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**THE *ÜBERMENSCH* COMES TO SCANDINAVIA:  
REREADING HAMSON AND DINESEN IN THE LIGHT OF  
NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY**

by

Anne Grethe Sabo

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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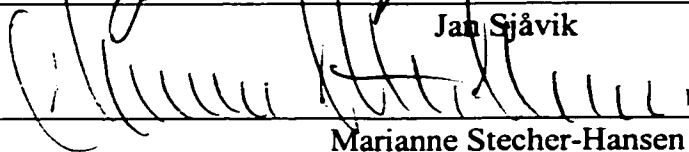
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Abstract

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by Anne Grethe Sabo

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This dissertation seeks to clarify the works of Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) and Isak Dinesen (1885-1962) in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy (1844-1900). The author considers Hamsun and Dinesen a "step-son" and a "step-daughter" of modernity, in line with Georg Brandes' interpretation of Nietzsche as a "step-child" in his time—in opposition to modern civilization, culture, philosophy, and morality—when he presented Nietzsche to his Scandinavian audience through his lectures in Copenhagen in 1888.

Both Hamsun's and Dinesen's critiques of modernity are, like Nietzsche's, fundamental to their works. Rejecting the rigid rules and norms of modern philosophy and Christian Puritan ethics, they do not formulate a new political program for a future society, but focus their attention instead on the individual who they see as the mover of cultural change on the artistic-existential level. Hence, the author focuses in particular on the Nietzschean protagonists in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen, discussing, for instance, their use of masks to survive as outsiders and to defend their artistic-existential projects. Further, the author argues that these projects are fueled by a pantheistic conviction in line

with Nietzsche's Dionysian pantheism and the eternal recurrence Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra preaches.

Finally the author discusses Hamsun's fascination with and Dinesen's disturbing views on Hitler as symptomatic of their disregard for the majority of people while celebrating the artistic-existential projects of great individuals. The author emphasizes the importance of recognizing this as a weakness related to their artistic-existential philosophy; a risk that they may be inclined to support a political alternative that is socially destructive while focusing on the opportunities it implies for the individual. This does not, however, mean that we must reject their work. Rather we should approach their work critically and separate the constructive from the destructive in their critiques of modernity.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations while quoting from texts listed in the bibliography:

By Isak Dinesen: **AD** for *Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard*, **KB** for *Karen Blixen i Danmark: Breve 1931-62*, **LT** for *Last Tales*, **SA** for *Samlede Essays*, **SGT** for *Seven Gothic Tales*, **WT** for *Winter's Tales*.

By Knut Hamsun: **BTi** for *Børn av Tiden* [*The Children of the Age*], **SB** for *Segelfoss By* [*Segelfoss Town*], **PS** for *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter* [*Hamsun's Polemical Writings*].

By Friedrich Nietzsche: **A** for *The Antichrist* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, **BGE** for *Beyond Good and Evil*, **BT** for *The Birth of Tragedy*, **EH** for *Ecce Homo*, **GM** for *The Genealogy of Morals* translated by Francis Golffing, **GS** for *The Gay Science*, **HAH** for *Human, all too Human*, **TI** for *Twilight of the Idols*, **WP** for *The Will to Power*, **Z** for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*.

### **A note on the translations:**

I have quoted from Hamsun and Dinesen in the language they first wrote the text quoted, i.e. I have quoted in Norwegian from Hamsun's books and English from Dinesen's tales. Dinesen was christened Karen Chistentze, her family called her "Tanne," but she wrote under various pseudonyms: Peter Lawless, Osceola, Nozdref's Cook, Tania Blixen, and Pierre Andrézel. She used Karen Blixen as her name for her tales in the Danish translations, and Isak Dinesen for her tales in the English originals, hence I have referred to her as Isak Dinesen. The translations of quotations from Hamsun are my own. I have used English translations as listed in the Bibliography for my quotations from Nietzsche.

## **INTRODUCTION: HAMSUN AND DINESEN: FASHIONABLE STEP-CHILDREN**

Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) and Isak Dinesen (1885-1962) are today considered members of the Scandinavian canon. Yet, they continue to raise controversy, as they did when they first started writing. It was originally their rejection of the social realism of their contemporaries that caused their critics' dismay. Today, on the other hand, it is exactly for their modernist subversion of the ideals of realism that they are celebrated. Further, Hamsun's open support for Hitler's Nazi Germany continues to traumatize his readers and critics dealing with his work. Dinesen's affinity for aristocrats has always bothered her countrymen. However, though she has been considered a patriot during World War II, her ambiguous attitude to Hitler's Nazism has recently been brought to the surface through the publication of her previously unpublished letters, leading to new questioning of her patriotism during World War II.

Except for a brief period of symbolism and neo-romanticism in the 1890s, Scandinavian literature has been dominated by a social realism since the 1870s and at least until the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true for Norwegian literature whose "Fire

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the national romanticism of the 1850s and 1860s, which glorified the nation's culture and history, the neo-romantic movement sought to heighten the awareness of moods and sensibilities. During the early twentieth century, however, writers shifted their focus away from the inward concerns favored by the neo-romantic and symbolist movements and toward more immediate and practical ones. Referred to as the new realists or the neo-realists these authors wrote socially committed novels whose style was not very experimental. Though neo-romanticism and symbolism are often considered modernist

Store” [“the Four Great”], Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Alexander Kielland, and Jonas Lie, represent the golden age of social realism during the last decades of the nineteenth century. With their shattering attack on conventional morality, Ibsen’s naturalist-realist plays were the sensation of Europe in the 1880s. It was a Dane, however, who gave both direction and definition to the trend toward a realistic, problem-oriented literature in Scandinavia. In a series of widely reported public lectures in Copenhagen in 1871—lectures that were eventually combined with others and published under the title of *Hovedstrømninger i det nittende Aarhundredes Litteratur* (1872-90; Eng. Tr. *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 1901 and others)—Georg Brandes laid down what he held to be the crucial test for contemporary literature: that it would “sætte problemer under debatt” [“raise questions for debate”].<sup>2</sup> Brandes also provided a distinctive term for this particular literary phenomenon in Scandinavia: the Modern Breakthrough. Breaking with the national romanticism of the first part of the nineteenth century, the second part of the nineteenth century thus represents a turn toward realism in which questions of social, political, ethical, and religious nature were raised. The 1880s

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movements (by, for instance, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane), modernism is usually referred to as a late-born phenomenon in Scandinavia, in particular in Norway where it did not become a significant trend until the 1950s.

<sup>2</sup> This was the central tenet of Brandes’ lectures, repeated in *Main Currents*. Brandes (1842-1927) had a Ph.D. from the University of Copenhagen in literature where he later lectured. He wrote extensively on both Scandinavian and European literature. He traveled widely, not only to the Nordic countries, but also to France, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Italy, Russia, Belgium, Holland, Austria-Hungary, Greece, and the United States. He gave lectures in Copenhagen, in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Berlin and other German cities, Vienna, Warsaw, Naples and Rome, and the United States.

brought an intensified version of realism as “naturalism” in which the portrayal of social reality became even starker.

Knut Hamsun repudiated the prevailing naturalistic style in literature and attacked the “Big Four” of Norwegian literature in a series of lectures in 1891. Against these, he set out the merits of “psychological” literature, which addresses itself to the modern mind, to the irrationalities of contemporary living. Isak Dinesen, on the other hand, rejected the modern novel with its portrayal of the bourgeois individual and ventured instead into the realm of enigmatic storytelling where heroism and sensuality, lightheartedness and tragedy, are played out.<sup>3</sup> In her first collection of tales, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), she appropriates and parodies the gothic genre.

Not surprisingly, it was according to the ideals of realism, measuring the quality of writing according to normality, logical points and a clear purpose, that Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s writings were first rejected. As Oddgeir Synnes shows in his article on the reception of Hamsun’s novel *Mysterier* [*Mysteries*] (1892), the early reviewers’ criticism “er tufta på realismen og naturalism sine estetiske fordringar” [“is founded on the esthetic requirements of realism and naturalism”] (99).<sup>4</sup> Kristian Randers, for instance, sought, as Synnes notes, “ei klar kopling mellom årsak og verknad” [“a clear connection

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<sup>3</sup> According to Eric O. Johannesson, “the underlying theme of Dinesen’s tales [is]: the defense of the story and the art of storytelling, a theme so pervasive that it has come to form the very basis of the author’s world view” (v).

<sup>4</sup> Discussing the reviews of *Mysteries* in Norway and Denmark in the context of its publication (Synnes has found seventeen reviews in all), Synnes shows how most critics attacked the novel according to the ideals of realism, though there were also some more positive reviews.

between cause and effect”] between the protagonist’s thoughts and actions (105). Seeking in vain to understand the protagonist’s eccentric behavior, Randers writes in his review that he is “trættet” [“annoyed”] by the author’s puzzles.<sup>5</sup> Randers’ conclusion is that Hamsun’s novel is nonsensical. This is also Frederik Schyberg’s central accusation against Dinesen’s debut, *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* [*Seven Gothic Tales*] (1935), deriding the book as “et Stykke blændende kunstnerisk Simili af en begavet, men forskruet Forfatterinde” [“a piece of glaring artistic simile by a gifted, but deranged author”] (225).<sup>6</sup>

Hamsun and Dinesen rejected the realism of their contemporaries— Hamsun in favor of the psychological novel, Dinesen in favor of fantastic tales—creating a language of their own that had the capacity to unsettle their contemporaries’ norms for literature. In so doing, they were both inspired by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-

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<sup>5</sup> Randers reviewed the book for the Norwegian national newspaper *Aftenposten*, September 25, 1892. The review is reprinted in *Søkelys på Knut Hamsuns 90-års diktning*, edited by Øystein Rottem, 85-89. “I længden bliver Læseren ... trættet ... fordi Forfatteren ikke giver noget Fingerpeg til at løse de Gaader, han selv har knyttet” [“In the long run the reader is ... tired ... because the author does not give a single clue to solve those riddles he has created”], Randers writes (87). He derides the hero of *Mysteries* as “en fantastisk Personifikation af Forfatterens egne Tanker, Syner og Drømme, — han er den legemlige Iklædning af et eiendommeligt, exentrisk Kunstner temperament” [“a fantastic personification of the author’s own thoughts, visions and dreams, — he is the embodiment of a peculiar, eccentric artist’s temperament”] (86).

<sup>6</sup> Dinesen first wrote the book in English, like most of her stories, and it was published in the United States in 1934. Schyberg reviewed the book for the Danish national newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, 25 September 1935. The review is reprinted in *Blixeniana 1980*, 225-231. To describe the book further, he uses the following terms: “litterært Illusionsnummer ... litterær Pastich ... Snobberi, Fantastik og Perversitet ... Mystifikationer ... falske Effekter ... Balletverden ... Marionetverden” [“an act of literary illusion ... literary pastiche ... snobbishness, the fantastic and the perverse ... mystifications ... false effects ... a ballet world ... a marionette world”] (229). As Selboe notes, Schyberg’s “målestokk er normalitet, klare poenger og formålsrettethet” [“measuring rod is normality, clear points and purposes”] (69).

1900). Though a popular philosopher today—and almost a cult figure of sorts among the French post-structuralists—he also remains the object of controversy and dismay, known as the philosopher of the *Übermensch* who proclaimed the death of god and attacked Christianity as a slave morality.

It was Georg Brandes, who had championed the fierce plays of Ibsen, who first gave any significant attention to Nietzsche's work in Europe. In *Nietzsche og Norden* [*Nietzsche and the Nordic Countries*], Harald Beyer argues that Brandes' attraction to Nietzsche did not represent a turn away from social values: Brandes never cared much for the masses, he always admired the great individual and any protest against beliefs in authorities (I: 64).

Trangen til å gjøre opprør var alltid levende hos Brandes. Liksom han i forelesningene om "Hovedstrømninger" hadde gjort opprør mot tidens smak, ergret de konservative og prøvd å føre de store kulturstrømningene inn over Danmark og Norden, slik kjente han nå, to desennier seinere, atter trang til åndsopprør, denne gang mot dannelsesfilistrene og den liberale sjølgodheten. Og atter mente han å kunne lede friske kulturstrømninger inn over Norden, strømninger som kunne bringe på dypt vann en dikterflåte som holdt på å strande i gold og talentløs hverdagsrealisme.

[The desire to rebel was always alive in Brandes. Just as he had rebelled against the taste of his contemporaries and annoyed the conservatives in his lectures on the "Main Currents," wanting to guide the larger cultural

currents into Denmark and the Nordic countries, he felt, two decades later, the same urge to rebel against his contemporaries' culture. This time he rebelled against the cultured philistines and their liberal self-righteousness. And again he felt that he could lead fresh cultural currents into the Nordic countries, currents that could bring into deep water a float of poets, which was about to be stranded in barren and inept everyday realism.] (I: 64-65)

In line with his own desire to rebel, Brandes writes approvingly in his dissertation on Nietzsche, *Aristokratisk Radikalisme* [*Aristocratic Radicalism*] (1889), that Nietzsche was convinced that “den store mand er ikke tidens barn men dens stedbarn” [“the great man is not the child of his age but its ‘step-child’”] (16). In other words, the great man is not a naïve product of his time, conforming to his contemporaries' ethics, but is, on the contrary, critical of his own time and wants to “opdrage den unge *imod* tiden” [“raise the young *against* his time”] (16).

