it best explains the idea that beyond the blank page, silence speaks. Perhaps silence is the grandest

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[1] Beckman C. Cannon et al. The Art of Music: A Short History of Musical Styles and Ideas (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1960), p. 327.

[2] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 352.

choreographer of them all.

> I set out the routine of my daily life to an orchestra.[1]
> -- Dinesen: Out of Africa.

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[1] Out of Africa, p. 25.

Chapter V

The Locked Caskets

> 'My Lord', said Fath, 'man and woman are two locked caskets, of which each contains the key to the other.'[1]
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> -- Dinesen: "A Consolatory Tale" from Winter's Tales.

In her tales Dinesen reveals self and other as two states of being that can co-exist as fruitful tension. Dinesen's characters face the challenge of widening the range of their own experience in order to understand that experience more fully. Experience alone, however, proves insufficient for the task of human understanding since Dinesen's stories also demand that characters appreciate the logic which governs the resistance of the world and limits the autonomy of the self. For most characters in the tales, awareness of oneself as both self and other depends partly upon sensitivity to the symbolic meaning of experience, and partly upon openness and vulnerability to forces outside the self. Because these two states of awareness are rarely balanced in individual characters, the tales allow characters to recognize the differing values of both symbols and experience in the quest for selfhood and otherness. It is the need to perceive the self in both rôles, as a subjective autonomous individual and as an objective part of the whole, that seems to motivate many of Dinesen's characters.

The tension between the self and other evidenced in Dinesen's portrayal of the Count in both "The Roads Round Pisa" and "The Poet"

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 308.

does provide for fruitful co-existence. Count Augustus von Schimmelmann is able to perceive other characters as objects in a design but he cannot himself discover the rôle as other that will complete his own identity. He is preoccupied with mirrors and reflections and others' opinions of him but he does not expand his limited sense of himself and is therefore never awakened to the truth that he claims he seeks. The Count has, as a young student, the habit of looking at himself in the looking-glasses, and has had his own rooms decorated with mirrors. He looks into the glass to see what he is like.

> A glass tells you the truth about yourself. With a shudder of disgust he remembered how he had been taken, as a child, to see the mirror-room of the Panoptikon in Copenhagen, where you see yourself reflected, to the right and to the left, in the ceiling and even on the floor, in a hundred glasses each of which distorts and perverts your face and figure in a different way--shortening, lengthening, broadening, compressing their shape, and still keeping some sort of likeness--and thought how much this was like real life. So your own self, your personality and existence are reflected within the mind of each of the people whom you meet and live with, into a likeness, a caricature of yourself, which still lives on and pretends to be, in some way, the truth about you.[1]

Augustus tries to predict and determine in advance the kinds of reflections he will see in the mirrors, and in the minds of others. He fails to see that it is from the distorted and perverted image of himself that an unsuspected truth may be revealed to him. Augustus remains with symbols and cannot achieve a balance between the symbolic and experiential quest for otherness. Although the Count searches for truth and says "Truth, like time, is an idea arising from, and dependent upon, human intercourse,"[2] he is not open and sensitive to forces

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 166.

[2] Ibid., p. 165.

outside himself. This notion of "truthfulness," like the notion that life is a mosaic, reflects a sense of human existence that is fundamentally social and reciprocal. Although Augustus consciously seeks validation of his existence by examining his reflections in mirrors, in the companionship of his wife, and in the eyes of his friends, he is never ready to expose himself to the hazards of living through experience.[1] The Count is a catalyst for action but never participates in the action himself. At the end of "The Roads Round Pisa," his situation has not changed: "Augustus took a small mirror from his pocket. Holding it in the flat of his hand, he looked thoughtfully into it."[2]

The new Augustus we meet in "The Poet" is older but still a man with a melancholic disposition. As time passed one thing had become as good to him as another; "Now, later in life, he had accepted the happiness of life in a different way, not as he really believed it to be, but, as in a reflection within a mirror, such as others saw it."[3] He now accepts the artificialities of life and uses them to suit his purpose for how others perceive him becomes an acceptable substitute for the things of real value to him. Even the jealousy of his wife is useful to him. He depends upon her attitude and "Like to the Emperor in his new clothes, he was walking on, dignified, his life a continual procession, entirely successful in every respect except perhaps to

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[1] Janet Handler Burstein, "Two Locked Caskets: Selfhood and 'Otherness' in the Work of Isak Dinesen," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 20, No. 1 (Spring 1978), p. 618.

[2] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 216.

[3] Ibid., p. 380.

himself."[1] Augustus has long since given up his artistic ambitions, but he was still a shrewd critic of all objects of art. His attitude toward art helps to shape his vision and to arrive at the otherness in those around him. He thus achieves a distance from experience that is usually accorded only the narrators in Dinesen's tales.[2] Ironically, Augustus can never perceive the other in himself and must remain content to experience it in his dreams. He takes hashish and looks upon opium as "an insinuating oriental servant who throws a veil over the world for you, and by experimenting you can arrive at the power of choosing the figures within the web of the veil."[3] He avoids the risk that his friend, the councilor, displays as proof of his own exposure to experience and turns from life itself to dwell in the symbolic mirror of the mind's eye.[4]

Baron von Brackel in "The Old Chevalier" illustrates what happens when a character who, like Augustus in "The Roads Round Pisa," immerses himself in symbols. The Baron denies individual selfhood to the prostitute with whom he spends a night. He sees her in symbolic terms and thus denies her her humanity. Although each in some way had shared in the destiny of the other, the Baron sees that "This was the end of the play."[5] He realizes, "It was I who was out of character, as I sat there in silence, with all the weight of the cold and real world upon me knowing that I should have to answer her or I might, even within

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[1] Ibid., p. 381.

[2] Burstein, p. 618.

[3] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 388.

[4] Burstein, p. 620.

[5] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 102.

these few seconds pass twenty francs on to her."[1] The old chevalier longs nostalgically for the mysteriously bustled and draped figures of the women of his youth but after an escape from death in the hands of his mistress, and a single night of love with a prostitute, he will be a stranger to the love of women.[2] Fifteen years after the encounter with the stranger, he visits a friend, a painter in Paris. The artist shows him the prettiest thing that he has in his studio. It is a skull from which he is drawing. The skull appears familiar to the old Baron: "In those few seconds I was taken back to my room in the Place François, with the silk fringes and the heavy curtains, on a rainy night of fifteen years before.[3] Because he has valued the symbolic over the individual woman, his search for love ends in the contemplation of a skull. He remains ever isolated from the richness of expérience that the love for another one may offer to him.

Augustus reveals that symbols help to illuminate meaning in the world of others, but that self-image must be exposed to experiential risk before he can discover the other in himself. Charlie Despard, a writer who figures in two of the Winter's Tales, illustrates the attempt to achieve a balance between the symbolic and the experiential quest for otherness.[4] In "The Young Man with the Carnation" we see Charlie becoming aware of and making peace with a self he has yet to discover, and with the truth of both his own autonomous desires and his rôle as other in the larger world. At first Charlie rejects the symbols of

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[1]Ibid., p. 103.

[2]Burstein, p. 624.

[3]Seven Gothic Tales, p. 107.

[4]Burstein, p. 620.

experience that constitute his material as a writer. He reflects on his own unhappy state as he beholds the radiant face of the young man with the carnation:

> It was no wonder that God had ceased to love him, for he had, from his own free will, exchanged the things of the Lord--the moon, the sea, friendship, fights--for the words that describe them.[1]

Unlike Count Augustus, Charlie wishes to abandon the satisfaction of interpreting symbols for the more immediate satisfactions of the experiential world. Charlie ultimately renews his dedication and symbolic truth by turning towards the things of the Lord that speak to him. Down by the harbour he stands upon the wharf and gazes at the ships:

> The hulls loomed giant-like in the wet night. They carried things in their bellies, and were pregnant with possibilities; they were porters of destinies, his superiors in every way, with the water on all sides of them . . . . As he looked, it seemed to him that a kind of sympathy was going forth from the big hulks to him; they had a message for him, but at first he did not know what it was. Then he found the word; it was superficiality.[2]

The ships in the harbour reveal symbolic meanings to him. They seem to speak to him of the virtues and power of the hollow, superficial "word". Charlie discovers the meaning of his loveless marriage in the waterfront whore who gives him a shilling's worth of love "as he took her hand, pulled down her old glove and pressed the palm, rough and clammy as fish-skin to his lips and tongue."[3] As the voice of God explains at the end of the tale, Charlie's writing serves the purpose of the Lord, and in exchange for that rôle Charlie will have to be content

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 13.

[3] Ibid., p. 23.

with a shilling's worth of love and no more. According to Janet Burstein:

> In the eyes of God, and eventually in his own eyes as well, Charlie accepts the restrictions which his role in the mosaic imposes; instead of the pleasure sought eternally by the unenlightened "self", he will be given the reward of understanding his identity as both self and "other": a half-successful seeker after love, and a reluctant but effective wielder of symbols in the service of God.[1]

In "A Consolatory Tale" Dinesen shows us the poet's necessary acceptance of his identity as both subject and object in Charlie's description of the writer's dependence upon his audience. Charlie at first laments his rôle to his friend Aeneas Snell:

> All human relationships have in them something monstrous and cruel. But the relation of the artist to the public is among the most monstrous. Yes, it is as terrible as marriage.[2]

Charlie continues that much against the artist's will, the artist and the public are dependent upon one another for their existence. In anguish he cries, "We are, each of us, awaiting the consent, or the co-operation of the other to be brought into existence at all."[3] By reading the works of art the public gives them being. Every work of art, then, is both an idealization and a perversion, a caricature of itself. When the public acclaims a work of art to be a masterpiece, it becomes a masterpiece, and when it denounces it as worthless, it becomes worthless. The relationship between artist and public is analogous to the relationship between the Lord and Job. Charlie feels that perhaps the Lord is more dependent upon Job than Job upon the Lord but still,

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[1] Burstein, p. 621.

[2] Winter's Tales, p. 289.

[3] Ibid., p. 290.

"In the end the two are reconciled."[1] The symbolic import of this relationship, as Charlie learns, lies in the ability of each to serve as reflector of the other. Job validates the subjective self of the Lord by bowing in acknowledgment of the Lord's creative power. In similar manner, an audience authenticates the self of the artist. Conversely, in his resistance to the Lord's will, as in an audience's rejection of the artist's work, Job reveals to the Lord his otherness. Charlie learns to understand the mutual reflectiveness of both parties to the relationship. In the words of the beggar in the interpolated tale, of Sultan and slave, life and death, man and woman, you and I, Charlie accepts that each of these "locked caskets" reveals and discovers its own identity partly by way of symbolic reflection.[2]

For Dinesen the fruitful tension between identity and rôle cannot exist unless one recognizes the limits of one's own power. Augustus is denied even a shilling's worth of happiness because he will not risk uncontrollable reflections which might distort the preconceived idea of the image he has of himself. Charlie Despard, on the other hand, takes the risk and yields himself to unflattering yet truthful self-reflections. Adam in "Sorrow-acre" accepts the tragic implications of symbolic power in the world, and thus can understand his predestined place in it.