Nietzsche criticized his contemporaries' culture, their ethics and philosophy, as does Hamsun in his novels and Dinesen in her tales. In that sense they are all “step-children” of their times, disturbing many of their early readers who disliked the threat to the status quo that their work posed. However, contrary to Hamsun's and Dinesen's first reviewers, who were annoyed with their unsettling of traditional norms and standards, today's critics acclaim their work for the exact same reasons, often by applying the term “modernism” to illustrate how their language broke with tradition. Atle Kittang, for instance, describes Hamsun as “vår fremste tidleg-modernistiske romanforfatter” [“our

foremost early-modernist author”] (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 27). In a persistent “re-use” (“gjenbruken”) of motifs, figures, and symbols, the art of writing is turned into self-reflection in a unique manner in Hamsun’s novels, explains Kittang (28). In Hamsun’s text motifs gradually add up in a rhetorical machine so that they *move away from themselves* towards a *figurative* status, departing from their concrete, “literal” meanings.<sup>7</sup>

Discussing Dinesen’s tales as modernist most recently is Bo Hakon Jørgensen in Denmark. Criticizing Dinesen scholars for either doing too much of a biographical reading of her work or making her work appear too neat, Jørgensen argues that it is the insistent focus on time as a problem—the moment that language cannot grasp—that characterizes her tales.<sup>8</sup> Further, Susan Hardy Aiken, who also notes the modernist effects

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<sup>7</sup> Thus is “den stadige ‘gjenbruken’ av egne motiv, figurar og symbol i tekstane hans, gradvis bygt opp til ein retorisk maskin, ein ‘refraksjonsmaskin’ så å seie, der gjentakninga ovvar seg gjennom avstandens verknad og såleis – nesten umerkeleg – set motiva, figurane og situasjonane på gli *bort frå seg sjølv*, mot den særlege *figurative* status som bestemmer det metapoetiske meiningsplanet i tekstane. For kva er betre kjenneteikn på det figurative, enn denne avvikande rørsle bort frå faste, ‘bokstavlege’ meiningar?” [“the consistent ‘re-use’ of the author’s motifs, figures and symbols in his texts, gradually built up into a rhetorical machine, a ‘refraction machine’ so to say, where the repetition shows itself through the effect of the distance and thus—almost unnoticeably—makes the motifs, the figures and the situations roll *away from themselves*, towards the particular *figurative* status which determines the meta-poetic level of meaning in the texts. For what is a better sign of the figurative than this departing movement away from solid, ‘literal’ meanings?”] (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 28). Jørgen Lorentzen also notes that, in line with the skepticism and relativism Hamsun’s work presents, the understanding of language is modernist: “Hans språkforståelse er også fullt og helt i overensstemmelse med det moderne gjennombrudd han er i ferd med å gjennomleve” [“His understanding of language is also entirely in accordance with the modern breakthrough which he is experiencing”] (62).

<sup>8</sup> Jørgensen has discussed Dinesen’s work in terms of modernism earlier, together with Marianne Juhl in *Diana’s hævsn* [*Diana’s Revenge*]. In his preface to *Siden hen* [*Later on*], Jørgensen situates his new work in the continuation of *Diana’s hævsn*, while he finds that the themes of revenge and sensuality were exaggerated in the earlier work. According to Jørgensen, Dinesen is a “modern” author because her tales center on time as a problem (292). In both Danish and Norwegian the term “modern” is used both to describe the modern age of rationality as well as aesthetic modernism. Jørgensen asserts that he is referring to the latter when discussing Dinesen as “modern,” referring to the modern understanding of time as “fortidens opløser” [“the dissolvent of the past”] (292.) Dinesen’s tales focus on the “moderne

of her narratives, has considered her tales an anticipation of postmodern feminist theories.<sup>9</sup> Like Kittang, Aiken emphasizes how Dinesen's texts "unsettle and dissolve their own apparent stability. With their multiple narrators, labyrinthine story-within-a-story narrations, echoic redoublings and repetitions, and complex forms of self-

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fænomen: døden i tiden, den stadige forandring" ["the modern phenomenon: death in time, the constant change"] while they aspire to connect with the present moment that has not been confiscated by language, explains Jørgensen (294). "Modernisterne søgte på forskellig vis samtidigheden, nuet, som det, der endnu ikke var beslaglagt af forestillinger og stift sprog. Dette område kaldte Karen Blixen 'tavsheden,' 'det uregelmæssige,' 'det mystiske,' som der først 'siden hen' kan peges på fra sprogets, det regelmæssiges og historiens sted. Rundt om kring i enkelte fortællinger findes en fokusering på en særlig 'Time' ... Denne time er sådan set Karen Blixens 'øjeblik,' set i forhold til modernisternes, som først lader sig fortælle siden hen." ["The modernists sought in different ways to reach the present now, that which still has not been confiscated by images and rigid language. Isak Dinesen called this area 'the silence,' 'the irregular,' 'the mysterious,' which can only be pointed to 'later on' from the position of language, the regular, and time. In various places of her tales there is a focus on a particular 'Hour' ... This hour is in this way Isak Dinesen's 'moment,' when compared to the modernists', which can only be told later on"] (297). Tone Selboe similarly underscores the modernism of Dinesen's work, maintaining that "Blixens tekster er spenningsfulde bl.a. i kraft av å befinne seg i et *etter-perspektiv*: i distansen mellom 'før' og 'nå,' mellom historien som konstruksjon og historien som erfaringsuttrykk, ligger et hermeneutisk potensial" ["Dinesen's texts carry a powerful tension by being in an *after-perspective*: in the distance between 'before' and 'now,' resides a hermeneutic potential"], (12). Focusing on Dinesen's use of masks and the staging of the world as imitation, she concludes that "kritikken mot den moderne rasjonalitet kommer så å si innenfra det moderne selv, ved at en fortid som framstilles som illusorisk, forvrent og amoralsk, for en kort stund gjenoppstår i maskefasong" ["the critique against the modern rationality comes, so to say, from the modern itself, in that a past which is depicted as illusionary, distorted, and amoral, for a short while resurrects in the appearance of masks"] (69). Moreover, Selboe relies on Gadamer's hermeneutics, Derrida's grammatology, and Barthes' semiotics to reveal Dinesen's mingling of styles and genres and to assert the discursive and rhetorical character of her texts. Like Jørgensen and Selboe, Frantz Leander Hansen focuses on Dinesen's understanding of time as a problem as that which defines her as a modern author in line with James Joyce (185).

<sup>9</sup> Relying on French Feminist theory and Hélène Cixous in particular, Aiken explains in her introduction that she hopes "not only to show the relevance of contemporary theories of sexual difference and signification for reading Isak Dinesen, but to demonstrate that Dinesen also provides a major anticipatory 'reading' of those theories—indeed, that her text blur the boundaries traditionally assumed to divide 'fiction' from 'theory'" (xxii). Further, Aiken explains that "if Dinesen is difficult for many readers to grasp, it is at least in part because she employs what appears to be an antiquated, even reactionary, narrative form to achieve distinctively modernist effects. Despite their superficial traditionalism, her narratives deploy a deconstructive poetics that challenges conventional categories of writing and reading" (70). See also *Isak Dinesen and Narrativity. Reassessments for the 1990s*, a collection of fourteen essays edited by Gurli A. Woods, interpreting Dinesen's tales while drawing from

referentiality” (70). Moreover, her tales “call into question the sacredness and ‘truth’ of those constructs formerly held to be beyond question” (69).

The discussions of the modernism or postmodernism of Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s texts underscore the resistance in their texts to literalness. Yet, there is also a resistance in their texts against being labeled modernist or post-modernist. Critics have generally agreed on a turn in Hamsun’s writing from his mid-period (in the 1910s), beginning with the Segelfoss-novels. As he got older, he supposedly became more conservative in his writing, turning to the roots of life in the countryside and a romantic or reactionary critique of modernity.<sup>10</sup> Hence, he turned away from his earlier and, at that time, radical investigation of the life of the unconscious and the neo-romanticism of his first books, *Sult* [*Hunger*] (1890), *Mysterier* [*Mysteries*] (1892), and *Pan* (1894).<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the modern “disorder” Hamsun attacked, *Markens Grøde* [*The Growth of the Soil*] (1917) (for which Hamsun was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920) apparently offers the idyllic ideal of the harmonious life of the independent peasant, living in tune with

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current theoretical orientations, such as feminism, gender studies, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and narratology.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Øystein Rottem (*Knut Hamsuns Landstrykere. En ideologikritisk analyse*) and Jan Fr. Marstrander (“Fra Konerne ved Vandposten til Ringen sluttet”). Leo Löwenthal, on the other hand, argues that Hamsun’s reactionary tendencies can be traced from his debut, as do Aasmund Brynildsen and Peder Kierkegaard. Sten Sparre Nilson (*En ørn i uvær*) and Morten Giersing, John Thobo-Carlsen, and Mikael Westergaard-Nielsen (*Det reaktionære opprør*) also discuss the relationship between Hamsun’s fiction and his reactionary politics.

<sup>11</sup> Literary histories, such as Harald Beyer’s (*Norsk Litteraturhistorie*), and biographies, such as Robert Ferguson’s (*Enigma*), generally assert such a “turn” in Hamsun’s writing.

nature.<sup>12</sup> Those discussing Hamsun as a “modernist” have therefore focused on his early works from the 1890s.<sup>13</sup>

Neither has “modernism” or “post-modernism” received authority as a conclusive label for Dinesen’s work. As Selboe notes, hardly any other author has been categorized by so many “*ulike merkelapper*” [“*different labels*”] as Isak Dinesen (11). Her writing has been considered modernist, post-modernist, baroque, romantic, and symbolic.<sup>14</sup> As in Hamsun’s case, critics have seen a shift in her writing, turning away from her original radical agenda in later works. Set in the context of the icy blue landscape of Denmark’s winters, her second collection of tales, *Winter’s Tales* (1942),

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<sup>12</sup> In *Knut Hamsuns Landstrykere* Rottem maintains that “I *Markens Grøde* blir ikke bare naturen, men ‘naturmennesket’ normen. Bonden blir symbolet på en tilværelse i pakt med naturen og på et natuforbundet, meningsfullt arbeid” [In *The Growth of the Soil* not only nature, but ‘the man of nature’ constitutes the norm. The farmer becomes the symbol of an existence attuned to nature and of natural, meaningful labor”] (81). See also Aasmund Brynildsen’s and Leo Löwenthal’s reading of this book which they find reactionary and romantic.

<sup>13</sup> These include James McFarlane, Peter Kierkegaard, Donald Riechel, and Martin Humpál. Atle Kittang represents an exception, arguing that Hamsun’s entire work is modernist. Jørgen Tiemroth also attempts to discuss Hamsun’s entire work in the light of modernism, but concludes that Hamsun’s capacity to create modernist fiction is exhausted by the time he wrote *Den siste glæde* [*The Last Joy*] (1912). In his recent monograph, Walter Baumgartner also considers Hamsun a modernist in his entirety.

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Engberg discusses the baroque aspects of her tales; Robert Langbaum and Thomas R. Whissen see her as a romantic. Jørgensen has earlier discussed the symbolism of Dinesen’s work. Biographies and works discussing (or labeling) Dinesen’s work in the context of her life are numerous. Examples include the works by Olga Anastasia Pelensky, Judith Thurman, Donald Hannah, and Linda G. Donelson. Sara Stambaugh and Susan Gubar see her work as the product of a feminist, and *Dansk Litteraturhistorie* [*Danish Literary History*] from 1984, edited by Peter Holst, discusses Dinesen under the headlines “En aristokratisk feminist” [“An aristocratic feminist”] (vol. 7) and “Aristokratisk modernisme” [“Aristocratic modernism”] (vol. 8). Likewise, Grethe Rostbøll focuses on the female rebellion against male oppression in Dinesen’s tales. Leander Hansen also wants to focus on “liv og værk” [“life and work”] together while focusing on the role of the aristocrat and her art, rebelling against bourgeois asceticism (9). In Scandinavia, several scholars have worked to identify the religious character of Dinesen’s work, such as Svend Bjerg, Peter Hjorth S. Bjerring, Mogens Pahuus, and Hans Holmberg. In his work from the 1950s and 1960s, Aage Henriksen focuses in particular on the myth about the fall of

thus departs from her first collection, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), which relishes elements of the erotic, exotic, fantastic, and supernatural.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as Robert Langbaum notes, Dinesen's fictional autobiography, *Den afrikanske Farm* [*Out of Africa*] (1937), "reassured the Danes, who had not liked the decadent, fantastic, cynical and perverse quality of *Seven Gothic Tales*, that Isak Dinesen had after all a regard for and a knowledge of reality and humanity" (155). The Danish reviewers liked its "realism," concludes Langbaum, "and its humanitarian sensibility, the love she shows in it for animals and simple people" (155).