The price of failure in the quest for otherness is a high as the price of success. The De Coninck sisters in "The Supper at Elsinore" never break free of the cold, sterile lives that reflect only those fragments of themselves that they willingly display to the world. They

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[1] Ibid., p. 292.

[2] Burstein, p. 621.

live out their lives in the cage of a partial selfhood. Miss Malin, however, in "The Deluge at Norderney" manages to achieve both dignity and self-satisfaction through a self-image rooted in fantasy rather than fact as the fanatical virgin of her youth becomes in old age the lascivious temptress.

Calypso in "The Deluge at Norderney" does succeed in escaping her cage-like existence. Calypso is first introduced as a small oriental doll and listens so intently to Miss Malin's tales about her as though she were hearing it for the first time. As long as Calypso was a child, her uncle, the Count Seraphina, took pleasure in her company but as she grew older and began to blossom into womanhood, the Count realized that she would never become a boy, "Her girl's beauty was her sentence of death."[1] Although she believes that she is not worth looking at, she still feels in her heart that she does exist. She passes the days in loneliness but with an inner fierce passion and at certain times she could "have put fire to the castle." Miss Malin explains that Calypso's task was a difficut one, "She had to create herself."[2] She had for so long been exposed to falsifiers of truth that she began to see herself through the eyes of her perceivers. She decides to cut her hair and chop off her breasts. With hatchet in hand, she walks through the house to a room in which she knew there was a looking-glass on the wall. She strips down to her waist and fixes her eyes on the glass. She sees a big figure behind her own. She turns and sees an enormous old painting on the wall. It represents a scene out of the life of nymphs, fauns, satyrs and centaurs. To her it "was a true representation of beings

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 44.

[2] Ibid., p. 46.

actually existing."[1] The Count had never permitted animals on the estate, thus Calypso had developed a passionate tenderness for animals and to her these animals were sweeter than human beings and possessed most of their characteristics. She returns to her mirror "and stood there contemplating herself within it. She had the sense of art of her uncle himself, and knew by instinct what things harmonized together. Now a hitherto unexperienced feeling of a great harmony came upon her."[2] She spends the night in the room and dons one after another the clothes and accessories that had once belonged to her great grandmother. Calypso discovers her sexuality and in her determination to perceive her womanhood, she escapes from the castle into Miss Malin's care.

If Calypso can no longer tolerate nonexistence, Jonathan Maersk can no longer stand his existence. He had noble blood for he has learned that he is the illegitimate son of a great nobleman. As much as he tries to escape his nobility, and his image as a man of fashion, the more he demonstrates it. He becomes Timon of Athens later known as Assens after the seaport town on the island of Funen where he was born. He is noted for his melancholy yet it is this very melancholy that becomes the fashion. Miss Malin sees him as the man for Calypso. He is seen only in his worldly or external aspect and not in himself. Calypso's problem is that no one could see her in her external aspect and therefore nobody could see her in herself.[3] One complements the other and their symbolic union in marriage signifies the reciprocity of human intercourse.

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[1] Ibid., p. 47.

[2] Ibid., p. 48.

[3] Langbaun, The Gayety of Vision, p. 61.

"A Sailor Boy's Tale" emphasizes the interdependence of man and woman in its simplest form. In this tale two women enable a boy to become a man, first by inspiring him to autonomous activity, then by awakening his latent love of woman. As he rescues a female falcon entangled in the rigging of his ship, Simon discovers both the sweetness of independent action and the joy of harmonious integration with the natural world.

> He was scared as he looked down, but at the same time he felt that he had been ordered up by nobody, but that this was his own venture, and this gave him a proud, steadying sensation, as if the sea and the sky, the ship, the bird and himself were all one.[1]

The young Simon discovers that his desire for Nora, a girl whom he has met, makes the embrace of other men repulsive to him. A Russian sailor detains Simon and the odious sensation of male bodily warmth and the bulk of the Russian lead him to madness. After he murders the sailor, an old Lapp woman by the name of Sunniva saves his life. She reveals to him that she is also the falcon whom the boy rescued in the rigging. She returns his kindness:

> So you are a boy, . . . who will kill a man rather than be late to meet your sweetheart? We hold together, the females of the earth. I shall mark your forehead now, so that the girls will know of that, when they look at you, and they will like you for it.[2]

Simon has gained the wisdom of experience and, Sunniva, in the transformation of the mark of Cain, illuminates him to the possibilities of risk and satisfaction life offers.[3]

In "Peter and Rosa" the male/female relationship serves as a

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 91.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

[3] Burstein, p. 624.

metaphor for the tension between the self and other. Peter's existence is whole only in its relationship to that of Rosa. Peter has always longed for adventure, for his imaginative spirit has been bound to the sea. His uncle, the parson, holds him to his books. Within the house at Søllerød "death was zealously kept in view and lectured upon, and Peter, in his survey of the future, also took the sailor's end into consideration."[1] In Rosa he entertains the prospect "of opening his mind to a friend, who would not interrupt him or laugh at him, rendered him as pensive and grateful as when he had listened to the trekking bird."[2] He climbs through Rosa's window and lies down beside her on the bed. Peter confides to Rosa that he has annihilated God, for he says: "But I have crossed his plans instead. . . I have worked against him."[3] He rejects the rôle that the parson has designed for him and decides to run away. He enlists Rosa's help. The "Esperance" is docked at Elsinore. He knows that the parson would never let him go so Rosa will say that she wishes to visit her Godmother there and wants Peter to accompany her. Peter is unafraid of death and states that death at sea would be grand. There is no physical union between Peter and Rosa but the mystery of human intercourse is revealed to him. Peter leaves Rosa's room "in such a state of rapture and bliss that he might as well have gone the other way, heavenwards, to those well-known stars which were not hidden behind the mist."[4] His flight and future, on the one hand, and Rosa, on the other, seemed incompatible, "But tonight all

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 250.

[2] Ibid., p. 259.

[3] Ibid., p. 261.

[4] Ibid., p. 265.

elements and forces of his being were swept together into an unsurpassed harmony."[1] Rosa symbolizes a female deity of the sea, powerful, foamy, and universal. This experience of human fellowship changes Peter's perception of himslf, of the universe around him, and of the girl herself, "In regard to the world, mankind in general and his own fate, he was from now on the challenger and the conqueror."[2] His soul calls out to Rosa, "Thou shalt not let me go except I bless thee." These very words lifted from Out of Africa suggest that once a character is aware of an overall design and the part he must play in it, he is ready to be released from life's limitations and is prepared to meet death with dignity. Peter experiences a oneness with Rosa and the world and it is this totality of existence that has been revealed to him. Dinesen herself experienced the oneness with the people on her farm for they shared a single purpose:

> It was during those long days that we were all of us merged into a unity, so that on another planet we shall recognize one another, and the things cry to each other, the cuckoo clock and my books to the lean-fleshed cows on the lawn and the sorrowful old kikuyus: 'You also were there. You also were a part of the Ngong farm.'[3]

In similar manner, that singleness of purpose which Peter and Rosa share enables Peter to give of himself and through the generosity of his being, he feels one with eternity: "It was something more absolute which he meant to yield up to her; it was himself, the essence of his nature, and at the same time it was eternity."[4] This offering to her of

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 266.

[3] Out of Africa, p. 236.

[4] Ibid., p. 266.

his being would be the utmost triumph and sacrifice on his part, "he could not go away until it had been consummated."[1] Rosa remembers when she had distrusted Peter and had meant to refuse him access to her own secret world. Towards morning Rosa has had a terrible dream, "She tried to chase off the dream by turning to the world of realities, and to her daily life."[2] She grows very pale at the thought of Peter's escape to the sea. Rosa has been content to live in her own world but this is no longer possible since she has allowed Peter to enter into it. In her close association with Peter, Rosa learns that she is capable of compassion but also through him, she discovers another part of herself that is capable of treachery. She has betrayed Peter's trust and has informed the parson of his intentions:

> The name of Judas stuck in her ear, and kept on ringing there, with terrible force. Yes, Judas was her equal, the only human being to whom she could really turn for sympathy or advice; he would show her her way.[3]

At this moment of betrayal she binds herself with her "room, with the prison, with the grave, and had closed the doors of them on her."[4] Peter and Rosa arrive at Elsinore and spot the "Esperance" which is "a large floe of ice, fifty feet long, and separated from the ice on which they stood by a long crevice."[5] Peter cries: "Are you coming aboard with me?"[6] She agrees and within the next moment a great calm came upon

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Winter's Tales, p. 268.

[3] Ibid., p. 275.

[4] Ibid., p. 276.

[5] Ibid., p. 281.

[6] Ibid.

her, "That fate, which all her life she had dreaded, and from which today there was no escape--that, she saw now, was death. It was nothing but death."[1] She acquiesces to destiny: "She did not think much; she stood up straight and grave, accepting her destiny."[2] In death, dream and reality, Peter and Rosa become one and are consumed by the sea, "The current was strong; they were swept down, in each other's arms, in a few seconds."[3] The resolution of the tale allows both Peter and Rosa to satisfy their desire for adventure at sea and to discover unexpected courage and tenderness and daring in themselves that lend dignity to their deaths and enable them to become eloquent symbols of the mutually illuminating power of love.[4]

Beyond the metaphor of young love Dinesen explores the characters' sexuality to suggest the more mature awareness that individuals belong not only to themselves and to each other, but also to a vast design that embraces God and the whole human community.[5] Lise's vulnerability to sexual violation in "The Ring" shatters the illusion of self-sufficiency that Dinesen appears to associate with sexual innocence.

It had not been a long time ago that Lise had played with dolls and now she "again lived through an enchanting and cherished experience: one was doing everything gravely and solicitously, and all the time one knew one was playing."[6] Lise is innocence itself in her white muslin

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[1] Ibid., p. 282.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 285.

[4] Burstein, p. 627.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Anecdotes of Destiny, p. 236.

frock as she accompanies her husband of one week across the meadows to the sheep field. He must tend to a problem so he tells Lise to go home ahead of him and he will catch up with her. Distressed by this separation, she, like a young innocent lamb herself, gambols through the grove and through the shrubbery to rediscover a glade she had explored earlier, "If today she could find that spot again she would stand perfectly still there, hidden from all the world."[1] In her adventure, she confronts a stranger in the woods, a fugitive whose "face was bruised and scratched, his hands and wrists stained with dark filth."[2] She has never before been exposed to danger. Not a word passed between them for the man raises the point of the knife until at her throat. The only object of value is her wedding ring which she offers him: "He slowly reached out his hand to hers, his finger touched hers, and her hand was steady at the touch. But he did not take the ring."[3] It falls to the ground. It rolls toward him and he kicks it away. He bends and picks up her handkerchief and "wrapped the tiny bit of cambric round the blade"[4] and thrusts the knife into its sheath. He looks into her face: "They remained like that, she knew not how long, but she felt that during that time something happened, things were changed."[5] He vanishes and is gone. She is free. The fugitive and the girl fully articulate Dinesen's philosophy that otherness is an essential part of one's identity, that it does not negate the self but makes it aware of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 239.

[2] Ibid., p. 240.