While they apply different styles that vary over time, both Hamsun's novels and Dinesen's tales nevertheless convey ideas that are consistent with what I read as the philosophies of their works. These philosophies are elucidated by the philosophy of Nietzsche. Moreover, recognizing the Nietzscheanism of their work makes it clear how different forms of styles—the different "periods" of the works of Hamsun and Dinesen—

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man as the core of her philosophy, together with the marionette symbol, interpreted as the idea that life is a matter of living according to God's thought.

<sup>15</sup> Reviewing *Vinter-Eventyr* [*Winter's Tales*] for the Danish newspaper *Politiken* on October 10, 1942, Tom Kristensen explains that "hendes 'Syv fantastiske Fortællinger' var paa Grund af deres ærkearistokratiske Holdning, som grænser til Snobberi, og deres ejendommelige, snørklede Erotik aldrig blevet populær her i Danmark" ["her *Seven Gothic Tales* never became popular in Denmark because of their too aristocratic tone, verging on snobbery, and their peculiar complicated eroticism"] (9). With *Winter's Tales*, however, Dinesen "er vendt hjem til Danmark" ["has returned to Denmark"] (10), continues Kristensen, and, he adds tongue-in-cheek, "de Læsere, som i 'Syv fantastiske Fortællinger' mente at kunne spore et Drag af Perversitet, bliver sørgeligt skuffede. Nok er Fantasien ude over den yderste Grænse; men der er en Renhed over de enkelte Kærlighedsscener" ["those of her readers who found in *Seven Gothic Tales* an affinity for perversity, will most certainly be disappointed. Her fantasy may perhaps go overboard, but a purity surrounds the love scenes"] (9). Thurman writes that "*Winter's Tales*" is the most Danish of Karen Blixen's books, the most somber and introspective ... the tales are filled with a poetic feeling" (325). Indeed, seven of the eleven stories are set in Scandinavia.

can nevertheless communicate ideas that belong together. This is not to say that these ideas, the philosophies of Hamsun and Dinesen, are replicas of Nietzsche's ideas. Rather, it means that since there is a resonance in the former of ideas formulated by the latter, Nietzsche's philosophy can be used as a helpful tool to clarify ideas expressed by Hamsun and Dinesen, regardless of these sources.

It seems that a prejudice against Nietzsche, rooted in a superficial understanding of his ideas, has caused a lack of recognition of the extent to which Nietzsche enlightens the works of Hamsun and Dinesen. In the following I shall seek to amend this ignorance when presenting the ideas of Nietzsche. Moreover, by revealing the connections between the ideas of these two Scandinavian authors and a continental thinker, I also hope to increase their interest to a wider audience.

In any case, Hamsun and Dinesen aligned themselves with Nietzsche, recognizing ideas in his philosophy that fit their own artistic visions.<sup>16</sup> Hamsun declared that no one had made such an impression on him as Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Strindberg.<sup>17</sup> To her

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<sup>16</sup> Hence, as Harald Beyer notes in *Nietzsche og Norden*, it is possible to discern Nietzschean ideas in Hamsun's writing even before he could have been familiar with Nietzsche's ideas, as for instance in *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* [*On the Cultural Life of Modern America*] which Hamsun wrote in 1888. Likewise, in his article on Dinesen's Nietzscheanism, Riechel explains that "Isak Dinesen ... could come to hold 'Nietzschean' views and to fight 'Nietzschean' skirmishes against morality without any particular acquaintance with the philosopher's thought ... by virtue of her adolescent intellectual and emotional experiences around 1900 as well as by her virtue of the general cultural climate in the first phase of Modernism" ("Roads Round Nietzsche" 330). For instance, "the ethical imperative of living dangerously, which is so recognizably Nietzschean, [and which] is a leitmotif in all Dinesen's writing ... is an imperative she could have learned from her father" (331). Neither Hamsun nor Dinesen read German and could thus not have read Nietzsche in that language.

<sup>17</sup> Hamsun made this statement in an article entitled "Professor Berendsohn," published in *Vor Verden* (1929), an anthology of various articles on current topics, edited by Ronald Fangen and Victor Mogens.

friend Thorkild Bjørnvig, Dinesen confessed that she had been a fan of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* since her youth, and she likened herself to a Nietzschean Yes-sayer.<sup>18</sup> However, though various critics have noted the connections between Nietzsche's philosophy and the fiction of Hamsun and Dinesen, no substantial study has considered the full degree to which Nietzsche's philosophy can enlighten their work.

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In this article, Hamsun rejects Prof. Berendsohn's claim that he has been greatly influenced by Thomas Mann, while asserting that "det er ingen som er mere paavirkelig end jeg, jeg er ingen Stenmand, jeg er indtryksom, nervøs, hysterisk om nogen saa synes, jeg har kanskje lært av alle de Forfattere jeg har læst, hvad vet jeg! Men ingen har i mine yngre Dager gjort det Indtryk paa mig som Dostojevski, Nietzsche og Strindberg" ["there is perhaps nobody who has been more influenced than I. I am no man of stone, I am impressionable, excitable, hysterical, some might think—perhaps I have learned from all those authors I have read, how would I know! But in my younger days, no one made such an impression on me as Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Strindberg"] (107). We could also add Schopenhauer to the list, indeed, Hamsun might have read more by Schopenhauer than Nietzsche (see my Chapter III). Mary Chavelita Dunne—who offers, as Harald Næss reports during the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies, 2000, the first mentioning of Nietzsche in Anglo-Saxon literature—refers to Hamsun's interest in Nietzsche, revealed to her during their meetings in 1890 and described in "Now Spring Has Come," her lightly fictionalized account of their relationship, included in *Keynotes* (1893), which carries a dedication to Knut Hamsun. Mary Chavelita Dunne, daughter of a Welsh mother and an Irish father, eloped to Norway with her first husband Henry Higginson, a bigamist, in 1887 where she remained until after Higginson's death two years later. She quickly learned Norwegian and became infatuated with Hamsun's *Hunger* which she immediately began to translate and which was later translated (in 1899) under the *nom de plume* George Egerton, the first two names of her second husband. In "Now Spring Has Come," she describes her intense correspondence and meetings with Hamsun with whom she was apparently in love and might even have proposed to (Ferguson 117). About one of their meetings, she writes: "Did we not talk about anything? Of course we did. Tolstoi and his doctrine of celibacy. Ibsen's Hedda. Strindberg's view of the female animal. And we agreed that Friedrich Nietzsche appealed to us immensely" (63). George Egerton became one of the most famous—and notorious—writers of the 1890s with the publication of her daring short stories in *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894).

<sup>18</sup> Bjørnvig writes that "hun havde elsket, fra hun var ung" ["she had loved, since her youth"] Nietzsche's "Zarathustrabøger" ["Zarathustra books"] (*Pagten* 15). Dinesen took a line from Zarathustra as the epigraph for *Out of Africa*: Equitare, acrem tendere, veritatem dicere: To ride, to shoot with a bow, to tell the truth. See Nietzsche "On the Thousand and One Goals," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (171). In a letter to Birthe Andrup, dated July 27, 1944, Dinesen confesses that she finds encouragement in "nogle Ord af Nietzsche ... 'Jeg er en Jasiger, og en Stridsmand har jeg været, for en Gang at faa Armene fri til at velsigne'" ["some words by Nietzsche ... 'I am a Yes-sayer and a warrior I have been, so that one fine day I could have my arms free to bless'"] (KB I: 373). She had once thought to include these words, she adds, at the end of *Out of Africa*.

With the exception of Harald Beyer's chapter on Hamsun in his two volume work *Nietzsche og Norden* [*Nietzsche and the Nordic countries*], the focus on Hamsun's Nietzscheanism has been directed towards his early works, particularly from the 1890s.<sup>19</sup> In fact in his article "Hamsun, Nietzsche og nazismen" ["Hamsun, Nietzsche and Nazism"], Sten Sparre Nilson rejects Beyer's interpretation of the Nietzscheanism in Hamsun's last book, *On overgrown Paths*, as a "feiltolkning" ["misinterpretation"] (296), arguing, moreover, that even the Nietzschean elements in Hamsun's earliest novels amount to nothing but "lettvinte lån" ["superficial copying"] (299) and "'nietzscheanisme' av banaleste sort" ["the most banal kind of 'Nietzscheanism'"] (302). In this way Nilson's condescending conclusion fails not only to consider the role of Nietzschean elements in Hamsun's early work, but how Nietzsche's philosophy can elucidate his entire oeuvre.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In contrast to Frank Beardow, Donald Riechel, Tarmo Kunnas, Rolf Nyboe Nettum, and Henning Sehmsdorf, Beyer also notes the Nietzscheanism of Hamsun's last book, *On Overgrown Paths*. I will discuss this text (which Hamsun wrote in response to the proceedings against him after World War II when he was accused of being a member of the Norwegian Nazi party) in depth in Chapter IV and V. Beyer lists Hamsun's "moral relativism" (rejecting the Court's judgment of what is right and wrong while upholding his own morality) and his derision of Professor Langfeldt's psychiatric science (while asserting his own insight into the psyche) as typically Nietzschean (*Nietzsche og Norden* II: 296-98). Professor Langfeldt observed Hamsun to determine his fitness to stand trial.

<sup>20</sup> Other critics who have commented on the Nietzschean elements of Hamsun's work include Frank Beardow, Donald Riechel, Tarmo Kunnas, Rolf Nyboe Nettum, and Henning Sehmsdorf, but none of them offer any substantial discussion of the extent of which Nietzsche's philosophy elucidates Hamsun's work. Frank Beardow focuses on Nagel, the protagonist of Hamsun's novel *Mysteries*, in his article "The Nietzschean Superman in Hamsun's *Mysteries* and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." Donald Riechel, in his article "Knut Hamsun's 'Imp of the Perverse,'" focuses on Hamsun's Nietzschean use of irony in his two first novels, *Hunger* and *Mysteries*. In his ten-page article on Knut Hamsun and Nietzsche, Tarmo Kunnas gives a quick summary of Nietzschean ideas in Hamsun's writing. In his book on Hamsun's early works, *Konflikt og visjon* [*Conflict and Vision*], Nettum includes brief comparative comments on Hamsun's Nagel with Nietzsche's Zarathustra. In his article on the Pan-motif in Hamsun's

If the discussion of Hamsun's Nietzscheanism has been superficial, it has been even more so in the case of Dinesen. Among those who have noted the Nietzschean aspects of Dinesen's work only James David Bono—whose (unpublished) dissertation discusses Dinesen as a Nietzschean mystic<sup>21</sup>—and Donald Riechel—who discusses Dinesen's Nietzscheanism in his article "Isak Dinesen's 'Roads Round Nietzsche'" — have made more than incidental remarks.<sup>22</sup> Other American scholars of Dinesen, such as Robert Langbaum, Judith Thurman, Sara Stambaugh, and Susan Hardy Aiken, merely

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*Pan*, Sehmsdorf uses Nietzsche's ideas on Pan when interpreting *Pan*, seeing Nietzsche as the originator of "the most influential modern reinterpretation of Dionysos and his companion, the satyr," and arguing that "it is not at all unlikely that Hamsun was familiar with these ideas in substance prior to writing *Pan*" (353, 355).

<sup>21</sup> According to Bono, mystical elements from Aquinas' theodicy and Dionysian elements from Nietzsche combine in Dinesen's primitive mysticism. With that definition, Bono is mainly concerned to reveal the unethical implications of Dinesen's philosophy, which he judges even worse than the implications of Nietzsche's philosophy. Basically his point is that Dinesen shouldn't be praised and admired as she has been because her ideas of life are egotistical, unethical, racist, and violent. He concludes that "Blixen did not understand Nietzsche because there was no discipline in her thought. Where Nietzsche concerned himself with the despair which would come from nihilism's advance, Blixen concerned herself with the true aristocrat's right to self-fulfillment. Her work is at its core egotistical: I can no longer have fun in real life, so I shall do so as a witch, in a pact with Lucifer; I shall manipulate people and make them believe that what they normally consider to be good is really bad, and what they normally think bad to be good" (224). Opposed to Dinesen, Bono emphasizes the values of ethics, rationality, and Max Weber's sociology to protect humanity (286). While I agree that there are dangerous implications related to Dinesen's emphasis on the aristocrat's affirmation of himself or herself (and I shall return to these in Chapter V), Bono's fear is in my opinion exaggerated. It blinds him from seeing the artistic-existential potential, which I will focus on, and also the full potential of a Nietzschean reading of Dinesen. I object to his limited focus on the Dionysian elements of Nietzsche's philosophy. Moreover, his conclusion that she did not understand Nietzsche because her thinking lacked discipline is condescending to say the least.