[3] Ibid., p. 242.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

meaning of existence. The experience with the fugitive changes Lise's vision of the world: "She beheld the man before her as she would have beheld a forest ghost: the apparition itself, not the sequels of it, changes the world to the human who faces it."[1]

She meets the alien eyes of the fugitive but it is in his eyes that she perceives a different image of herself. The symbolic sexual encounter with the stranger suggests a defilement of the spirit and is juxtaposed against the physical consummation of the marriage with her husband. As she utters, "My wedding ring," she conceives the true meaning of the words, "With this lost ring she had wedded herself to something. To what? To poverty, to persecution, total loneliness. To the sorrows and the sinfulness of this earth."[2] She has been exposed to the world and no longer can she play at existence for true existence had been revealed to her. Her husband kisses her hand but, "It was cold, not quite the same hand as he had last kissed."[3] Whereas before she "breathed in perfect freedom because she could never have any secret from her husband"[4] she claims now that she has no idea at all where she may have lost the ring. She must live within the confines of the ring, "and what therefore God has joined together let man no put asunder."[5] Lise's perception of self and world has changed. She is illuminated to the symbolic enclosure of her married state and to the bond of fidelity and her husband.

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[1]Ibid., p. 241.

[2]Ibid., p. 244.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 235.

[5]Ibid., p. 244.

"The Pearls" is another tale which further elucidates the reciprocity of love within marriage. For Alexander and Jensine marriage is "a love affair, and the honeymoon, technically, an idyll."[1] The couple begin their honeymoon in Norway where Jensine is quite content to begin married life in the wilderness alone with her husband. Although Jensine has believed herself a daring spirit in the wildly romantic landscape, overwhelmed by the unknown and formidable forces within her own head, she longs for support. She realizes that her husband, Alexander, cannot help her, "he was a human being entirely devoid, and incapable, of fear."[2] She must teach her husband to fear. To do this she must first try to scare him with the possibility of losing her. Therefore, she becomes more reckless than he in their climbs. She would stand on the edge of a precipice and ask him its depth. She would balance herself across narrow, brittle bridges and venture out in a small boat during a thunderstorm. These darings did not have upon Alexander the effect that she had hoped. He is enchanted and surprised at the change within her. In quiet moments of reflection she had vowed never to have children: "As long as I must strain myself against him in this way, we will never have a child."[3] She decides that upon her return to Copenhagen she will take a lover: "Then she was angry with herself, and with all women, and she pitied him, and all men."[4] All attempts to conquer him have failed. The only time she has known Alexander to foresee disaster is in his admonition to stop twisting the

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[1] Winter's Tales, p. 107.

[2] Ibid., p. 109.

[3] Ibid., p. 112.

[4] Ibid., p. 111.

string of pearls he had given her and which had belonged to his grandmother: "Were the pearls, she wondered, a token of victory, or of submission?"[1] Jensine does break the string of pearls. There are fifty-two pearls on the string and Alex picks up each one. His grandfather had given his grandmother fifty pearls to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary and in addition provided one more on each birthday. Jensine brings the pearls to the shoemaker in the village who will restring the pearls for her. He had done this once before for an English lord and his lady.

On Jensine's way back to the inn she encounters a man in black. She discovers from this stranger that the shoemaker had once aspired to become a poet but he had been hard pressed by destiny and had to take up a shoemaker's trade. The stranger questions Jensine about their wedding trip and realizes it must have been Jensine who had desired to visit the mountains that are high and dangerous: "That he might be the bird, which upwards soars, and you the breeze, which carries him along."[2] Jensine learns later that the stranger is Herr Ibsen who was once an apothecary but who has been writing plays for the theatre in [illegible]gen, Ibsen's insight into Jensine's nature is one of which she herself is still ignorant. Jensine will achieve some insight into her own nature only when she dares to risk and to experience the unknown possibilities in life. Like Herr Ibsen and the shoemaker, she must come to terms with her own destiny. The pearls will help her to do this. Although her husband urges her to count them, she at first refuses. Since Denmark is on the brink of war, an article she reads in the Berlingske Tidinde

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[1]Ibid., p. 113.

[2]Ibid., p. 116.

provides her with courage: "The moment is grave to the nation. But we have trust in our just cause, and we are without fear."[1] She counts the pearls and to her amazement they number fifty-three. She discovers that one pearl is worth as much as all the others put together. She must get to the bottom of the mystery and writes to the shoemaker. She cannot find a truthful answer, for her husband, when they speak of war, asks if his death in battle might be a consolation to her; "To be a hero's widow . . . would be just the part for you, my dear."[2] She finds she cannot articulate to him her feelings about the war. The shoemaker's reply to her letter is her moment of truth. As she looks into the looking-glass above the mantlepiece, "she met the grave eyes of her own image."[3] Her eyes are severe and they echo the thought she had once had of her husband when he had related a story about one of his experiences in life: "You are really a thief, or if not that, a receiver of stolen goods, and no better than a thief."[4] The pearl was from the English lady's necklace which the shoemaker had once restrung. He had forgotten to put one pearl in and when he found it, he decided to add it to Jensine's necklace. The shoemaker wishes her luck, "And you may wear the pearl long, with a humble heart, a firm trust in the Lord God, and a friendly thought of me, who am old, here up at Odda."[5] Jensine realizes through the image of herself in the mirror that, "It is all over. Now I know that I shall never conquer these people, who know

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[1] Ibid., p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 121.

[3] Ibid., p. 122.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

neither care nor fear. It is as in the Bible; I shall bruise their heel, but they shall bruise my head."[1] Alexander, the world, the war, and the realization that she had been made a fool of does not matter. The pearls remain steadfast, symbolic of some great importance which had intruded upon her existence within her marriage and within the world. She can cry in ecstasy for in a hundred year's time the pearls will still be there. She can now truly climb the heights. She can move from the mirror now and face life together with Alexander. Through his view of the world, she has perceived hers: "From their window the husband and wife looked down the street."[2]

This crucial reciprocity in the relationship between individuals extends to the interdependence between individuals and the community. Lady Flora Gordon in "The Cardinal's Third Tale," however, is a character able to burst the confines of her isolation and realize the necessity of communion with others. At first she fears any relationship with others and rejects love, but she is given a sign of self-discovery. Her syphilitic condition forces her to realize she is one within a fellowship of the world and only now can she truly fulfill a rôle for which she has been intended:

> Strange and wonderful it is to consider how in such community we are bound to foreigners whom we have never seen and to dead men and women whose names we have never heard and shall never hear, more closely even than if we were all holding hands.[3]

This relationship to mankind is Lady Flora's salvation. Through her fellowship with the people at the bath of Monte Scalzo she is changed:

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[1] Ibid., p. 123.

[2] Ibid., p. 124.

[3] Last Tales, p. 88.

". . . there was a new joviality, a mirthful forebearance with the benevolence toward the frailty of humanity."[1]

This concept of interdependence permeates Isak Dinesen's tales. It invites its own acceptance as the only real and genuine principle of order in human existence and enables Dinesen's characters to enjoy a more generous world. The image of the locked caskets serves as a motif for understanding the reciprocity of relationships in the world of Dinesen's fiction.

> Yes, but haven't you yet perceived that it isn't possible to live in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?[2]
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> -- Pirandello: Six Characters in Search of an Author.

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[1] Ibid., p. 96.

[2] Pirandello, p. 274.

Chapter VI

The Law of Divine Proportion

> These three tiny toy figures are placed to mark three corners of a rectangle, in which the width is to the length as the length to the sum of the two. These, you know, are the proportions of the golden section.[1]
>
> -- Dinesen: "Of Hidden Thoughts and of Heaven" from Last Tales.

Isak Dinesen goes beyond the explanation of reconciling polarities as seen through the image of the locked caskets. She further explicates the story as a divine art by presenting a third and complicating force, that of the sinner brought face to face with himself in moments of despair. A character's search for self-definition leads him through the anguish of guilt, despair, retribution, and the joyful realization of the necessity of keeping in one's heart the law of Divine Proportion. In order to realize the Infinite or Absolute, he must first confront the finite. By renouncing the finite, the character ultimately gains both the finite and the Infinite.

Angelo Santasilia in three of the stories of Last Tales learns to accept in his heart the divine law of proportion. "The Cloak" begins with the arrest of the great old master sculptor, Leonidas Allori. He is condemned to death for high treason. While most of his students weep and wish for revenge, one disciple, Angelo Santisilia, whom Leonidas loves, seems neither to have heard nor to have understood the terrible news. Angelo's schoolfellows take his silence to mean the expression of

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[1] Last Tales, p. 62.

infinite sorrow. The true reason is that Angelo is passionately in love with Leonidas' wife. It is reasonable to him that his mistress should be the wife of his teacher: "He had loved no human being as he had loved Leonidas Allori; no other human being had he at any time whole-heartedly admired. He felt that he had been created by the hands of his master, as Adam by the hands of the Lord; from these same hands he was to accept his mate."[1] Leonidas himself brought Angelo and his wife, Lucrezia, closer together. While making Lucrezia pose for his immortal Psyche with the Lamp, Leonidas called on Angelo to try his hand at the same task and pointed out "the beauties in the living, breathing and blushing body before them."[2] Leonidas is preoccupied with the possibility of his own death, for he realizes he is being watched and followed. Not wishing to alarm Lucrezia he sends her away to the house of a friend on the pretext that she looks pale and feverish. Lucrezia wends word to Angelo and the two discuss plans for a meeting at the farm, "in Lucrezia's room next to the studio where the master was working, and with the door to it open."[3] Angelo would approach the house unseen, throw a pebble at the windowpane and Lucrezia would open the window to him. For his nocturnal journey young Angelo had bought for himself a large fine cloak of violet goat's wool with brown embroidery. The government was resolved to condemn such a dangerous man as Leonidas to death. Orders were given that he be shot within the week. The old sculptor asks to be paroled for twelve hours in order to say goodbye to his wife. His plea is at first denied but later granted. Conditions

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[1] Ibid., p. 28.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

[3] Ibid., p. 31.

are set for his parole. Angelo, whom Leonidas calls 'son', is to replace him in prison for the twelve hours and that "it will be made clear to both the old and the young artist that at the expiration of the twelve hours, at all events an execution will be carried out in the prison yard."[1] The reader is not quite certain whether or not Leonidas has heard the conspiracy of Angelo and Lucrezia. That he has is suggested in the sermon he gives to Angelo on faithfulness:

> I cannot explain to you--for the time is now but short--how, or by what path, I have come to understand in full God's infinite faithfulness toward me. Or how I have come to realize the fact that faithfulness is the supreme divine factor by which the universe is governed. I know that in my heart I have always been faithful to this earth and to this life. I have pleaded for liberty tonight in order to let them know that our parting itself is a pact.[2]

Leonidas gazes at Angelo and adds, "And you, my son, you, whom I thank for your faithfulness throughout our long happy years--and, tonight--be you also faithful to me."[3] Angelo realizes that this is the night of the pre-arranged rendezvous. Leonidas explains his plans to take the mountain road, to approach Lucrezia's window, to throw a pebble against the windowpane. Lucrezia has been his strength. He says that after this last meeting with her his eyes will be closed. "I shall have no need of these eyes of mine. And It shall not be the black stone, nor the gun barrels, that I shall leave behind in these my dear, clear eyes when I quit them."[4] He asks Angelo for his cloak. He reminds him of the time when they had lost their way in the mountains and how Leonidas

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[1] Ibid., p. 32.

[2] Ibid., p. 35.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 37.

had removed his cloak to keep Angelo warm. Angelo had awakened in the morning to cry out, "Father, this night you have saved my life."[1] The cloak which saves Angelo's life now becomes a symbol of his treachery. Leonidas' cloak saved Angelo's life and now the cloak will save Angelo's life again in a spiritual sense, because he will be unable to commit his sin of passion with Lucrezia. Angelo is left alone with his thoughts; "From this world of light, which his father had once opened to him, he was now cast down into darkness."[2] He is completely alone, for to him unfaithfulness is equated with annihilation. For Angelo:

> The word 'unfaithful' was now flung on him from all angles, like a shower of flints on the man who is being stoned, and he met it on his knees, with hanging arms, like a man stoned. But when at last the shower slackened, and after a silence the words 'the golden section' rose and echoed, subdued and significant, he raised his hands and pressed them against his ears.[3]

Angelo's anguish is heightened further by three dreams. In the first two he can see the big figure in the cloak walking up the path, stopping and bending down for a pebble and throwing it against the pane. He sees Lucrezia in the man's arms and he awakes with a deadly pain of physical jealousy, with all the reverence for his master gone. In his third dream, he follows the wanderer with a knife. He plunges the knife first into his master's heart, then into Lucrezia's. Thus he passes the night. The master returns. Angelo hopes that Leonidas will approach him with closed eyes, "The hand which--as it put the cloak round him--rested against Angelo's neck forced his head a little forward, the large eyelids trembled and lifted, and the master looked into the eyes of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 38.

[2] Ibid., p. 39.

[3] Ibid.

disciple. But the disciple could never afterward remember or recall the look. A moment later he felt Allori's lips on his cheek."[1] The cloak once again binds the two as one. The passing on of the cloak symbolizes the passing on of the legacy from father to son. Leonidas bequeaths Angelo his craft and his wife. As God's agent of destiny he blesses Angelo with a kiss. The irony of understatement is found in the turnkey's final words, "The priest is coming later. Things are done with precision here. And fair--as you know--is fair."[2]

This tale presents a paradox of the moral life. Angelo lives without certain knowledge of Leonidas' intentions and judgement. Angelo is caught between faithfulness to his master and faithfulness to himself and to his destiny as an artist. He is yet to experience the depths of despair. He must continue to rid himself of spiritual blindness before he can discover who Angelo is.

"Night Walk" leads Angelo into the bowels of hell where he must confront his act of treachery. "He was totally isolated, an absolutely lonely figure in this world, and he felt that the man whose grief and shame--like his own--exceeded that of all others must at the same time be exempt from the laws which governed those others."[3] He meets Giuseppino (Pino) Pizzuti, the philosopher, who had once owned the noblest marionette theater in Naples. Three fingers of his right hand had withered so that he could no longer manoeuver his puppets.

> He now wandered from place to place, the poorest of the poor, but luminous, as if phosphorescent, with a love of humanity in general and with a knowing and mellifluous compassion for one

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[1] Ibid., p. 42.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] Ibid., p. 46.

human being with whom he just happened to be talking.[1]

Angelo relates events that have happened to him. The old man's face lights up as he replies:

> That is not a matter for grief. It is a good thing to be a great sinner. Or should human beings allow Christ to have died on the Cross for the sake of our petty lies and our paltry whorings? We would have to fear that the Saviour might even come to think with disgust of His heroic achievement! For exactly this reason, as you will know, in the very hour of the Cross, care was taken that He had thieves by Him, one to each side, and could turn His eyes from the one to the other. At this moment He may look from you to me, and mightily recognize and repeat to Himself, 'Aye, verily it was needed!'[2]

Pino adds, "And I myself am the crucified thief Demas, to whom Paradise was promised."[3] Pino vanishes like a rat into a gutter hole and Angelo is left with his despair. Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, he cries out, "Despise me, cast me away, but allow one to be like others, allow me to sleep."[4] He tries opium; he seeks the advice of others; but to no avail. He returns to the tavern where he had met Pino and speaks to the owner, Mariana. She gives him advice:

> Walk from the broadest street of the town into a narrower one, and from this narrow street into one still narrower, and go on like that. If from your narrowest alley you can find your way into a tighter passage, enter it, and follow it, and draw your breath lightly once or twice. And at that you will have fallen asleep.[5]

Angelo follows Mariana's advice finding himself in an exceedingly narrow passage; "He stretched out his hand, took care to draw his breath

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[1] Ibid., p. 46.

[2] Ibid., p. 47.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 48.

[5] Ibid., p. 49.

lightly twice, and opened the door."[1] By a table in a little, faintly lit room a red-haired man was counting his money. He tells the man that he cannot sleep. The red-haired man replies:

> Only dolts and drudges sleep. Fishermen, peasants and artisans must have their hours of snoring at any cost. Their heavy natures cry out for sleep even in the greatest hour of life. Drowsiness settles on their eyelids. Divine agony sweats blood at a stone's throw, but they cannot keep awake, and the whizzing of an angel's wings will not wake them up. Those living dead will never know what happened, or what was said, while they themselves lay huddled and gaping. I alone know. For I never sleep.[2]

The man suddenly turns toward his guest and continues:

> He said so Himself and had He not been so hard driven, with what high disdain would He not have spoken! Now it was a moan, like the sea breaking against the shore for the very last time before doomsday. He Himself told them so, the fools: 'What, no one, no one in the world could ever seriously believe that I myself did sleep--on that Thursday night in the garden.'[3]

In this surrealistic nightmare Angelo meets his other self in the form of Judas. Angelo learns that the key to his salvation lies in his capacity for spiritual intensity, for such is the lot and destiny of great sinners. It is a good thing to be a great sinner. In Angelo's capacity for suffering, remorse, and grief lies the potential for love, compassion and resignation to God's will. It is through the confrontation with his 'other' or shadow that acceptance will be made possible.

Seven years later in "Of Hidden Thoughts and Of Heaven" we find Angelo to be the owner of a large villa and married to Lucrezia with whom he has had three children and with a fourth on the way. He

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[1] Ibid., p. 50.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

[3] Ibid.

encounters Pino Pizzuti and tells him that his happiness is marred by the secret that Lucrezia has kept from him all these years. "She has never spoken of it. Many times I have waited for a word from her lips which would solve the riddle."[1] Pino says that one might on Angelo's behalf ask Lucrezia whether or not Leonidas knew of the betrayal but:

> She would then look up at the inquirer, her eyes so clear that he would be ashamed to doubt even for a moment the truth of her words, and answer him, 'I am verry sorry that I cannot tell you. But I do not remember. I have forgotten.'[2]

Pino and Angelo speak of other things but Angelo reminds Pino that he is seven years closer to heaven. Pino asks Angelo if they shall meet and talk one day in Paradise. Angelo takes one of his small clay figures and places it on the balustrade. He says:

> A man is more than one man. And the life of a man is more than one life. The young man who was Leonidas Allori's chosen disciple, who felt that at his hand he would become the greatest artist of his age, and who loved his master's wife--he will not go to heaven. He was too light of weight to mount so high.[3]

He sets another figure on the balustrade a little distance from the first and to the right of it. He continues:

> And this famous sculptor, Angelo Santasilia, whom princes and cardinals beseech to work for them, this good husband and father--he will not go to heaven either. And do you know why? Because he is not at all eager to go there.[4]

He places the last figure in between the two others, farther back on the balustrade, "Do you see, Pino?. These three tiny toy figures are placed to mark three corners of a rectangle, in which the width is to the

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[1] Ibid., p. 57.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

[4] Ibid.

length as the length to the sum of the two. These, you know, are the proportions of the golden section."[1] Angelo lets his skilled hand fall to rest in his lap and adds, "But, the young man whom you met at the inn of Mariana-the-Rat--the good home of thieves and smugglers down by the harbor--the young man with whom you talked there at night, Pino--he will go to heaven."[2] It was during that night walk that Angelo found the key to his existence. In his search for God or the Infinite he must roam in the night, the period of suspension between the finite and the infinite. According to Robert Langbaum this closing passage explains:

> Leonidas' admonition to 'keep always in your heart the divine law of proportion, the golden section.' The reference is to De Divine Proportione (1496), the treatise of Leonardo's friend, Luca Pacioli, which sets forth, in the proportion of the segment of a line to the whole line, a relation among three points that determines the fourth point of a perfect rectangle. Leonidas' admonition explains the diagrammatic structure of these stories around the number three; for Leonidas, Pino and Angelo refer to the divine proportion as a principle of life as well as art. One recalls Jung's theory that the ideas of threefoldness and fourfoldness are a 'spontaneous product' of the collective unconscious--that three represents the relative and four the absolute.[3]

The doctrine of the Crucifixion and the Atonement are seen time and time again in Dinésen's tales. Kasparson in "The Deluge at Norderney" relates the tale of "The Wine of the Tetrarch" to show that there are worse things than perdition. In this tale Simon Peter is approached by a stranger shortly after the Crucifixion of Christ. He asks Peter if he believes that the man whom he serves has risen from the dead. Peter assures him that he does. He asks whether every word that the Rabbi spoke is certain to come true. Peter replies: "Nothing in the world is

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 63.

[3] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 212.

as sure as that."[1] The reason for these questions is that this stranger's friend had died with the Rabbi and he wishes to know if he is now in Paradise. Peter is certain he is there now. The stranger relates how his friend, Phares, came to be taken prisoner and put to death. The stranger and Phares were discovered while attempting to escape prison. Phares could have run off but instead he waited to see what would happen to his friend. Peter listens half-heartedly and replies, "All this I hold to be very brave of you, and it was well done to risk your life for your friend."[2] Peter tires of the man's questions, but the man persists and asks Peter if he can purchase some of the wine that the Rabbi had for his followers the night before he died. The words bring grief to Peter and in order to strengthen himself he speaks the words of the Lord himself, "My son, take up thine cross and follow him."[3] The stranger replies, "My cross! Where is my cross? Who is to take up my cross?"[4] The stranger tells Peter that he knows nothing. He shows Peter his chest and shoulders crossed by many terrible deep white scars:

> My cross! The cross of Phares was to the right, and the cross of the man Achaz, who was never worth much, to the left. I should have taken up my cross better than any of them. Do you not think that I should have lasted more than six hours? I do not think much of that, I tell you. Wherever I have been, I have been a leader of men, and they have looked to me. Do not believe, because now I do not know what to do, that I have not been used to telling others to come and go as I liked.[5]

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[1] Seven Gothic Tales, p. 63.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

[3] Ibid., p. 67.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

Peter inquires about the identity of this stranger who answers:

> Did you not know my name? My name was cried all over the town. There was not one of the tame burghers of Jerusalem who did not shout it with all his might. 'Barabbas', they cried, 'Barabbas! Barabbas! Give us Barabbas.' My name is Barabbas. I have been a great chief, and, as you said yourself, a brave man. My name shall be remembered.[1]

Barabbas is deprived of any rôle in life by Christ Himself. Although Barabbas does not figure in any of Dinesen's other stories, he stands behind many tales as the archetype of one who has no cross to bear and nothing to live for. For him communion with others is not possible.