<sup>22</sup> As with Hamsun, Riechel is particularly interested in Nietzschean irony, arguing that Dinesen's writing is "inspired by an all-encompassing ironic vision" ("Roads Round Nietzsche" 334). Referring to "the paradoxes of Dinesen's self-conscious narrative techniques" and how "Dinesen's stories do not end with reconciliation or synthesis of polar opposites," he defines her irony—as opposed to Robert Langbaum who defines Dinesen's irony as "romantic"—as Nietzschean (335-36).

note the connections between Nietzsche and Dinesen in parenthesis.<sup>23</sup> Among Scandinavian critics, Nietzsche seems to be even less of an issue. Most either refrain from referring to Nietzsche or if they do, it never amounts to any substantial discussion.<sup>24</sup>

## NIETZSCHEANISM

Nietzsche's philosophy is multifaceted and "Nietzscheanism" is therefore not an unambiguous concept. Writing in aphorisms and excelling in the art of irony and

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<sup>23</sup> Langbaum makes references to Nietzsche and writes in a footnote that Dinesen confessed to him that "I like Nietzsche very much" (184). However, he does not pursue any analysis of how Nietzsche's philosophy works in her stories. Thurman argues that Dinesen very likely read Brandes' lectures on Nietzsche when they were reprinted in 1900, and that his lectures must have made a great impression on her. "Brandes's essay suggests the scope of Dinesen's debt to Nietzsche," writes Thurman (53). However, except for mentioning that Brandes lectured on "Nietzsche's contempt for the Christian heritage of dualism," Nietzsche's belief "that fate should be courageously embraced," and "Nietzsche's call for 'a new nobility'—a class of people who have learned to know life through action," as points for comparison, she does not substantiate her argument with an analysis of Dinesen's tales to show their "debt to Nietzsche" (53). Moreover, she is content to highlight the Nietzschean qualities of Dinesen's mind by prefacing some of the chapters in her biography with mottoes and quotations from Nietzsche. As Riechel notes, "Stambaugh adopts Thurman's method of association in her recent feminist reading of Dinesen, where Dinesen's opposition to Christianity receives particular attention. In commenting upon the choice of the pen name 'Isak' and upon Dinesen's conception of God as a laughing amoral artist, Stambaugh quotes from Nietzsche's 1886 Preface to *Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)* to conclude: 'The similarity to Dinesen's views is hardly accidental' (Stambaugh 63)" ("Roads Round Nietzsche" 328). Aiken, finally, argues that Nietzsche was "a crucial precursor" to Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, but except from mentioning his name in some of her footnotes, she does not explain how Nietzsche was important for Dinesen's *Out of Africa* or any of her other writings (220).

<sup>24</sup> Jørgensen, for instance, in a book of more than three hundred pages, refers to Nietzsche only once, when he quotes a paragraph from Nietzsche's *Human, all too Human* to elucidate his interpretation of the opera fire in Dinesen's tale "Drømmerne" ["The Dreamers"] as an image of a young soul's rebellion against her home (82-83). Rostbøll notes that Dinesen "gør som Nietzsche op med kristendommens snævre moralbegreber og med Vestens dualism" ["like Nietzsche rejects the confining ethics of Christianity and the dualism of western culture"], but she refrains from any further discussion to show how exactly she rebels like Nietzsche (303). Like Rostbøll, Leander Hansen refers to Nietzsche in his discussion of Dinesen's rebellion against bourgeois asceticism without any further discussion. Bjerring does assert the similarity between Dinesen's active sense of destiny and Nietzsche's *amor fati*. However, he reveals a typical Scandinavian (superficial) understanding of Nietzsche as the philosopher of the irreligious *Übermensch* and is therefore careful to assert that Dinesen and Nietzsche are quite different (see my Chapter V).

contradiction, Nietzsche easily lends himself to various uses. Because of his critique of language and logic, he became particularly popular among the French philosophers of post-structuralism and deconstruction, such as Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman, and hence we hear of him today as a deconstructor of absolute truth who rejects essentialism, while asserting the significance of style, play, and perspectives.

Before deconstruction and postmodernism established a stronghold within philosophy and criticism, the existential Nietzsche, or the prophet Zarathustra, held sway, a version of Nietzsche expounded by Walter Kaufmann and later Bernd Magnus, among others. In *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (1978), Magnus reads *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in an existential vein, focusing on how it presents man as eternally doomed to face the terrible abyss of existence, before which he realizes that he is left to his own means and action to affirm the meaning of his own life.

Prior to this existential version of Nietzsche, we can locate a radical political or social Nietzsche, deploring the masses of democracy, calling for the *Übermensch* to assert his own will to power beyond the petty standards of bourgeois ethics. Georg Brandes, for instance, was a proponent of this Nietzsche, defining his philosophy as an aristocratic radicalism. In line with this political Nietzsche is also his (reactionary) celebration of Greek antiquity and history's former aristocrats who lived according to their own will and instincts while asserting their rank and power.

As the creator of the *Übermensch* Nietzsche has become a persona in himself; the syphilis-ridden mad-man who, in the tradition of a long line of artists and philosophers, sacrificed his health to pronounce his truths to the future. Monumental biographies and critical commentaries on Nietzsche by a range of famous authors, as well as creative appropriations, using Nietzsche's ideas as a point of departure for their own projects, have nourished the idea of the Nietzsche-persona.

In his "Prologue" to *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950), Walter Kaufmann discusses the reception of Nietzsche in terms of the "Nietzsche legend" that arose as a result of Nietzsche's life and writings, his insanity and obscurity, his later literary fans and followers, and most of all as a result of the appropriation of his ideas by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. She was the wife of Bernhard Förster who had been one of the leaders of the German anti-Semitic movement, and with whom Elisabeth founded a Teutonic colony in Paraguay. "Elisabeth published edition after edition of Nietzsche's 'collected works,' ever rearranging the material and including something new," explains Kaufmann, inspiring the later "misinterpretations ... and the Nazis' brazen adaptation of Nietzsche" (5, 8).

The most infamous version of Nietzsche is the one which was defended by leaders of the Nazi movement as their philosopher.<sup>25</sup> Alfred Baeumler, who was appointed chief of research in the ministry of education in 1933, became the undisputed Nazi authority on

Nietzsche as the editor of the Reclam edition of Nietzsche's works and the author of *Nietzsche as Philosopher and Politician*, published in 1931. Six years later, Heinrich Härtle wrote *Nietzsche and Nazi Socialism*, a kind of manual on the relationship between Nietzsche's ideas and Nazi ideology. However, as Rudolf E. Kuenzli notes in his article on "The Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche," Nietzsche's works "posed not a small challenge to make them fit the Nazi mold" (429). Kuenzli shows how the Nazi authorities on Nietzsche, such as Alfred Baeumler and Heinrich Härtle, were only able to sell Nietzsche as a prophet of Nazi Socialism through a very limited and careful selection of passages from his works. "In forcing consistency of meaning upon Nietzsche's works, they had to overlook the process of contradiction and reversals, which precisely form Nietzsche's basic strategy through which he indicates that none of his sayings has anything to do with truth," concludes Kuenzli (434).<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Nietzsche's philosophy is often considered a life philosophy, or *Lebensphilosophie*, alluding to those philosophers who have reacted, since the latter part of the nineteenth century, against the philosophical discourses that legitimated the sterility of modernity, i.e. the arid instrumentalism of rationalism, positivism, and

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<sup>25</sup> See Steven E. Ascheim for a general introduction to the reception of Nietzsche's work in German culture that also provides an extensive treatment of the central problem in the German reception: Nietzsche's relationship to the German Right and especially to the ideology of National Socialism.

<sup>26</sup> Kuenzli's comment on Nietzsche's attitude to truth needs clarification. While Nietzsche rejected "Truth" as absolute correspondence between word and thing, he did not, as we shall see, reject "truth" as perspective and interpretation.

scientism.<sup>27</sup> Reacting against the growing sickness, or decadence, among his contemporary Europeans toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche emphasizes the significance of a healthy will to create values and perspectives on life that are life enhancing. It was in particular the mass mentality and Christian Puritan ethics of his contemporaries that he thus wanted to transcend.

These are just some of the various “Nietzsches” or “Nietzscheanisms” that have been and are being discussed today. We can trace a variant of Nietzscheanism in the service of deconstruction, and another in the service of existentialism. Moreover, Nietzsche has become a hero of sorts in contemporary cultural criticism and among feminists, though he continues to be criticized as a misogynist.<sup>28</sup> Hence, fifty years after Kaufmann established Nietzsche as a significant philosopher for the English speaking world, we find ourselves today in the position of having to consider an even larger “Nietzsche legend.”

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<sup>27</sup> Ross Posnock lists Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and William James as some of the strongest voices of a philosophy of life. Further, he lists the will to power, intuitionism, phenomenology, and radical empiricism as some of its best-known philosophical doctrines (89).

<sup>28</sup> See Wendy Brown’s use of Nietzsche in her discussion on “identity politics” in the United States as an example of how Nietzsche is used in contemporary cultural criticism. See also *Why Nietzsche still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics*, edited by Alan D. Schrift, which includes essays that assert the German philosopher’s continued critical relevance for cultural and political studies. Oliver and Pearsall, Eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* is a good introduction for the uses of Nietzsche in feminist criticism.

## BRANDES' NIETZSCHE

Describing Nietzsche's philosophy as an "aristocratic radicalism," Brandes was a proponent of a radical political Nietzsche. As the dominant critic and lecturer at that time, Brandes introduced Nietzsche to a large Scandinavian audience, including to both Hamsun and Dinesen. He gave four lectures on Nietzsche in Copenhagen during the spring of 1888, which were widely attended and discussed. Brandes' definition of Nietzsche's philosophy as an "aristocratic radicalism" appealed to Nietzsche, who responded in a letter to Brandes that it is "the cleverest thing I have yet read about myself."<sup>29</sup> However, it nourished the misconceived idea in Scandinavia that Nietzsche is solely the philosopher of the *Übermensch* and defender of a ruthless master morality.<sup>30</sup> Though a simplified version of Nietzsche (and also of Brandes' reading of his philosophy), it was a slogan fueled by Brandes' focus on how Nietzsche saw "enkelte store mennesker" ["the singularly great men"] as the goal of history (17). This caused a great moral debate that stretched out for several months (1889-90) in which Georg Brandes and Harald Høffding, an influential university philosophy professor at that time,

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<sup>29</sup> Letter to Brandes, dated December 2, 1887. Reprinted in the 1914 Macmillan edition of Brandes' *Friedrich Nietzsche* which includes "An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism" as well as the correspondence between Brandes and Nietzsche (64).

<sup>30</sup> See for instance Bjerring's discussion of Dinesen referred to in Chapter IV. As Beyer explains in *Nietzsche og Norden [Nietzsche and the Nordic Countries]*, the Nietzscheanism in the Nordic countries was narrowed down from the beginning to signify an aristocratic and immoral current. "'Slavemoral' og 'herremoral,' 'lev livet farlig,' 'hinsides godt og ondt,' 'alt er tillat' og først og fremst ordet 'overmenneske'" ["'slave morality' and 'master morality,' 'live life dangerously,' 'beyond good and evil,' 'everything's allowed' and first of all the word 'overman'"] were the central slogans of this current (I: 51).

played the main roles. Opposed to Brandes' emphasis on the great men of history, Høffding, a staunch defender of a social welfare morality, calls for our attention to the majority of people, arguing that it is for their sake history evolves, not for the sake of geniuses.

Brandes, however, did not confine his attention to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. His discussion of Nietzsche's poetic language—first of all the songs of Zarathustra—inspired, as Beyer notes, the lyrical writing of several of the neo-romanticists in the 1890s.<sup>31</sup> Brandes, on the other hand, describes *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as “en god dyb bog” [“a good, deep book”], but he admits that it is not among his favorites (55). For the most part his focus is on *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Hamsun considered Brandes, who had backed not only the rise of Ibsen, but of the Swedish playwright August Strindberg,<sup>32</sup> his mentor. Edvard Brandes, editor of the newspaper *Politiken*, and Georg's brother, encouraged Hamsun to complete his debut novel *Hunger*, and Gustav Philipsen, editor of the magazine *Ny Jord*, to publish it, seeing he could not publish it himself.<sup>33</sup> Upon the publication of his first novel in 1890, Hamsun presented Georg Brandes with a copy of the book and was utterly disappointed when

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<sup>31</sup> *Nietzsche og Norden* (II:49). See my Chapter III.

<sup>32</sup> Strindberg was also inspired by Nietzsche and Hamsun was one of his great fans.