Dinesen's concern with atonement for sin is also found in one of her earlier works, "The deCats Family," published in 1909. The deCats family of Amsterdam are a noble and wealthy family. They hold the highest offices in the land, both ecclesiastical and secular. The one misfortune that befalls them is that there is among them one member in each generation who is as disreputable as the rest are respectable. Jeremias deCats has sought bad company and has created so many scandals that he must leave Amsterdam and the country. At the suggestion of old Vrouw Emerenze, the family agrees to accept Jeremias back into the bosom of the family. The young Petrus deCats feels that the family has made a mistake for two reasons:

> The first is that when we speak about justice we should remember that it is equally wrong to decapitate an innocent man and to let a guilty man go free. This is a misstep fate will bring up against us if we ever complain of its injustice. Now, how can we protest when fate ruins honorable men and lets the dishonorable succeed? We should allow justice to be all-powerful. We will feel the effect of this for twenty years.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 69.

[2] Isak Dinesen, Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 6.

Uncle Cornelius asks Petrus about mercy:

> . . .--well, Uncle Cornelius, mercy should not set justice aside--one can serve the world in two ways: one can make virtue attractive or vice repulsive. The entire world rests on the principle that virtue is rewarded, but who will believe it if they do not see it? It is for this reason that the country is indebted to us, for we have demonstrated the felicity of virtue. The family has two reasons to rejoice that we have advanced in the world; virtue has made progress and we also have made progress. But Jeremias--he has given up virtue, so should he make vice repulsive. If he were breaking rocks on the highway or begging in the streets, not even you, Uncle Cornelius, or you, Aunt Caroline, would be a better example for the youth. There would be no one among us whose name would be more frequently mentioned in moral talks to the children. You are destroying for Jeremias, as he is, his only hope of serving the world![1]

As soon as Jeremias is received into the fold of the family, the family members begin to fall from grace. Two of the brothers decide that in order to save the family, Jeremias must reassume his rôle as the black sheep. They hold a family council and one of the deCats, the Bishop of Haarlem, makes a speech to the assembly during the course of which the rôle of scapegoat undergoes a transfiguration into that of a sublime redeemer.[2] The Bishop speaks of fate and destiny:

> . . . destiny--life--demands a sacrifice from us today. Yes. Yes, we should ask what it means to sacrificed and to be sacrificed. Is the law harsh; the laws of the world are just, they are not harsh, only weakness calls them that. Let us ask: What is it that demands our sacrifice? The good, virtue. Is that law harsh which demands sacrifices for the good? On the contrary, the best of us strive to offer up our lives for virtue. Yes, my friends, when we examine it, it is a beautiful and exalted lot to be found worthy to save others through sacrifice. One individual bears the sins of many; their guilt is collected in him; so that they may live, he is condemned. From the sacrifice of one man proceeds the salvation of many, yes, of an entire people.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 7.

[2] Hannah, p. 167.

[3] Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales, p. 22.

Jeremias comes to the rescue and offers to leave the family and his country. The family is now secure in that all their sins are being borne by one man, Jeremias.

In "The Heroine" Heloïse places the responsibility for redemption solely upon the refugees. They can use her as a scapegoat and they accept the fact that they are mortal sinners or they can refuse to do so and accept the consequences and thus share in Heloïse's pride and glory. We can see from these tales the implication of choice with which Dinesen believes man is faced. Choice issues forth from the whole doctrine of divine redemption. On the one hand, Christ expiates the sins of the world through the Crucifixion; thus, man becomes the passive onlooker. On the other hand, through the Crucifixion, the Lord shows man how to find and bear his own cross and the ways in which man can take a full and active rôle in his own redemption by accepting responsibility for his own fate.

"The Diver" is a tale that employs the art of flying in order to explain man's attempt to reach a spiritual state or the Absolute. In Shiraz there lives a young student of theology by the name of Softa Saufe: "As he read and re-read the Koran he became so absorbed in the thought of the angels that his soul dwelt with them more than with his mother or his brothers, his teachers of fellow students or any other people of Shiraz."[1] To Saufe birds must be of all creatures most like angels. He reflects that, "The angels are not elated with pride so as to disdain their service, they sing, and perform that which they are commanded--and surely the birds do the same. If we endeavor to imitate

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[1]Isak Dinesen, Anecdotes of Destiny 1958; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 3.

the birds in all this, we shall become more like the angels than we are now."[1] Saufe decides to leave Shiraz and to study the ways of winged creatures. When he finishes his first pair of wings he cannot keep the news to himself and speaks of his triumph to his friends. Mirzah Aghai, a minister of the King, finds Saufe a dangerous man inasmuch as he has great dreams. He decides to prove or to disprove Saufe's belief in the existence of angels by sending Thusmu, as an assumed angel to him one evening. Thusmu says, "I am going to teach you how angels and men arrive at perfect understanding without argument, in the heavenly manner."[2] Saufe's happiness is so great that he forgets about his work and surrenders himself to this celestial understanding of which Thusmu speaks. In the course of their relationship Thusmu begins to lose her sense of purpose and believes that Saufe is capable of anything. She asks him to show her his workshop. Here Saufe sees "that rats had eaten his eagles' flight-feathers and that the frame of his wings was broken and scattered about."[3] In Thusmu's sorrow and indignation, she reveals Mirzah's plan to Saufe. She confesses, "I cannot fly, although they tell me that when I dance I am of an extra- ordinary lightness."[4] Saufe replies, "God has appointed none but angels to preside over hellfire."[5] Saufe can love Thusmu only as long as he thinks of her as an angel. Hers is a human love with an admixture of guilt. Saufe cannot absorb guilt. Saufe cannot absorb guilt into his love so he gives up all hope

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[1] Ibid., p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

[4] Ibid., p. 10.

[5] Ibid.

of flying. His is a world where aspiration has exceeded realization. He has lost his faith in the angels and without hope one cannot fly. The unfortunate Saufe roams about in loneliness and according to Mira Jama, the narrator of the tale, he is never seen in Shiraz again.

Mira Jama in the second half of his story-telling relates his experience with a man by the name of Elnazred who can dive down into greater depths and stay down longer than any other fisherman and who never fails to find a pearl. Mira Jama seeks out this man and finds him sitting on the sand near his hut, gazing at the sea. Mira Jama, eager to prove his skill as a storyteller, begins to relate to him the tale of Softa Saufe. When he comes to the passage of the lovers on the roof-top, Elnazred raises his hand in such a manner that Mira Jama cries out, "You are the Softa of Shiraz."[1] At Mira Jama's insistence the diver tells what had happened to him once he had left Shiraz. In Elnazred's search for pearls an old cowfish took him in hand and taught him the ways of the sea. She enlightens him:

> We run no risks. For our changing of place in existence never creates, or leaves after it, what man calls a way, upon which phonomenon--in reality no phonomenon but an illusion--he will waste inexplicable passionate deliberation.
>
> Man, in the end, is alarmed by the idea of time, and unbalanced by incessant wanderings between past and future. The inhabitants of a liquid world have brought past and future together in the maxim: Après nous le déluge.[2]

The Saufe content and happy as a diver is quite different from the Saufe who wishes to fly. Saufe, as diver, has made what Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling calls the first movement of faith:

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

[2] Ibid., p. 20.

> Abraham I cannot understand, in a certain sense there is nothing I can learn from him but astonishment. If people fancy that by considering the outcome of this story Abraham and Isaac they might be moved to believe, they deceive themselves and want to swindle God out of the first movement of faith, the infinite resignation. They would suck worldly wisdom out of the paradox.[1]

The narrator, Johannes de Silentio, in Fear and Trembling can well describe the movements of faith but he has not yet reached the point that he can make them:

> When one would learn to make the motions of swimming one can let oneself be hung by a swimming-belt from the ceiling and go through the motions . . . but one is not swimming. In that way I can describe the movements of faith, but when I am thrown into the water, I swim, it is true . . . but I make other movements, I make the movements of infinity, whereas faith does the opposite: after having made the movements of infinity, it makes those of infiniteness.[2]

Saufe must give up all his dreams, his love, all earthly hope in order to lessen the chasm which separates faith and doubt. In seeking the Infinite or Absolute he must first confront the finite and by ultimately renouncing the finite he will gain both the finite and the Infinite. This theme is the thrust of Dinesen's tale, "The Diver", and it reflects a different perspective toward a similar theme in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling. Saufe's resignation is the movement that stands as the last stage prior to faith. He must reconcile himself with existence and this decision affects the nature of his reconciliation with the finite or the temporal. Abraham in making the double movement from resignation to faith, regains his son, Isaac, and accepts the Will of God. The narrator in Fear and Trembling realizes:

> The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to

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[1] A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 118.

[2] Ibid.

> faith, so that one who has not made this movement had not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then can there be any question of grasping existence by virtue of faith.[1]

For Dinesen those who have no idea of God in the making of them tremble, with reason, before their fate. The other stories in Anecdotes of Destiny, like the tale of "The Diver", explain the ways in which the mystical soaring is achieved through an upwards and downwards movement to the finite in its link with the Infinite. These stories serve to explicate further Dinesen's theory of man's search for the Absolute.

"Babette's Feast", the second story in Anecdotes of Destiny, surrounds the element of choice and contrasts the ethical and aesthetic ways of life. The Dean's daughters, Martine and Philippa, now elderly ladies:

> . . . spend their time and their income on works of charity; no sorrowful or distressed creature knocked on their door in vain. And Babette had come to that door twelve years ago as a friendless fugitive, almost mad with grief and fear.[2]

The ladies have not been without love. A young officer named Lorens Loewenhielm falls in love with Martine, but the more he follows her slim figure "he loathed and despised the figure which he himself cut in her nearness."[3] He cannot express his love to her and leaves her to concentrate on life's pleasures and a career. Philippa's lover is the great singer, Achille Papin of Paris. He offers the Dean to take Philippa on as a pupil. The two perform Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni, and when they kiss the moment becomes too sublime for further word or

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[1] Ibid., p. 125.

[2] Anecdotes of Destiny, p. 24.

[3] Ibid., p. 26.

movement. After this performance Philippa, surprised and frightened by something in her own nature, refuses further singing lessons. Upon receiving the Dean's letter Achille reflects, "I have lost my life for a kiss, and I have no remembrance at all of the kiss! Don Giovanni kissed Zerlina, and Achille Papin pays for it. Such is the fate of the artist."[1]

It is through Achille Papin that fifteen years later Madame Babette Hersant enters the lives of the elderly spinsters. The sisters doubt Monsieur Papin's assertion that Babette can cook and they show her how to prepare a split cod and an ale-and-bread soup. They explain to Babette that they are poor and to them all luxurious fare is sinful. Babette understands for she had once cooked for an old priest who was a saint, and "Upon this the sisters resolved to surpass the French priest in asceticism."[2] Thus, the staunch puritanism of the North embodied in the sisters lives side by side with the aesthetic catholicism of the South embodied in Babette.

The fifteenth of December is the Dean's hundredth anniversary. The daughters wish to celebrate this occasion as though their dear father were still among his disciples yet "it had been to them a sad and incomprehensible thing that in this last year discord and dissension had been raising their heads in his flock."[3] With his death the Dean had left the door ajar to things unknown to the sisters: "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

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[1]Ibid., p. 32.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

[3]Ibid., p. 39.

resentment, like a poisoning of the blood."[1] Babette in her good fortune wins a lottery in Paris and she begs the sisters to allow her to cook a celebration dinner on the Dean's birthday. What difference could a dinner make to a person who now owns ten thousand ffancs? The ingredients for the birthday celebration finally arrive and Martine is horrified at the creature with "a snake-like head" that she spots in the kitchen. Although she had seen pictures of tortoises and had owned a small one as a child, she retreats from the kitchen to spend a sleepless night where visions of the dinner party become a witches' sabbath. Saying nothing to her sister, Martine goes from house to house in the village and tells her Brothers and Sisters that she cannot speak of the dinner that is being prepared for them. They resolve to be silent upon all matters of food and drink.

To add that touch of the ironical as only Dinesen can, old Mrs. Loewenhielm who had lost in old age sense of smell and taste, asks that her nephew, Lorens, now General Loewenhielm, be permitted to attend the celebration. The sisters hang a garland of junipers around their father's portrait on the wall. The weather outside in its wintery folds contrasts with the warm but sparsely furnished dining room. The Brothers and Sisters sing a hymn and join hands in fellowship. General Loewenhielm stands "tall, broad and ruddy, in his bright uniform his breast covered with decorations."[2] He looks like an ornamental bird, a golden pheasant or a peacock in this party of black crows and jackdaws.

General Loewenhielm had obtained all that he had desired in life but he was not perfectly happy. The General found himself worrying

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 50.

lately more and more about his immortal soul. The strange meeting years earlier with Martine had compelled him to make out the balance-sheet of his life:

> Young Lorens Loewenhielm had attracted dreams and fancies as a flower attracts bees and butterflies. He had fought to free himself of them; he had fled and they had followed. He had been scared of the Huldre of the family legend and had declined Martine's invitation to come into the mountain; he had firmly refused the gift of second sight.[1]

The elderly Loewenhielm "found himself longing for the faculty of second sight, as a blind man will long for the normal faculty of vision."[2] He resolves to make his account with the young Lorens tonight at this dinner. The Brothers and Sisters who should have been surprised and amazed with the food and drink remain true to their purpose and are poised and sophisticated in their manners. Yet, the General, the aristocrat, immersed in poise and good manners is the one to scream out, "This is very strange! . . . Amontillado! And the finest Amontillado that I have ever tasted."[3] The turtle-soup is strange too. With each new dish served, the General exclaims at its excellence. The wine that the Brothers and Sisters drink is not wine to them but lemonade and this drink "agreed with their exalted state of mind and seemed to lift them off the ground, into a higher and purer sphere."[4] This ecstasy contrasts with the effect of drink on the General. Whereas the 'convives' grow lighter in weight and lighter of heart, the General feels a little heavy. The General, drunk with wine, stands up to speak:

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[1] Ibid., p. 52.

[2] Ibid., p. 53.

[3] Ibid., p. 56.

[4] Ibid., p. 57.

"Mercy and truth, my friends, have met together . . . Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another."[1] He speaks to them of grace:

> We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble. . . We tremble before making our choice in life, and after having made it again tremble in fear of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace, brothers, makes no conditions and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes us all to its bosom and proclaims general amnesty. See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us.[2]

The Brothers and Sisters realize that the infinite grace of which the General speaks has been allotted to them. Their vain illusions of the world dissolve and they begin to see the universe as it really is, "They had been given one hour of the millenium."[3] As the General leaves, he takes Martine's hand in his and says to her, "I shall be with you every day that is left to me. Every evening I shall sit down, if not in the flesh, which means nothing, in spirit, which is all, to dine with you, just like tonight. For tonight I have learned, dear sister, that in this world anything is possible."[4]

Babette reveals to the sisters that she was once the famous cook in the Café Anglais in Paris but that she will not return to her homeland. Babette has no money, because she has spent her ten thousand francs on their dinner. The sisters are speechless. With great dignity, Babette

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[1] Ibid., p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 60.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

[4] Ibid.

tells them that such a dinner at the Café Anglais would have cost ten thousand francs. Babette has made the art of self-sacrifice not for their sakes but for her own. She is a great artist and great artists are never poor for they have something of which people know nothing. There is only one cry that echoes from the artist's heart, "Give me leave to do my utmost."[1] Philippa places her arm around Babette and whispers, "I feel, Babette, that this is not the end. In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be! Ah! Ah, how you will enchant the angels!"[2]

The dinner scene of "Babette's Feast" is an excellent example of the skill with which Dinesen explores her philosophy of communion with the Infinite. The scene is comic yet its theme is serious and profound. Dinesen had long admired the works of one of her countrymen, Søren Kierkegaard. "Babette's Feast" reflects a concern similar to the preoccupation of Kierkegaard in Either/Or about the absurdities of life abounding in the comic, and about the whole concept of choice. "Babette's Feast" presents the element of choice seen in ethical and aesthetic terms. The feast or supper in December, the month of Christ's birth, alludes to the spiritual communion of the Last Supper made possible through the Nativity. Reality, prophecy, choice, grace, and faith come together in the Lord's sacrifice on the Cross. Babette's offering or feast equally relates to the widow's gift of her mite, to the gift at Cana, and to the gifts of the Magi. Simply expressed Kierkegaard's Either/Or presents the reader with two ways of looking at life: either you look at what life does to you, or you turn around and

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[1] Ibid., p. 68.

[2] Ibid.

look at what you do to life.[1] In either case, however, one must make a choice. Dinesen sees choice from a slightly different perspective. The General in his epiphany at the end of the dinner suggests that it does not matter which choice we make since grace demands nothing from us. We must await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. For Kierkegaard:

> From birth, we each have our own given personality. At the beginning each personality is merely potentiality. Many strains run through our genes. The many voices that people the world within each personality request a ruler. All of us must choose a rule for himself. Only after accomplishing this task do we become 'our own selves'. It is by 'choosing absolutely' that we become free to rule ourselves. An act of the will, this choice poses many difficulties. The Judge concedes that many people never reach that particular choice, which stands as the true watershed between the asethetic and the ethical.[2]

In "Babette's Feast" General Loewenhielm is an individual who has chosen pleasures over and against a second sight. However, in his unhappiness he seeks the gift of a second vision. His answer comes to him through the feast. The General shows the inadequacies of both the aesthetic and the ethical life in order to recommend the life of religious faith.[3] Although Dinesen appears to be taking issue with Kierkegaard, she reinterprets his alternatives. She accepts Kierkegaard's understanding of the mystical way in which the absurd triumphs for man is granted both what he has chosen and what he has refused.[4] In The Journals Kierkegaard says:

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[1] Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 75.

[2] Ibid., p. 109.

[3] Langbaum, The Gayety of Vision, p. 253.

[4] Ibid., p. 254.

> Therefore faith hopes also in this life, but . . . by virtue of the absurd, not by virtue of the human understanding.
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> The paradox in Christian truth is invariably due to the fact that it is truth as it exists for God. The standard of measure and the end is superhuman; and there is only one relationship possible: faith.[1]

In summary, the element of unconditional acceptance abounds in Dinesen's tales. She moves her characters through various stages, from uncertainty to an act of faith in the story as the principal force in shaping their destinies.

> By faith I make renunciation of nothing; on the contrary, by faith I acquire everything . . . .[2]
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> -- Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling.

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[1] Bretall, p. 116.

[2] Ibid., p. 127.

Chapter VII

Destiny Fulfilled

> And in return we get the world's distrust--and our dire loneliness, And nothing else.[1]
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> -- Dinesen: "Tempests" from Anecdotes of Destiny.

Through her tales Isak Dinesen shows that life without art is indeed narrow and confining. Art, however, lifts man into willing acceptance of life's conditions and to the joyful recognition of their necessity. Art and life are balanced and interdependent. Like dancers art and life may operate independently but it is through the dependence of one on the other that harmony is produced. Through art life becomes heightened to a state of transcendant truth, that of a spiritual awareness of one's destiny. The problems that face the artist when he attempts this balance of life and art is clearly evidenced in "Tempests".

Herr Soerensen, the great old actor and theater director of "Tempests", does not confuse life and art. Like Babette he is a visionary and is practical in executing his vision. He is determined to produce The Tempest and play the part of Prospero himself. He chooses for his Ariel a young member who had recently joined his troupe. Malli had always known in her heart that she would become a great actress. Her father, a ship's captain, had deserted her mother, Madame Ross, who was with child. When Malli was alone she thought of her big, handsome

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[1] Anecdotes of Destiny, p. 146.

father, "For her he might have well been an adventurer, a privateer captain, like those one heard of in time of war--indeed even a corsair or a pirate! Below her quiet manner there lay a vital, concealed gaiety and arrogance; in her contempt for the townspeople was mingled forbearance for her own mother."[1] She herself and Alexander Ross knew better than they. Malli had learned to read Shakespeare and for her, Alexander Ross became a Shakespearean hero.

In rehearsing The Tempest Herr Soerensen does not leave her in peace: "He scolded and swore, with inspired cruelty sneered at her facial expression and her intonation, pinched her slim arms black and blue and even one day soundly boxed her ears."[2] They become more and more each day Ariel and Prospero. Their first performance is to be in Christianssand. A fierce storm ravages the coast and overtakes the passenger boat, The Sophie Hosewinckel, which is bearing the troupe to Christianssand. In their flight for safety only one of the passengers chooses to remain on board. Mamzell Ross with noble courage gives up her place in the lifeboat for one of the injured sailors. It was Malli whose "dauntlessness struck courage into the breasts of the crew."[3] A young ordinary seaman, Ferdinand Skaeret, stands shoulder to shoulder with Malli all through the stormy night. Malli becomes the heroine of Shakespeare's play and brings the ship home as Ariel brings Prince Ferdinand's ship home to safety. Malli receives a heroine's welcome and is kissed by the shipowner's son, Arndt Hosewinckel. The Hosewinckels open their home to Malli in gratitude to one who has risked her life for

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[1] Ibid., p. 82.

[2] Ibid., p. 86.

[3] Ibid., p. 91.

one of its ships. To the household Malli is at first a combination of reality and fantasy. She then becomes a symbol, half of the ship Sophie Hosewinckel and half of young Sophie after whom the ship had been named and in whose room Malli now sleeps. Arndt and Malli become engaged. "For Malli this came to be the completion and perfection of her own mighty rise. She had once been given wings; they had grown miraculously and had been able to carry her, ever upward, to this unspeakable glory."[1] For all of Malli's innocence, Arndt himself has not been without his experiences in life. When he was fifteen a young girl by the name of Guro came to the Hosewinckel house as a maid. Arndt and Guro became lovers before they knew of it themselves. Since Arndt was so young he did not know guilt or fear, yet one day Guro drowned herself in the fjord. Guro had been with child. Once Arndt learns that Guro has had a sweetheart before she had come to his home, "This truth which Arndt had from the lips of his father and mother did away with his own guilt."[2] But it seemed at the same time to do away with everything else, so that he himself was left with empty hands. He wished to recapture the faith he had had in Guro. "A secret felicity in life had revealed itself to him and proved its existence, then immediately afterwards had denied itself and proved that it had never been."[3] This had happened twelve years before he had met Malli. This experience from Arndt's past suggests that Malli will do to him what Arndt did to Guro. The tale bears out that Malli, unlike Arndt, cannot live with her own guilt. When Malli asks Arndt if he is happy, he answers that he is but

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[1] Ibid., p. 144.