<sup>33</sup> In November 1888, *Ny Jord* published a shorter piece by Hamsun that Hamsun later developed into *Hunger*. The full version finally appeared on 5 June 1890, also published by Philipsen in Copenhagen.

Brandes described it as “monotonous.”<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Hamsun continued to be a persistent pursuer of Brandes’ recognition. He wrote to him frequently, hoping for his approval and support, but though Brandes recognized Hamsun’s talent, he always maintained a critical attitude to his writing.

Hamsun returned to Copenhagen—still buzzing from Brandes’ lectures—from a longer visit to America, in the early fall of 1888. He lived in Copenhagen during the heated debates between Brandes and Høffding while he was working on *Hunger*. Dinesen was only three years old when Brandes gave his lectures on Nietzsche, but Thurman argues that Dinesen very likely read Brandes’ essay “Aristocratic Radicalism,” based on his lectures on Nietzsche, when it was reprinted in 1900 (52-54). Brandes was a friend of Dinesen’s father and she herself desired his friendship. She read his work, referred to him as her mentor, and praised him for being the one who first revealed literature and intellectual genius to her.<sup>35</sup> She was finally able to meet him in 1925.<sup>36</sup>

There are elements of Brandes’ Nietzsche in the later texts of Hamsun and Dinesen, but also of the other Nietzscheanisms discussed above. There is a radical Nietzscheanism of overmen and overwomen affirming their will to create their own lives

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<sup>34</sup> Ferguson quotes Hamsun’s “long letter of defence which this criticism fired off” while commenting on Hamsun’s desire for Brandes’ recognition (114). When Brandes invited Hamsun to spend Christmas at his home with his family in 1889, it was, as Knut Hamsun’s son Tore Hamsun writes, “en stor sosial triumf” [“a great social triumph”] for Hamsun (117).

<sup>35</sup> In a letter to her aunt, Mary Bess Westenholz, dated April 19, 1924, Dinesen writes about Brandes that “jeg ... kan sige at det er ham, som har aabenbaret Literaturen for mig. Min første *personlige* Begejstring for Bøger ... fik jeg gennem ham” [“I ... can say that it is he who has revealed literature to me. My first *personal* enthusiasm for books ... I got through him”] (*Breve fra Afrika* I: 260).

beyond the ethics of modern culture, according to their own styles and perspectives on life. And there is a nostalgic Nietzscheanism in their texts, a yearning back to a former time of a nobler and more natural way of living. I shall begin my discussion of Hamsun's and Dinesen's Nietzscheanism with the latter.

### **OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

In Chapter I, I will consider both Hamsun's and Dinesen's critique of modern society, explaining it in terms of Nietzsche's pathology of modernity. I will focus in particular on Hamsun's Segelfoss-novels and Dinesen's tales "Copenhagen Season" and "Sorrow-Acre," demonstrating how the tension between the old age and the new time is portrayed in these texts. I will compare the critique of modernity and praise of aristocrats in these texts to Nietzsche's arguments in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. I will also refer to *The Birth of Tragedy* by Nietzsche in my discussion of, in particular, Dinesen's defense of the aristocratic sense of tragedy. Hamsun and Dinesen follow Nietzsche in upholding a healthier, aristocratic past against the decadent mass society of modernity. Whereas modern men are governed by a standard set of rules and norms, and by their desire for utility and comfort, men of the old age lived according to their own will and set their own rules. In the old age, power and style played a higher role than comfort and utility.

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<sup>36</sup> See Thurman for a further discussion of Dinesen's great admiration for and indebtedness to Brandes .

In Chapter II, I will extend my discussion of Hamsun's and Dinesen's critiques of modernity into their critiques of modern philosophy; the authority of rationality and the ideals of realism and objectivity in writing. Like Nietzsche, Hamsun and Dinesen find the root of the problem of modern culture in the way people think about and relate to life in particular through language. Only by changing the latter can the former be revitalized. Like Nietzsche, they see the inversion of their contemporaries' norms as one way to inspire change. Hence, instead of the literalness of the realist literature of their contemporaries, they offer fantastic tales, and instead of the Truth they offer lies and fabrications.

In Chapter III, I will consider the existential alternatives Hamsun and Dinesen offer to modernity. I consider these their "artistic-existential projects," in line with Nietzsche's demand that the overman create his own values beyond modernity. Moreover, like Nietzsche, Hamsun and Dinesen see the individual's intellectual and psychological health and his or her creative power as the foundation for a great culture. Their concern is thus not with the political per se, but with the artistic-existential projects of their heroes and heroines. In this chapter I will consider how the artistic-existential projects they describe are presented as a healthier and more vital alternative to the modernity in line with the life of the *Übermensch* Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra calls for.

Underscoring the artistic aspect of Hamsun's and Dinesen's existentialism, their protagonists follow Nietzsche's bid that they wear a mask when affirming their existential projects. This is also in line with Nietzsche's rejection of the Kantian illusion that there is a rational self or essential being governing our actions. Moreover, Hamsun and Dinesen equip their protagonists with a range of masks, including the diagnosis of madness (which they employ as a mask), to distort and disrupt conventional understandings of reality, truth, and sanity, and to expand our sense of what reality may be. Wearing masks and telling tales, the heroes and heroines in Hamsun's and Dinesen's fiction embody or aspire to embody, a richer sense of truth and a healthier form of ethics, beyond modernity.

A pantheistic conviction fuels the artistic-existential projects of the Nietzschean protagonists in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen, as it does for the self-overcoming of Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra. Hence, while critical of organized religion and Puritan Christianity, there is nevertheless a religious element in the projects of Hamsun and Dinesen, as well as Nietzsche, which inspires their protagonists' affirmation of life. In Chapter IV, I will consider this religious element in terms of their experience of, or insight into, the abyss of nature and the eternal creation of the transient. I will compare what Hamsun and Dinesen write about this to Nietzsche's ideas about the original "Oneness" in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the "eternal recurrence" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

In Chapter V, finally, I will focus on the political implications of the literary projects of Hamsun and Dinesen. Though primarily concerned with the artistic-existential aspects of life, their projects do have political consequences, most obviously since they represent a philosophy that basically ignores the masses. However, neither a philosophy for the masses nor a political program for society is what Hamsun and Dinesen are interested in formulating. As we will have seen in Chapter I, they defend an older age of aristocrats not because of the political structure of this age *per se*, but because of the way its heroes and heroines relate to life. Likewise, we shall see in this chapter that when they turn to more primitive or pagan cultures (Dinesen to the native people in Africa and Hamsun to the Sami people, the native people of the northern parts of Scandinavia), they admire these cultures primarily because these people relate to life in a way that resembles the attitude to life of their own Nietzschean protagonists.

Finally, I will look at the views towards Hitler of both Hamsun and Dinesen, the most disturbing aspect of their works that cannot be ignored. Hamsun's Nazism has been discussed and analyzed in every conceivable way, yet it remains a controversial topic that still engages the Norwegian people. Dinesen, though critical of Denmark's national politics, has traditionally been considered a patriot during World War II. However, as I will show in this chapter, she also reveals some rather disturbing views on Hitler. Like Hamsun, she seems fascinated by his capacities as a leader of a movement that promises greatness for those who follow his German model.

I maintain that we must understand these disturbing views on Hitler as founded *not* in a racist or political ideology, but in an *existential* philosophy that ignores the masses while focusing on the capacities of the great individual. Yet, I underscore the importance of recognizing these unfortunate sides of both Hamsun's and Dinesen's projects. By so doing, we can critically approach their works and draw from them what we may find helpful for our lives while supplementing their projects with an accentuated emphasis on the social and political to avoid falling into the same pitfalls they did.

## CHAPTER 1: MODERNITY AS THE DEMISE OF HEROIC GREATNESS

Nietzsche's critique of modern Europe as a sick and decadent culture is a key to understanding Hamsun's and Dinesen's social critiques. It is in particular the herd mentality of modern men that concerns Nietzsche and the consequent lack of great men and free spirits. "*Morality is in Europe today herd-animal morality,*" deplores Nietzsche, (BGE 125), and "the vermin 'man' occupies the entire stage ... tame, hopelessly mediocre, and savorless" (GM 176). Intimidated by the courage of great men, they strive for "security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all" (BGE 72). While attacking modernity, Nietzsche is, in other words, not so much concerned with its material identity as a mass producing society, but with its psychological identity as generating an ethics of conformity.

Nietzsche sets out on his critique of modernity in his first philosophical work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), presenting the heroic age of the Greeks as an ideal culture from which modern men have degenerated. When Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* he believed that the qualities of a nation were expressed in their art. Celebrating Attic tragedy for its Dionysian elements that face man with the abyss of the eternal suffering of existence, he complains about the current status of German art, arguing that it has "degenerated into the lowest kind of amusement and esthetic criticism" (BT 135).

“Never has there been so much loose talk about art and so little respect for it,” Nietzsche concludes (BT 135).

According to Nietzsche, Attic tragedy, with its myths and music, had, on the other hand, the capacity to raise life above the superficial. Through its music, man would experience the fundamental terror of life, and through its myths, he would understand the timelessness of the immediate present. Thus Attic tragedy would “give to quotidian experience the stamp of the eternal” (BT 139). There are, according to Nietzsche, two main reasons for the demise of Attic tragedy: Euripides’ popular tragedies and Socrates’ optimistic philosophy. Whereas Sophocles elevates life to its heroic potentials, Euripides drags life down to a “bourgeois mediocrity” of “the common man” in a “womanish escape from all seriousness and awe,” Nietzsche asserts (BT 70-72). In contrast to the hero eternalized, Euripides wanted to make characters “so finely individualized ... that the spectator ceases to be aware of myth,” he explains further (BT 106). Thus dismissing not only the heroic type, but the Dionysian spirit and the significance of myth, Euripides was led to an “inartistic naturalism,” founded in a “rationalistic method” which asserts that “whatever is to be beautiful must also be sensible” (BT 79).

Nietzsche, in other words, held that to be profound, it was necessary to face life as essentially painful, yet also powerful and delightful. Hence he commends Attic tragedy, because in contrast to the shallow art of modern culture, Attic tragedy, or, rather the Dionysian art of Attic tragedy, “makes us realize that everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution” (BT 102). Attic tragedy thus leads the

audience to face the abyss of existence—to shudder at the sufferings that befall the hero. However, in Attic tragedy, the Dionysian experience of the “ever-suffering and contradictory” essence of life is coupled with the Apollonian beauty of art, portraying, moreover, great heroes, thus producing a profound sense of delight (BT 32).

The Apollonian spirit rescues us from the Dionysiac universality and makes us attend, delightedly, to individual forms ... and so satisfies our instinct for beauty, which longs for great and noble embodiments ... It parades the images of life before us and incites us to seize their ideational essence. (BT 128)

Rejecting the shallow tragedies of Euripides and the ensuing comedies, Nietzsche emphasizes the impact of facing the abyss in order to experience the solacing effects that Attic tragedy affords. According to Nietzsche, Attic tragedy teaches us that “there is need for a whole world of torment in order for the individual to produce the redemptive vision and to sit quietly in his rocking rowboat in mid-sea, absorbed in contemplation” (BT 33-34). Hence, “the luminous images of the Sophoclean heroes—those Apollonian masks—are the necessary productions of a deep look into the horror of nature; luminous spots, as it were, designed to cure an eye hurt by the ghastly night” (BT 59-60).

It is thus “the alternation of Apollonian and Dionysiac excitation in the spectator” that reveals the “sublime esthetic joy in the heart of original Oneness” (BT 133). Euripides, on the other hand, put his pride in “having portrayed life ‘as it really is,’” Nietzsche derides, “and shown men how to attack it: if now all members of the populace

were able to philosophize, plead their cases in court and make their business deals with incredible shrewdness, the merit was really his, the result of that wisdom he had inculcated in them” (BT 71). His campaign also brought life to “the new comedy—that chesslike species of play—with its constant triumphs of cleverness and cunning,” in which tragedy lived on in “a degenerate form” (BT 70-71). In a shallow cheerfulness, Euripides’ goal—to destroy myth and replace it with theory—had thus succeeded. Henceforth plays were to be rational rather than Dionysian, and thus they became trivial.

The connection Nietzsche sees between Euripides’ superficial tragedies and the pursuit of theoretical enlightenment brings him to his central conclusion that Euripides is the spokesman of Socrates’ philosophy.

Euripides may have appeared to himself as the first rational maker of tragedy ... Euripides set out, as Plato was to do, to show the world the opposite of the ‘irrational’ poet; his esthetic axiom, ‘whatever is to be beautiful must be conscious’ is strictly parallel to the Socratic ‘whatever is to be good must be conscious.’ We can hardly go wrong then in calling Euripides the poet of esthetic Socratism. (BT 81)

With Euripides, Socrates’ “drive toward knowledge and scientific optimism has succeeded in turning tragedy from its course” (BT 104).

In the introduction Nietzsche later added to *The Birth of Tragedy*, “A Critical Backward Glance,” Nietzsche distinguishes between the “*strong* pessimism” of the Attic tragedy and the “cheerfulness” of Socrates’ logic (BT 4). Whereas “superabundance”

and “a penchant of the mind for what is hard, terrible, evil, dubious in existence, arising from a plethora of health, plenitude of being” characterize the Greeks who created the former, “decline, fatigue, distemper” characterize the Greeks of the later period (BT 4). The “inquiring mind” was simply the human mind terrified by the strong pessimism of Attic tragedy and trying to escape from it (BT 4).

Though persistent in his accusations against Socrates throughout his life, Nietzsche later abandoned his emphasis on the significance of art as the expression of a nation’s qualities.<sup>37</sup> He eventually comes to see Plato’s philosophy and Paul’s Christianity as the two main reasons for the demise of the great age of the ancient Greeks, demeaning nature by turning the attention toward an imagined transcendence.<sup>38</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche elaborates on how Platonism and Christianity have caused the degeneration of culture and the prevalence of a herd morality in late nineteenth century Europe.

Once he had abandoned his belief in the significance of art for the greatness of a nation and to soothe the individual’s response to the abyss, Nietzsche underscores instead the importance of a powerful will as the embodiment of greatness. Those who participate in a master morality are characterized by such a will and by being creators of their own

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<sup>37</sup> He continued, however, to emphasize the creative styling of oneself and one’s ideas, as we shall see later.

<sup>38</sup> In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche focuses his attack not on Christ, but on Paul. On Jesus he writes that he “had abolished the very concept of ‘guilt’—he had denied any cleavage between God and man; he *lived* this unity of God and man as his ‘glad tidings’ And *not* as a prerogative” (616). Paul, on the other hand, who made Christ’s historical death into a *doctrine* of judgment and return, “embodied the opposite type to

values. They were once the natural commanders over those whose wills were weaker. Eventually, however, this lower class of weak and cowardly people joined forces in a slave revolt, overturning the qualities of courage, power, and hardness in the face of the abyss. “The slave revolt in morals begins by rancor turning creative and giving birth to values,” explains Nietzsche; “the rancor of beings who, deprived of the direct outlet of action, compensate by an imaginary vengeance” (GM 170). “Good” was originally defined by the ruling class as what they were themselves, “that is to say the noble, mighty, highly placed, and high-minded” (GM 160). However, with “frightening consistency,” the rancorous lower class “invert[ed] the aristocratic value equations good/noble/powerful/happy/favored-of-the-gods and maintain[ed] with the furious hatred of the underprivileged and impotent, that ‘only the poor, the powerless, are good; only the suffering, sick, and ugly, truly blessed...’” (GM 167).

Nietzsche dates the slave revolt to antiquity, blaming, in particular, the Christian church and its priests. Wherever slave morality gains ascendancy, “those qualities which serve to make easier the existence of the suffering will be brought into prominence and flooded with light: here it is that pity, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, friendliness come into honour—for here these are the most useful qualities and virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence” (BGE 197). The Christian church has in this way worked “at the preservation of

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that of the ‘bringer of glad tidings:’ the genius in hatred, in the vision of hatred ... *How much* this dysangelist sacrificed to hatred!” (617).

everything sick and suffering, which means in fact and truth at the *corruption of the European race*" (BGE 88). How was the Christian church able to do this? Nietzsche answers as follows:

Stand all evaluations *on their head*—that is what they had to do! And smash the strong, contaminate great hopes, cast suspicion on joy in beauty, break down everything autocratic, manly, conquering, tyrannical, all the instincts proper to the highest and most successful of the type "man," into uncertainty, remorse of conscience, self-destruction, indeed reverse the whole love of the earthly and of dominion over the earth into hatred of the earth and the earthly—*that* is the task the church set itself and had to set itself, until in its evaluation "unwordliness," "unsensuality," and "higher man" were finally fused together into *one* feeling. (BGE 88-89)

Thus European Christianity has worked for more than eighteen centuries "to make of man a *sublime abortion*," concludes Nietzsche (BGE 89). "Men who, with their 'equal before God,' have hitherto ruled over the destiny of Europe, until at last a shrunken, almost ludicrous species, a herd animal, something full of good will, sickly and mediocre has been bred, the Europe of today ...." (BGE 89).

Modernity thus becomes a pathological issue in Nietzsche's philosophy. And as a cultural physician, Nietzsche investigates the sickness of modernity.<sup>39</sup> In his preface to

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel R. Ahern discusses Nietzsche as a "cultural physician." In his book he explores Nietzsche's conception of sickness and health, maintaining that Nietzsche "approaches virtually everything he speaks of in the manner of a physician of culture" (3).

*The Genealogy of Morals* he asks: “‘Under what conditions did man construct the value judgments *good* and *evil*?’ And what is their worth? Have they thus far benefited or retarded mankind? Do they betoken misery, curtailment, degeneracy or, on the contrary, power, fullness of being, energy, courage in the face of life, and confidence in the future?” (GM 151). *The Genealogy of Morals* is written as a confirmation of the former; that modern ethics are symptomatic of sickness and weakness. It is therefore “the diseased who imperil mankind, and not the ‘beasts of prey,’” argues Nietzsche (GM 258). In fact, it is “the born misfit” of today, whose “introverted gaze” directs him away from life’s natural instincts, that makes the air stink “as of a lunatic asylum or sanatorium” (GM 258). The ascetic ideal has etched itself on the memory of mankind and thus caused, concludes Nietzsche, “the supreme disaster in the history of European man’s health” (GM 280).

Nietzsche further explains the ascendancy of slave morality in late nineteenth century Europe in terms of Christianity’s political heir; democracy. According to Nietzsche, “the *democratic* movement inherits the Christian,” namely “herd-animal desires” (BGE 125). Hence, when the “free spirit” is defended “in all the countries of Europe and likewise in America” it is by “something that misuses this name, a very narrow, enclosed, chained up species of spirits who desire practically the opposite of that which informs our aims and instincts ... They belong, in short, and regrettably, among the *levellers* ... eloquent and tirelessly scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its

‘modern ideas,’ men without solitude one and all ... good clumsy fellows who ... are unfree and ludicrously superficial” (BGE 71- 72).

Symptomatic of their lack of greatness, modern men also lack a “deep reverence for age and the traditional,” argues Nietzsche (BGE 196). “When, conversely, men of ‘modern ideas’ believe almost instinctively in ‘progress’ and ‘the future’ and show an increasing lack of respect for age,” he continues, “this reveals clearly enough the ignoble origin of these ‘ideas’” (BGE 196). Nietzsche concludes that

there is perhaps nothing about the so-called cultured, the believers in “modern ideas,” that arouses so much disgust as their lack of shame, the self-satisfied insolence of eye and hand with which they touch, lick and fumble everything; and it is possible that more relative nobility of taste and reverential tact is to be discovered today among the people, among the lower orders and especially among peasants, than among the newspaper-reading *demi-monde* of the spirit, the cultured. (BGE 203)

It is Nietzsche’s point, finally, that every “aristocratic society” and “higher culture” on earth has been begun by “men of a still natural nature, barbarians in every fearful sense of the word, men of prey still in possession of an unbroken strength of will and lust for power, [who] threw themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful ... races or upon old mellow cultures” (BGE 192). “Their superiority lay,” explains Nietzsche, “not in their physical strength, but primarily in the psychical—they were *more*

*complete* human beings (which, on every level, also means as much as ‘more complete beasts’—)” (BGE 192). As a more complete man,

the noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of, he judges “what harms me is harmful in itself,” he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things, he *creates values*. Everything he knows to be part of himself, he honours: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground stands the feeling of plenitude, of power which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would like to give away and bestow. (BGE 195)

Finally, while thus celebrating his own power and glory, the noble type of man despises “the cowardly, the timid, the petty, and those who think only of narrow utility” (BGE 195).

In order to sustain the superiority of a master morality, an order of rank, in which the noble stand above the rest, is necessary. In Chapter IX of *Beyond Good and Evil*, entitled “What is Noble?” Nietzsche explains as follows:

Every elevation of the type “man” has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society—and so it will always be: a society which believes in a long scale of orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man and needs slavery in some sense or other. Without the *pathos of distance* such as develops from the incarnate differences of classes, from

the ruling caste's constant looking out and looking down on subjects and instruments and from its equally constant exercise of obedience and command, its holding down and holding at a distance, that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed either, that longing for an ever-increasing widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, more remote, tenser, more comprehensive states, in short precisely the elevation of the type "man," the continual "self-overcoming of man," to take a moral formula in a supra-moral sense ...

(BGE 192)

Nietzsche bemoans the absence of a noble rank of aristocrats in modern Europe.

"The strange narrowness of human evolution, its hesitations, its delays, its frequent retrogressions and rotations, are due to the fact that the herd instinct of obedience has been inherited best and at the expense of the art of commanding," explains Nietzsche (BGE 120). Hence, in Europe today, there are no true commanders, only "instruments of the common good. On the other hand, the herd-man in Europe today makes himself out to be the only permissible kind of man and glorifies the qualities through which he is tame, peaceable and useful to the herd as the real human virtues: namely public spirit, benevolence, consideration, industriousness, moderation, modesty, forbearance, pity" (BGE 121). There are, however, a couple exceptions, such as Napoleon, who did not think of himself as acting in obedience to laws from beyond or outside. Hence, Nietzsche asserts:

What a blessing, what a release from a burden becoming intolerable, the appearance of an unconditional commander is for this herd-animal European, the effect produced by the appearance of Napoleon is the latest great witness—the history of the effect of Napoleon is almost the history of the higher happiness this entire century has attained in its most valuable men and moments. (BGE 121)

In the following we shall see that there are echoes in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen in their own reaction against modern civilization, criticizing its leveling of humankind, curtailing the potentiality for greatness and nobility. Saluting “det gamle patriarkalske systemet” [“the old patriarchal system”], Hamsun said about socialism that he “kan ikke med den, fordi den ødelegger det personlige initiativ. De klumper seg sammen om tingene” [“cannot stand it, because it destroys personal initiative. They throng together about things”] (Langfeldt 70).<sup>40</sup> Dinesen, on the other hand, or “Baroness Blixen,” as she preferred to be addressed, insisted that “jeg er ikke Socialdemokrat” [“I am not a social democrat”] (KB I: 473), and maintained that “der er i selve det hellige Demokratis Idé meget, som er mig imod” [“there is in the holy idea of democracy itself so much that I am against”] (KB I: 485).<sup>41</sup> In a letter to her friend Birthe Andrup, she

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from interviews by Dr. Ødegård who, together with Dr. Langfeldt, examined Hamsun's mental fitness to stand trial for treason after the war. Hamsun further says about the Russians, with “stor styrke” [“great emphasis”], according to the doctors, that “jeg hater kommunistene” [“I hate the communists”] (Langfeldt 74).

<sup>41</sup> Dinesen attained the title as Baroness through her marriage with Baron von Blixen (1914). She kept the title even after the divorce (1925) though she was no longer entitled to it by law.

satirically writes about the Danes that “jeg ...synes at den danske Folkekarakter er som en Deig uden Gær,- alle Elementer for Smag og Næring er tilstede; men det, der bringer Substansen selv til at forandre sig, til, saa at sige, at lette, er blevet udeladt” [“all ingredients for taste and nourishment are present, but that which brings the substance itself to raise itself up, so to say, is missing”] (KB I: 384).<sup>42</sup>

### HAMSUN VERSUS THE DESPOTISM OF MODERNITY

Hamsun’s critique of modern society is a key to his work from the beginning. Even before he published his first novel *Sult* [*Hunger*] (1890), which can be read as a portrayal of urban alienation, depicting a starving and aspiring writer, roaming Norway’s capital, Hamsun attacked the modern culture of America in his book *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* [*On the Intellectual Life of Modern America*] (1889). The book was developed from a lecture he gave in America towards the end of his second visit there (1886-88).<sup>43</sup> Though Hamsun was not familiar with Nietzsche’s ideas when he gave the

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<sup>42</sup> Dinesen continues her letter, dated November 2, 1944, to complain about the Danes’ lack of a sense of humor. Alluding perhaps to her years in Kenya (1914-31) where she and her husband Bror Blixen started a coffee farm (she was left with complete responsibility for the farm after they divorced in 1925), she concludes that since she, who “er i Besiddelse af denne Sans for fun, eller Skøj ... føler sig noget ude af det paa den danske Muld, og sætter Sejl til” [“has a sense of fun and knows how to say things in jest ... feels like an outsider on Danish grounds and therefore sails off”] (KB I: 384).