[2] Ibid., p. 108.

[3] Ibid.

he does not experience happiness as Malli does. Malli responds in a voice that echoes the cultural memory of myth, for she responds, "Yes, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die, but have everlasting life."[1] Arndt must leave for a few days and Malli sees him as her father, as one who will never return. Yet is is Malli who will abandon Arndt out of her guilt over Ferdinand, that young sailor on the ship. Malli appropriates to herself the guilt of her father's desertion, the tempest at sea which brings about Ferdinand's death, and the guilt of being unable to reciprocate Arndt's physical love. As a result, a change overtakes Malli: "She was once more the girl with the stiff white face and joints, who had been brought from the wreck."[2]

The only person to whom Malli responds is the old Jochum Hosewinckel. She is pleased to listen to his tales of old times and to his plain nursery tales. It is through one of his tales that Malli discovers the key to her existence. A great fire had broken out in Christianssand which had threatened to destroy Jens Aabel's house and warehouses. The man came out of his gate with his scales in his right hand and his yardstick in his left and he spoke in a loud voice:

> Here stand I, Jens Guttormsen Aabel, merchant of this town, with my scales and my measure. If in my day I have made wrong use of any of them, then, wind and fire, proceed against my house! But if I have used these righteous things righteously, then you two wild servants of God will spare my house, so that in years to come it may serve men and women of Christianssand as before.[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 117.

[2]Ibid., p. 123.

[3]Ibid., p. 131.

His possessions were saved. Jens Aabel's Bible holds a prominent place in the Hosewinckel home and it has a special quality to it: ". . . if anyone in the house, uncertain as to what he ought to do, goes to it to ask advice from it, and lets it fall open where it chooses, he will get from it the right answer to what he is asking."[1] Jochum invites Malli to go to the Bible for advice. The old couple hear a heavy fall in the next room and "They found the girl lying in front of the table as if she were dead, and the book open upon it."[2] Malli runs to Herr Soerensen and tells him that Ferdinand is dead and that Arndt loves her. Malli now steps out of the rôle of Ariel and sees the diabolic in herself: "I will not make people unhappy. I will not! I will not! God himself knows that I was not aware I was doing so!. I thought, Herr Soerensen, that I had told no lies, and made no mistakes!"[3] She cries that she has betrayed them all. She must go away and she speaks "as one that has a familiar spirit, out of the ground."[4] The reader learns only later what passage Malli had read in the Bible but she alludes to it here. Herr Soerensen confides that he too was once married and that he like Malli deserted his lover. They sit and talk together, but out of her need for human sympathy, Malli begins to caress Herr Soerensen's shoulders, neck and head. He symbolizes her father whose sexual potency is likened to the sublimation of art. He is Arndt, the idealization of love of the spirit. He is Ferdinand who had died in innocence, a victim of Malli's rejection. Herr Soerensen, the true artist, becomes fully

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[1] Ibid., p. 132.

[2] Ibid., p. 135.

[3] Ibid., p. 138.

[4] Ibid., p. 139.

conscious of his authority and responsibility. He is Prospero and must transform Malli into Ariel, to reintroduce her into the world of art out of the tragic world of reality in which she finds herself. He says, ". . . now I arise. / Sit still, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow."[1] He will give up his performances in Christianssand. As Ariel Malli skips from one place in the text of the drama to another; Herr Soerensen as Prospero responds. Malli asks why things must go so disastrously. He replies, "O girl, be silent. We must never question--it is the others shall come questioning us--it is our noble privilege to answer--o answers fine and clear, o wondrous answers!--the questions of a baffled and divided--humanity. And ne'er ourselves to ask."[2] And what does one get in return? "And in return we get the world's distrust--and our dire loneliness. And nothing else."[3]

Malli shows in her letter to Arndt that she has become the genuine artist. Malli now knows that she must renounce Arndt's love for she must surrender her innocence not in a physical manner to Arndt, but in a spiritual manner to art itself. She claims that she is not the heroine others thought her to be for on the ship she was Ariel who believed the situation to be the first scene of the play. As a token of their friendship, she sends him the gold coin her mother had received of her father.

The passage Malli had read in the Bible is Isaiah 29 which begins, "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel . . . And thou shalt be brought down, and thou shalt speak out of the ground, . . . and thy voice shall be as of one

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[1]Ibid., p. 141.

[2]Ibid., p. 145.

[3]Ibid., p. 146.

that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust!"[1] Malli continues with the eighth verse, "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."[2] For Malli to have loved Arndt would bring about the destruction of his soul. The only consolation that Malli can offer him is that their love and its possibilities will remain a memory in his imagination. This is the same offering that General Loewenhielm has given Martine in "Babette's Feast". Guro has gone to her death with the words, "I am a lost creature because I have met you."[3] Malli can utter the reverse, "I have been saved, because I have met you and have looked at you, Arndt!"[4]

In spite of the supreme importance Isak Dinesen attaches to art, she does not entirely turn art into an aesthetic doctrine of art for art's sake. Life can be made to imitate art by striving for a degree of its perfected order and meaning and thus trying to reproduce its organic unity. Isak Dinesen is by no means the only writer aware of a profound conflict between life and art. In perfecting life to art, there is a danger that the human element is eliminated altogether. Human life by imitating art can eventually reach a point where it becomes inhuman and the mosaic of which Dinesen speaks can be simply a design, nothing more

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[1] Ibid., p. 148.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 103.

[4] Ibid., p. 151.

and nothing less.[1] There is a similarity between the dramatic structure of Pirandello's work and the narrative structure of several of Dinesen's stories and thus the preoccupation with similar themes. The Father in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author is trapped inside a play within a play. He is a character with a fixed and immutable rôle to play and it is this fixity of identity he is rebelling against. The Father cries out to the Manager:

> No sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality which should make you shudder when you approach us if you are really conscious of the fact that your reality is a mere transitory and fleeting illusion, taking this form today and that tomorrow, according to the conditions, according to your will, your sentiments, which in turn are controlled by an intellect that shows them to you today in one manner and tomorrow . . . who knows how?[2]

In "Roads Round Pisa" Augustus tries to get into a work of art and attempts to find an established singleness of identity. On the other hand, the Father is trying to break loose of art and seeks to establish a place in life. He is caught in a moment of suspended time. He attempts to strip himself of the mask of lechery and aspires to a condition of life in which he can lose his fixed identity. He is confined like the other characters to a world of unchanging reality. They are all creations of art excluded from life and pinioned in art and thus they are not subject to the laws which govern change and mutability. Life is a fluid, ever-changing force and art is a rigid, fixed and immutable force. Pirandello portrays art as more real than life because it is not subject to the fluctuations of life and thus

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[1] Hannah, p. 137.

[2] Pirandello, p. 266.

exist forever. Yet he shows art as not alive precisely because it is fixed and cannot undergo the changes that constitute life. This paradox is explained in his Preface to Six Characters in Search of an Author in the tragic situation at Madama Pace's:

> If the Father and Step-Daughter began their scene a hundred thousand times in succession, always, at the appointed moment, at the instant when the life of the work of art must be expressed with that cry, it would always be heard, unaltered and unalterable in its form, not as a mechanical repetition, not as a return determined by external necessities, but on the contrary, alive every time and as new, suddenly born 'thus forever'! embalmed alive in its incorruptible form. Hence, always, as we open the book, we shall find Francesca alive and confessing to Dante her sweet sin, and if we turn to the passage a hundred thousand times in succession, a hundred thousand times in succession Francesca will speak her words, never repeating them mechanically, but saying them as though each time were the first time with such living and sudden passion that Dante every time will turn faint. All that lives, by the fact of living, has a form, and by the same token must die--except the work of art which lives forever in so far as it is form.[1]

The great power of the artist is to fix his creations forever, but his shortcoming is that by fixing them he finds it is impossible to give them life.[2] For Dinesen, this dilemma is not so terrible. For example, in "The Dreamers" once Pellegrina Leoni decides to become many persons, she reaches a state of freedom that the Father in Six Characters in Search of an Author longs for but cannot attain. However, Pellegrina does not seek this transition from art to the freedom of life but is forced to comply due to the loss of her singing voice. There is no doubt that through the various rôles she plays, she is still the great singer Pellegrina Leoni and she spends her life trying to recreate the same conditions of art until she is forced by circumstances to don

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[1] Ibid., p. 372.

[2] Bishop, p. 39.

another mask and play another rôle.

"Ehrengard" is a pastoral story that brings all of Dinesen's works to a triumphant conclusion. It shows that the artist does not have to reject life for art or pay the price of tragedy as seen in "Tempests". "Ehrengard" may not be as profound as some of the tales but in Ehrengard art and life are combined into complete reconciliation between heaven and earth. "Ehrengard" reflects the themes of "Diary of the Seducer" with which Kierkegaard concludes his account of the aesthetic life in Either/Or. According to Robert Langbaum, Dinesen proposed Kierkegaard's title "The Seducer's Diary" for "Ehrengard" when she first submitted it for publication to the Ladies' Home Journal in 1962. They rejected this title in favour of "The Secret of Rosenbad".[1] Although Dinesen accepts Kierkegaard's analysis of the aesthetic life, she rejects his evaluation of it. According to Langbaum:

> Kierkegaard apparently wants us to consider the seducer a scoundrel or at least to see the esthetic life as a dead end. But Isak Dinesen sees in the seducer's desire for the girl a fulfillment--to bring her womanhood to birth, in Kierkegaard's metaphor--an emblem of the artist's desire at just the point where it meets with God's. Far from being a dead end then, the esthetic life is for Isak Dinesen continuous with that spiritual or religious life which Kierkegaard is at such pains to distinguish from it.[2]

Dinesen sets "Ehrengard" in a storybook world and divides it into the form of a musical composition of three parts: the prelude, the pastorale, and the rondo. The old lady who tells the tale has received details of Ehrengard's story from the letters that Herr Wolfgang Cazotte had written to her great-grandmother. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Babenhausen are blessed with a son, young Prince Lothar, but the

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[1] Langbaum, Gayety of Vision, p. 274.

[2] Ibid., p. 275.

Grand Duchess wonders whether her son were not all too perfect for this world and so resolves to find him a suitable mate. She gives a number of court balls and encourages her son to frequent the opera and ballet. Lothar admires beauty in women and is courteous to them, "But 'la belle passion' as his young companions knew it, to him seemed to remain alien."[1] The Grand Duchess at this time is having her picture painted by the great artist, the Geheimrat Wolfgang Cazotte. Herr Cazotte had painted the portraits of most queens and princesses of Europe and he was on as easy and friendly terms with royalty as he was with street hawkers, circus performers and flower girls. The Grand Duchess so far does not favour Cazotte's friendship with Lothar because Cazotte is known as a conqueror, a seducer and an irresistible Don Juan with the ladies of his age. Cazotte confides in one of his letters that in calling an artist a seducer, one is paying him the highest of compliments, "The whole attitude of the artist towards the Universe is that of a seducer."[2] The Grand Duchess confides her apprehensions about Lothar to Cazotte who replies:

> It is true that, generally speaking, in a boy or a youth the qualities of inexperience and intactness, and of innocence itself, are looked upon as merely negative traits, that is, as the absence of knowledge or of zeal. But there are natures of such rare nobility that with them no quality nor condition will ever be negative. Incorporated in such a mind anything partakes in its soundness and purity. To the plastic unity of an exalted spirit no conflict exists, but nature and ideal are one. Idea and action, too, are one, inasmuch as the idea is an action and the action an idea.[3]

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[1] Isak Dinesen, Ehrengard (London: Michael Joseph Limited, 1963), p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Ibid., p. 14.

From this time on the Duchess in the hopes of awakening in Lothar the idea of the erotic encourages his friendship with Cazotte. Prince Lothar accompanies Cazotte to the principality of Leuchtenstein and there Lothar falls in love with the Princess Ludmilla and "The young couple, like two instruments of different nature, melted together in melodious happiness.[1] However, the serpent raises its head in this idyllic Eden for Prince Lothar announces to his mother that the Ducal heir on whom she had for so long set her heart is about to enter the world a full two months before the law of decency permitted. She blames Cazotte but decides to keep this secret. Cazotte tries to calm her by saying:

> The Lord God, that great artist, at times paints his pictures in such a manner as to be best appreciated at a long distance. A hundred and fifty years hence your present predicament will have all the look of an idyll composed to delight its spectators. Your difficulty at this moment is that you are a little too close to it.[2]

He suggests that the Duchess take advantage of the predicament and elevate the situation into a work of art. The couple is to retire to a country resort. Two months after the birth of the child, the Grand Duchy would announce the birth of a male heir and proclaim to town and country the happy news. The country resort Cazotte chooses is the little chateau of Rosenbad, a rococo hermitage situated on a mountain slope by a lake. He would have to find a suitable maid-of-honour to the Princess and he settles on Ehrengard von Schreckenstein. Cazotte in his letter to the Countess reveals his desires to seduce Ehrengard. Isak Dinesen uses the letters as a lyrical accompaniment to the action and in

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[1] Ibid., p. 18.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

contrast to the extravagant measures taken by Kierkegaard's seducer. Cazotte does not want the physical act of consummation required by Kierkegaard's seducer as a token of success.[1] He wishes to bring forth the hidden flower of Ehrengard's being in the form of a 'blush'. He says in his letter, "And I made my decision. In the blush."[2] The more virginal and pure Ehrengard is the more passionate her arousal to the erotic: "I have seen the Alpen-Gluhen once, the moment is among the greatest of my existence, and when it was over I said to myself that I would give ten years of my life to see this once more. And yet after all it has been but a presage of my adventure with Ehrengard."[3]

It is Ehrengard's love for the Prince's and Princess' baby that first quickens the idea of sensuality within her. Cazotte is still determined to seduce her. He says in his letter, "Why does not the silly fool seduce the girl in the orthodox and old-fashioned manner and set his mind at rest? My answer . . . Madame, the silly fool is an artist."[4] Ehrengard's ruin will be a fact and a reality, "inasmuch as the reality of Art be superior to that of the material world. Inasmuch as the artist be, everywhere and at all times, the arbiter on reality."[5]

Cazotte chances upon Ehrengard bathing in the lake. He proceeds to possess her by capturing her existence on canvas: "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

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[1] Langbaum, Gayety of Vision, p. 277.

[2] Ehrengard, p. 35.

[3] Ibid., p. 49.

[4] Ibid., p. 54.

[5] Ibid., p. 58.

crowning of his career as an artist."[1] The face of the bather would be turned away in the painting. To possess her, to bring about her fall, Cazotte would have Ehrengard gaze at the painting and realize she is beautiful. In the recognition that she is naked, Ehrengard's fall is imminent. In this sense Ehrengard would give herself to him. However, the nymph does not return to the lake. She surprises Cazotte and says, "My maid tells me that you want to paint a picture. Out by the east of the house. I wish to tell you that I shall be there every morning, at six o'clock."[2] By acquiescing to Cazotte's secret desires, Ehrengard foils his plans to seduce her. His letter reads in one line, "The damnable, the dynamic, the demonic loyalty of this girl!"[3] Ehrengard's willingness to come to him of her free will disrupts the idealization of virginity that Cazotte has of her and we see that the artist is no longer in full control of his scheme. The plans are disrupted further when the husband of the baby's wet nurse kidnaps his wife, Lispeth, and her charge. Ehrengard pursues the kidnapper to "The Blue Boar". Ehrengard is engaged to an officer, Kurt von Blittersdorff, who is at this time dining with his comrades at the inn. He is alerted by the screams from above for Ehrengard has "gripped Matthias by his long hair and three times knocked his head against the wall behind him . . . 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."[4] Kurt rushes upstairs and is amazed to see Ehrengard. The

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[1] Ibid., p. 66.

[2] Ibid., p. 77.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 98.

husband, Matthias, makes no claim on the child but wants his wife to return with him. Kurt asks Ehrengard in a steady voice, "Do tell me, Ehrengard. What child is it?"[1] At this precise moment Cazotte enters the room. Ehrengard says that the child is hers. "It is my child." The young man's faith in her and his new need for her contracts in his throat and he is unable to speak. To Ehrengard, too, something is happening: "She too felt, in a new way, the depth of life."[2] Kurt cannot leave until Ehrengard acknowledges to him the father of the child. She turns and looks straight at Herr Cazotte: "The girl's glance was strong and direct, like an arrow's course from the bowstring to the target. In it she flung her past, present and future at his feet."[3] At this glance Herr Cazotte's "blood was drawn upwards . . . till it colored him all over like a transparent crimson veil."[4] Herr Cazotte, the artist, blushes. Ehrengard has sacrificed all: her reputation for virginity, her engagement to Kurt, her loyalty to her sovereign's secret. Cazotte is the father of her child and in his blush he realizes that its living presence is the symbol of the impregnation of the idea of the erotic that he has had of Ehrengard. According to Robert Langbaum:

> Cazotte had planned for Kurt to be the 'spiritual cuckold' who would have external possession of Ehrengard while he himself had internal possession. But in naming her spiritual seducer, Ehrengard exorcises him and prepares the way for a union with Kurt of body and soul . . . Ehrengard is enabled to love two men in Kurt--the ideal and the mortal man. She can therefore step out of the realm of reflection, where

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[1] Ibid., p. 103.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] Ibid., p. 109.

[4] Ibid.

Kierkegaard's lovers remain, into the realm of existence.[1]

Ehrengard is no passive victim as the girl in Kierkegaard's "Diary of the Seducer" suggests. She is a moving force and calls to mind other such characters in Dinesen's works as Athena in "The Monkey", Lady Flora in "The Cardinal's Third Tale", and Miss Malin in "The Deluge at Norderney". Ehrengard bears out Cazotte's remark in his first letter, "But most of all to be seduced is the privilege of woman, the which man may well envy her."[2] To Dinesen the old aristocratic order with its cultural memory connects with art, desire, and spirit. She adds that which Kierkegaard does not, of the Ariel force, the connecting force between the aesthetic and the religious life.[3]

Although Dinesen leans more in favour of art, her works show an ambivalence of attitude. According to Donald Hannah, Dinesen like Keats has written her 'Grecian Urn',

> . . . even if the questions posed are slightly different. What happens when we try to force life to conform entirely to the shape of art and to become, in Yeats' phrase, an 'artifice of eternity?' If art is more harmonious than life, when does this harmony change into discord? What is the result of the attempt to impose an artistic pattern rigidly and inexorably upon life.[4]

Several though not all of these questions are answered in Dinesen's tales. It is difficult for Dinesen as a writer and as a person to maintain at all times a point of balance in her tales. Once she tries to order all the components into an aesthetic design or total picture the less like life art becomes and as a result the less human. On the other

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[1] Langbaum, Gayety of Vision, p. 282.

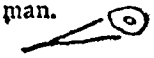
[2] Ehrengard, p. 12.

[3] Langbaum, Gayety of Vision, p. 283.

[4] Hannah, p. 141.

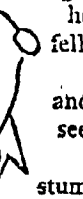
hand, the closer art approximates to the condition of life, the less perfect it becomes. Dinesen strikes an equilibrium in Out of Africa and because it is based on autobiographical experience she is not able to transmute it completely into a work of art.[1] She once asked for a sign and the gods answered as the cock bit off the chameleon's tongue. The artist most often must pay his price with this type of uncertainty and loneliness. The story of the chameleon and the anecdote entitled "The Roads of Life" in Out of Africa reflect the divergent tendencies of Dinesen's work as a whole. As a child she had been shown a picture, a kind of moving picture inasmuch as it was created before your eyes and while the artist was telling the story. The story was told every time in the same words: It runs as follows:

In a little round house with a round window and a little triangular garden in front there lived a man.

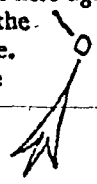
Not far from the house there was a  pond with a lot of fish in it.

One night the man was woken up by a terrible noise, and set out in the dark to find the cause of it. He took the road to the pond.

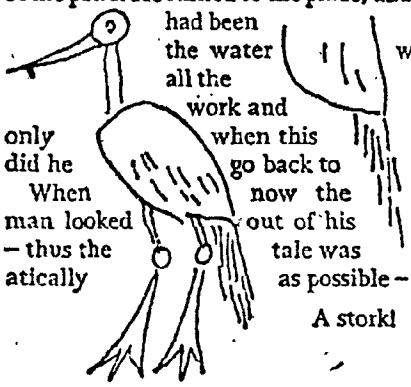
Here the story-teller began to draw, as upon a map of the movements of an army, a plan of the roads taken by the man.

He first ran to the South. Here he stumbled over a big stone in the middle of the road and a little farther  he fell into a ditch, got up, fell into a ditch, got up, fell into a third ditch, and got out of that.

Then he saw that he had been mistaken, and ran back to the North. But here again the noise seemed to him to come from the South, and he again ran back there. He first stumbled over a big stone in the middle of the road, then a little later he fell into a ditch, got up, fell into another ditch, got up, fell into a third ditch, and got out of that.



[1] Ibid., p. 144.



[1]

Persons in life never fit completely into an overall design. The artist cannot box or trap his characters inside a pentagram of art. Dinesen, through her wit and love of the Word which enlivened her works with such grace, succeeds in illustrating the difficult tasks she set for herself in conceptualizing the vision of the relationship of art and life.[2]

Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.[3]
-- Wilde: The Decay of Lying.

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[1] Out of Africa, p. 214.

[2] Hannah, p. 146.

[3] Dukore, p. 624.

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