<sup>43</sup> While relentlessly negative towards modern (urban) America in his first book, Hamsun appears more sympathetic towards the America beyond its cities in several of his later short stories, as I will discuss in Chapter V. In the article “Festina lente,” published in 1928 and written at the request of the Pulitzer editor, Hamsun persists in his critique of the restless materialism and consumption of the occident. He laments the loss of the soul and the lack of attention to the general well being in a society where time is money and money is all. He politely adds, however, his recognition of Americans’ recent contributions within science, art, literature, and philosophy, and commends the women and children of the United States. “Festina lente” is included in *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter* [*Hamsun’s Polemical Writings*] (225-30). See Harald Næss for a further discussion on Hamsun and America.

lecture, the book, as Beyer also notes, presents Nietzschean arguments (*Nietzsche og Norden* II: 94-95). Moreover, Hamsun wrote the book itself after he had encountered Nietzsche's ideas in Copenhagen where he worked on it, for the moment setting aside the completion of *Hunger*.

In his book on America, Hamsun is relentlessly negative towards America, attacking its politics, sensationalist press, crass materialism, alphabetism, and its lack of real culture. He begins his book by complaining that,

Det første, som slaar en rejsetræt fremmed imøde og gør ham forstumlet i Amerika, det er naturligvis den store Støj, Rastløsheden, det jagende Liv i Gaderne, den urolige, forvovne Ilfærdighed, hvormed der fares frem paa alle Omraader.

[The first thing that strikes a tired traveler from abroad and that makes him bewildered in America is of course the constant clamor, the restlessness, the chasing life of the streets, the jagged, rash speed at which everyone rushes around in all matters all over.] (7)

An equal to Nietzsche when it comes to satire, he then goes on to attack Americans' self-satisfaction, hatred of foreign newcomers, and obsession with numbers and money and anything Big. He maintains that

Amerikanerne er et Forretningsfolk; mellem deres Hænder blir altsammen Forretninger; men de er et kun lidet aandeligt Folk, deres Kultur er sørgeligt tom. Lad dem være herrer i mekaniske Opfindelser ... lad dem

ogsaa have deres Industri ... lad dem have Deres Handel, deres vel udviklede Bankvæsen, deres beundringsværdige Kommunikation ... dét er ikke ubetinget de stærkeste Beviser paa, at Landet er et første Rangs Kulturland. Amerikanerne er ikke aandeligt optagne, ikke Spor af aandelig grebne.

[Americans are a people of businessmen; in their hands everything turns to business; but it is not a very intellectual people, their culture is sadly empty. Let them be masters of mechanical inventions ... let them also have their industry ... let them have their trade, their well developed banking system, their admirable communication ...but there is nothing there to convince us that America is a supreme country of culture. Americans are not interested in the intellectual, are not at all moved by the intellectual.] (21)

In this vein, he criticizes at length Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, asserting that

Whitman og Emerson er blevne fremhævede som de særligt nationale Repræsentanter for deres Lands Literatur, — dette er ikke Amerika til ubetinget Fordel; den ene var en uarticuleret poet, den anden en literær Postilforfatter.

[Whitman and Emerson have been promoted as exemplary models of their country's literature, — this is not to the unconditional advantage of

America; one of them was an inarticulate poet, the other an author of sermons.] (69)<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, says Hamsun scornfully, “er det en meget primitiv Kunst, man stifter Bekendskab med paa de amerikanske Teatre” [“it is a very primitive art that one encounters in the American theaters”] (83).

More specifically in line with Nietzsche, Hamsun despises what he sees as the “despotic” freedom of democracy, its tendency to annihilate individuality and encourage a mob response to issues and events.

En fremmed føler, at han midt i Amerika ikke er ubetinget fri, hans Sympatier og Meninger blir ham dikterede, han har bare at føje sig eller tage Følgerne, han staar foran Frihedens Despotisme—en Despotisme, som er saa meget utaaleligere, fordi den udøves af et selvgodt, uintelligent Folk ... Endelig er Friheden i Amerika en Frihed med store aabne Huller

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<sup>44</sup> Despite his attacks against Whitman and Emerson, Hamsun is nonetheless willing to confess his admiration and respect for Emerson’s essays to a certain degree, referring to his talent for paradoxes and his style in general that challenges our sense of logic. Beyer sees Hamsun’s respect for Emerson, despite all his downgrading, as a connection between him and Nietzsche who admired Emerson (II: 95). In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche dedicates a section to Emerson which praises him as “much more enlightened, adventurous, multifarious, refined than Carlyle; above all, happier... Emerson possesses that good-natured and quick-witted cheerfulness that discourages all earnestness” (75). In an appendix to *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche further asserts that “Emerson with his essays has been a good friend and cheered me up even in black periods: he contains so much skepsis, so many ‘possibilities’ that even virtue achieves esprit in his writings. A unique case! Even as a boy I enjoyed listening to him” (340). In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche refers to Emerson as one of the few “masters of prose” (146). Emerson too, in fact, referred to himself as “a professor of the Joyous Science” at several instances, (first in 1841, and also in a significant lecture on “The Scholar” in 1876). In his introduction to Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann suggests that Nietzsche might have been familiar with Emerson’s “joyous science,” though there is “no evidence that Nietzsche ever read this lecture [i.e. “The Scholar”]” (10).

... Dette gælder særlig de Omraader af den, hvor den religiøse Fordummelse og den patriotiske Fanatisme breder sig i Fællesskab.

[A stranger feels in the middle of America that he is by no means entirely free, his sympathies and meanings are dictated to him, he cannot but obey or take the consequences, he stands in front of a Despotism of Freedom—a Despotism which is even harder to stand because it is followed by a self-absorbed, unintelligent people ... Finally, the freedom in America is a freedom with great wide holes ... This is particularly true for those aspects of it where the religious stupefaction and the patriotic fanaticism are spreading out by joint efforts.] (96)

Toward his conclusion, Hamsun criticizes the American educational system for its failure to teach young Americans about the history and culture of other countries, which “har maaske ikke bidraget saa lidet til at nære den nationale Selvgodhed og gøre Yankeerne end mér patriotiske end de før var” [“has perhaps not contributed to only a small degree to nurture the national self-absorption, making the Yankees even more patriotic than they were before”] (107-08). Like the fast pace and the obsession with numbers, the tyranny of opinions and the fascination with scandals, the educational system is symptomatic of the superficiality of the culture of modern America; its lack of real culture.<sup>45</sup> Hamsun ends his book on America with a note on the contentment and

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<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche also complains about the modern educational system, arguing that “the objective of education ... in our very democratic, that is to say plebeian age ...[is]... in essence the art of deceiving” (BGE 203-04).

patriotic self-esteem in America that represent its lack of culture, preventing them from receiving inspiration and assistance from other cultures.

As Nietzsche complained about the lack of true commanders, Hamsun similarly complains that Americans, concerned with the steady growth and progress of industrialism and capitalism, fail to recognize the significance of “de store Schaktræk, Enkeltaanders vældige Revolter, som med én Gang støder Menneskeheden fremad for flere Slægtled” [“the great moves, the mighty revolts of unique spirits, which at once push humankind forward for several generations”] (131). It is for such great revolts and unique men that Nagel, the protagonist in Hamsun’s second novel *Mysterier* (1892), also longs. Hamsun’s critique of modern culture is, moreover, a central aspect of this book, less explicit than in his book on America, but more explicit than in his first novel *Hunger*.

In *Hunger* we follow a starving journalist—the reader never learns his name—as he roams Chistiania (“Kristiania,” the name for Oslo until 1924), pondering upon grand titles for his future articles, stalking strangers, and riding a taxicab to addresses he comes up with out of nowhere. In *Mysterier* we encounter an equally erratic protagonist who shocks the citizens of a small coastal town in the south of Norway where he resides for a summer, attacking their mores while throwing around Nietzschean slogans of the lonely supermind against the masses. Whereas *Hunger* depicts the alienation caused by the growing cities, *Mysterier* portrays a provincial small coastal town in the south of Norway where the protagonist, Nagel, resides for a summer. More pointedly than in *Hunger*, however, it depicts the pettiness and herd mentality of the modern middle class. The

settled townspeople thus become the object of Nagel's scorn and satire until he finally—overwhelmed by the humbug that surrounds him—drowns himself.

I have already referred to *Mysterier*' initial negative reception. As Ferguson explains, the “critics were puzzled: the perverse and peculiar mind which the state of hunger seemed satisfactorily to ‘explain’ in the first novel was here presented again, in a more refined and tortured perversity” (131). Indeed, discussing the book in 1929, Einar Skavlan concludes that Nagel “har ikke—som den unge mann i Hamsuns første bok—nogen *sult* å skylde på for alle sine urimeligheter; han er slik av naturen” [“has not—like the young man in Hamsun's first book—any hunger to blame for all his absurdities; he is like that by nature”] (164). Whereas Hamsun's first novel *Hunger* allowed the reader to see hunger as the cause of irrational behavior, mad thoughts, and crazy hallucinations, there were no such logical reasons to be found in *Mysterier*.

The eccentric protagonist of *Mysterier*, Nagel, has later been interpreted as an intellectual aristocrat à la Nietzsche, an artist, and a detective.<sup>46</sup> According to Marstrander, Nagel represents Hamsun himself in his suspicion against the public while desiring their approval (34-35). In any case, Nagel remains a mystery. As Nettum notes, the reader learns even less about the past of Nagel than the past of the *Hunger*-protagonist. Hence, his summer in the small coastal town becomes “kvintessensen av hans liv” [“the quintessence of his life”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 112).

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<sup>46</sup> Beyer focuses on Nagel as a Nietzschean figure (*Nietzsche og Norden*), Johan Borgen sees him as an artist, and Nybø sees him as a detective.

The mysteries that permeate the novel regard not only Nagel, but also “real” crimes and murderers. Just before Nagel’s arrival to town, a theology student, Karlsen, has killed himself, apparently out of desperate love for the minister’s daughter, Miss Dagny, who is engaged to marry Hansen, a naval officer. Nagel seems, however, to suspect that “Minutten” [“the Midget”]—a local fellow and the town’s fool—killed Karlsen, and while he himself falls in love with Miss Dagny, he makes sporadic attempts at investigating the case.

However, as Nybø concludes in his discussion of Nagel as a detective, *Mysteries* gives no clear answers as to what crimes have been committed. Nor are any crimes solved, though Miss Dagny reflects in a postlude, some months after Nagel has thrown himself into the harbor to his death, that Nagel had been right about the Midget. She has at this point learnt from poor old Miss Martha Gude that the Midget had assaulted her in some way. *How* Nagel knew about the Midget, remains a mystery.

According to McFarlane, it is this very question—how Nagel might have known and his merits for knowing in this way—that “lead straight to the heart of the novel and bring to the surface those things that Hamsun was concerned to say in it” (“Whisper of the Blood” 579). The real business of the novel is with *secrets*, explains McFarlane, and “the secrets are those that reside deep in personality, things which human reticence normally keeps hidden or tries to ignore, things repressed or camouflaged by social convention” (572). In other words, like Nietzsche, Nagel unveils the lies nurtured by a slave morality while he attacks their pettiness. Indeed, argues McFarlane, the reader

meets Nietzsche's opinions "almost unmodified on nearly every page of *Mysterier*" (564).<sup>47</sup>

Deriding the smalltown people, Nagel complains that,

det var bare lus og gammelost og Luthers katekismus overalt. Og menneskene var middelshøie borgere i tre etages hytter; de åt og drak til nødtørft, koset sig med toddy og valgpolitik og handlet dag ut og dag ind med grønsåpe og messingkammer og fisk.

[there was only lice and old sour milk cheese and Luther's catechism everywhere. And the people were citizens of average size who lived in three story cottages; they ate and drank only what they needed, enjoyed themselves with toddy and politics, and traded day in and day out in soft soap, brass combs and fish.] (53)

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<sup>47</sup> Not only is Nietzsche's name mentioned, but there are, as Beyer notes, several "Nietzsche-reminisenser eller -sitater" in this novel ["reminiscences and quotations from Nietzsche"] (*Nietzsche og Norden* II: 101). Further discussing the Nietzscheanism of Hamsun's *Mysterier*, Beyer argues that "det er først og fremst den alminnelige tendens i Nagels innstilling som er i slekt med Nietzsche i denne romanen, den åndsaristokratiske holdningen parret med gavmildhet, forakten for demokratiet, beundringen for overskuddsmenneskene og 'de store Befalere,' immoralismen, instinktmorale, forakten for massen, liberalismen, nyttehensynet og den 'allvitende' vitenskap, beundringen for 'der vornehme Mensch,' det dionysiske, det ekstatiske, lovprisningen av festens og viljens kraftsvulmende rus." ["it is first of all the general tendency in Nagel's attitude that is related to Nietzsche in this novel, the attitude of the intellectual aristocrat coupled with generosity, the contempt for democracy, the admiration for the men of surplus and 'the great commanders,' the immoralism, the moral of instincts, the contempt for the masses, liberalism, and the principle of utility and the 'omniscient' science, the admiration for 'der vornehme Mensch,' the Dionysian, the ecstatic, extolling the intoxication of celebration and the will swelling with power"] (II: 95-96). Beyer also refers to Nagel as a "yes-sayer" as typically Nietzschean, as well as the idea that socialism is a result of revenge. Finally he refers to Nagel's contempt for writing as a craft and for the principle of utility in general—in contrast to the ideal of living dangerously and the sense that pain belongs to joy and actually increases it—as typically Nietzschean (II: 96-98).

Opposed to such “middelmådighet” [“mediocrity”] Nagel admires the impact of the genius on history: “Jeg beundrer og elsker resultatet av geniets virksomhet i verden” [“I admire and love the result of the genius’ undertakings in this world”] (229). Like Nietzsche, he defends the power of “herremenneskene” [“the overmen”], not just a “Napoleon petit,” but “de utvalgte og overlegne” [“the selected and superior”] (39). “Hva det kommer an på er å påvirke og opdrage *magten*,” he concludes, like “de store” [“the great”] did, such as “Kaifas, Pilatus og keiseren” [“Caiaphas, Pilate, Caesar”] (39).<sup>48</sup>

As I said earlier, critics tend to divide Hamsun’s work into different periods, separating the psychological investigation of his early neo-romantic novels from the realism of his later work. Kittang, on the other hand, argues that Hamsun’s modernist project, focusing on the tensions between illusion and disillusion, is an undertaking Hamsun never abandons.<sup>49</sup> While I support Kittang’s point in focusing on the continuity of Hamsun’s ideas, it is evident that a change occurs with respect to the style of

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<sup>48</sup> Commenting on the aggression of Nagel’s outburst, Nettum explains that “for Nagel er det en lise å kunne utløse sin misnøye gjennom den rene billedstorm, ved å snu opp-ned på de vedtatte verdier. Når han gjør Kaifas og Pilatus til sine helter, følger han i SULT-dikterens spor—han som i blasfemisk rus hånte Gud” [“it’s a relief for Nagel to release his dissatisfaction as an idol smasher, turning accepted values up-side down. When he makes Caiaphas and Pilate his heroes, he follows in the *Hunger*-hero’s footsteps—he who in a blasphemous intoxication derides God”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 134).

<sup>49</sup> Kittang comments that, “kontinuiteten i Hamsuns verk stikk djupare enn vitalismen og naturlengten ... det handlar om ein kontinuitet der denne lengten berre har plass som éin pol i ein tematisk konflikt ... ei utforskning av grunnleggande forhold i menneskelivet, og ei kvilelaus utprøving av det fundamentet sjølve ditekunsten har i vår evne til (og vårt behov for) å skape fantasiar, fiksjonar, illusjonar.” [“the continuity in Hamsun’s work reaches beyond vitalism and a yearning for nature ... it’s a question of a continuity in which such a yearning has its place as one pole in a thematic conflict ... an investigation of the fundamental relations in human life, and a restless testing of the foundation fiction itself has in our capacity (and in our need) to create fantasies, fictions, illusions”] (20).

Hamsun's writing, shifting from a first person narrator to a third person spectator. His social critique, on the other hand, remains not only the same, but grows increasingly loud and satirical.

For now, I will focus on his two Segelfoss-novels (1913-15), because in these the old and the new are most clearly set up against each other. Whereas Hamsun refrains from idealizing the old order and is indeed satirical in his portrayal of both the new age as well as the old order, his portrayal of the old order reveals a noble potential, which Nietzsche's philosophy elucidates. In the first novel, *Børn av tiden* [*Children of the Age*] (1913) we follow the old landowner and aristocrat Lieutenant Willatz Holmsen's loss of power to Tobias Holmenrå, a man of the new age. Born a poor peasant, Holmenrå has traveled out in the wide world and has made his fortune in Mexico. Returning from Mexico he receives all the attention as a mysterious figure—"en fabelhelt" ["a hero from the fables"] and "kong Tobias" ["king Tobias"] (33)—who eventually makes his way up in society as a modern capitalist in Segelfoss.

Holmenrå's investments change Segelfoss radically. Originally a small coastal community in the north of Norway, centered around the Lieutenant's estate, relying on Bergen (Norway's largest city on the west coast) for flour and other commodities, Segelfoss develops into a self-sufficient town. Holmenrå builds a large new mill, so that grain can be refined locally. Then he builds a quay to take larger ships to facilitate his trading contacts with the outside world. Changing from a feudal to an industrial society, Segelfoss acquires a post office, a telegraph service, and its own bakery.

Holmengrå begins his capitalistic adventures in Segelfoss by buying a parcel of land from Lieutenant Holmsen on which he builds his new mill. Though reluctant to sell off his land and thus possibly reveal his need for cash, the Lieutenant is persuaded by Holmengrå who claims he needs the land to settle in an area with fresh forest air to cure his poor health (38-39). The Lieutenant would thus not be selling off his land in the interest of his finances, but in the interest of Holmengrå's health. Hence his aristocratic self-reliant appearance—on which his overflowing power rests—is secured.

However, Holmengrå gradually attains all of the Lieutenant's land. The Lieutenant's identity as the undisputed Lord is thus essentially undermined, as is his identity as a truly Nietzschean aristocrat. The Lieutenant seems not only desperate, but pathetic as he is fighting tooth and nail to protect his aristocratic appearance. According to Marstrander, the Lieutenant represents Hamsun's typical hero: the outsider. "Nagel, Glahn ... vandrerer og Willatz Holmsen, alle har de ensomhetsopplevelsen felles, alle har de isolert seg eller blitt det, som den dikter som skapte dem" ["Nagel, Glahn ... the wanderer and Willatz Holmsen, they all share the experience of loneliness, they have all isolated themselves or become isolated, like the poet who created them"] (10). I agree with Marstrander that Hamsun's typical hero stands alone. However, I reject his interpretation, concluding that since Hamsun must have felt like an outsider, who had made his way up from rags to riches, yet always feeling misplaced, his protagonists would feel similarly about their social status. Such a reading reduces the potential of Hamsun's text and protagonist. There is a difference in focusing on Hamsun's hero as a

lonely outsider instead of a tenacious step-child who stands alone against the rest. Rather than Marstrander, whose focus is on the former, I focus on the latter. Though Hamsun's hero may appear a failure compared to Nietzsche's noble type, his aspirations hold potential that reaches beyond Hamsun's personal experiences. In contrast to Nietzsche's philosophy, however, Hamsun's text points to those historical and private circumstances that can prevent—or at least make more difficult—the practical realization of Nietzsche's philosophy. I shall return to Nagel, Glahn, and the wanderer August in Chapter III to show how their potential—as representations of Hamsun's typical hero and aspiring *Übermensch*—is prevented from its full realization in the context of late nineteenth century Norway. In this chapter I will focus on Lieutenant Williatz Holmsen and what his potential as a Nietzschean aristocrat may be, despite his bankruptcy and personal idiosyncrasies. He is addicted, for instance, to the game of patience and is obsessed with maintaining the advantage in the power balance between himself and his wife, changing his ring back and forth from his right hand to his left as he loses or gains the upper hand.

Holmengrål is another typical hero in Hamsun's universe, revealing how a character's potential is undermined by historical circumstances. Though he arrives in town like a wealthy king and essentially comes to support the Lieutenant's livelihood, Holmengrål never receives the same obedience and respect that the Lieutenant once did, and he behaves, in fact, toward the Lieutenant as a subordinate to his superior. As if his granted merit over others in Segelfoss depended on the Lieutenant's generous superiority, Holmengrål eagerly defends the appearance of the Lieutenant as the true lord. When, for

instance, the Lieutenant offers Holmenrå to take over Segelfoss, realizing that Holmenrå actually owns the estate, Holmenrå convinces the Lieutenant to stay on (BTi 178-79).<sup>50</sup> In other words, though he aspires to be a great man, Holmenrå does not want to acquire such a position at the cost of the Lieutenant's as the undisputed aristocrat. On the contrary, Holmenrå wants to bask in the sun of being the great Lieutenant's and his wife Mrs. Adelheid's privileged friend. To secure a friendly relationship with the Lieutenant in which the Lieutenant's position remains undisputed, Holmenrå maintains a low profile when around the Lieutenant and trivializes his own wealth, implicitly reassuring the Lieutenant that he is not a threat to his role as the great lord. When he has come to the possession of all of the Lieutenant's land, he persistently defends the Lieutenant to the local doctor as "en overlegen mand" ["a superior man"], asserting that the rumors about the Lieutenant's bankruptcy are only gossip (BTi 154).

Nei gik det nu an å gjøre fru Adelheid og løytenanten til nogen ganske almindelige personer som hvemsomhelst kunde mene noget om! Hvad stas var det da for hr. Holmenrå å ha været deres store og gode ven i alle disse år!

[It really was out of the question to reduce Mrs. Adelheid and the Lieutenant to normal everyday people about whom anyone could think or

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<sup>50</sup> The author confides that "hr. Holmenrå inderst inde syntes å bære på den lille eiendommelighet å være svak for det fine, det fornemme. Det hadde været ham en tilfredsstillelse å omgåes herren og fruen på Segelfoss." ["deep inside mr. Holmenrå seemed to carry a distinctive attraction toward the refined, the aristocratic. It had been a pleasure for him to associate with the lord and lady of Segelfoss"] (BTi 178).

say whatever they wanted. Then there would be nothing special about mr.

Holmengrå as their friend for so many years!] (BTi 154)

Holmengrå realizes that the aura he has attained from his successes as a wealthy man is transitory whereas the Lieutenant's authority is rooted in tradition, a quality which, as we've seen, Nietzsche also underscores. Lieutenant Holmsen is—or was—the feudal overlord, effortlessly commanding in his relations with the local people, and respected by them in turn, except, that is, by the new upstarts and civil servants. We've seen that Nietzsche—while emphasizing the significance of difference and having a commanding class over an obeying one—scorns the demi-monde of the cultured, in contrast to whom he prefers the lower orders and peasants. Likewise, Hamsun is biting satirical in his portrayal of the civil servants while his humor is more warmhearted in his portrayal of the peasants.<sup>51</sup> The new doctor, for instance, whose business is growing as more money is circulating, and who has no respect for the Lieutenant's aristocratic rank, is one of the main targets of Hamsun's satire.<sup>52</sup>

On the overall, the Lieutenant remains the Lord in the eyes of most people at Segelfoss. Holmengrå, on the other hand, as a man of the new age and an upstart whose

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<sup>51</sup> As Kunnas writes, commenting on *Segelfoss Town*, Hamsun excludes democracy while he asserts his affinity for paternalistic societies. "I hans verden forstår folket og aristokratene hverandre" ["In his world the grassroots and the aristocrats understand one another"] (34).

<sup>52</sup> When the doctor comes to pay his first visit to the Lieutenant and his wife, Mrs. Adelheid is upset about the doctor's rude manners. She reflects that "i det hele tat var denne lille mand ikke så sympatisk som små mænd kunde være. Han sat og undersøgte malerierne som om han var fra et hjem hvor det også var skilderier" ["this little man was, in fact, not at all as sympathetic as small men could be. He sat and investigated the paintings as if he were from a fine home were there was also art on the walls"] (BTi 108).

blood does not carry the tradition of nobility, continuously has to make an impression to be treated as a great man. This is even more evident in the sequel, *Segelfoss by [Segelfoss Town]* (1915), which follows the social and economic fortunes of the townspeople after Lieutenant Holmsen's death. Here Holmengrå even pretends to be a highly ranked member of the Freemasons to persuade the townspeople about his secret reserves of power and authority.

Whereas the first Segelfoss-novel includes a good portion of humor, even when depicting the pettiness among the lower and the arrogance among the higher classes, the sequel presents a much more bitter and hostile picture of the new age. In *Segelfoss Town*, Holmengrå's status as the new great man is threatened by other upstarts climbing the social ladder, such as Theodor på Bua, who runs the village store and provides the local people with all kinds of fashionable modern goods, like false teeth, tinned food, and ready-made shoes. Holmengrå is increasingly plagued by his own inability to command the respect of his workers—which a born aristocrat like Willatz Holmsen effortlessly enjoyed—while the industrial worker and the day-laborer of the new age, working for money alone, appear increasingly self-important. Trying to explain to Willatz IV, the Lieutenant's son, why he, Holmengrå, isn't able to maintain the same kind of discipline over his workers as Willatz' father once did, he recalls with nostalgia that “Deres far var den rette. Jeg må tænke på ham mere end en gang, ham og hans hest. Pekte han så lystret hans folk” [“your father was of the right kind. I have to think about him more than one time, him and his horse. If he pointed with his finger, his people obeyed”] (SB 121).

Finding only remnants left of the old order, the Lieutenant's role—once the principle of the place—seems a mystery or a fairytale from the past.<sup>53</sup>

So, what is it that the old order of Willatz Holmsen had that the new age of social climbers does not have? In Hamsun's rendition, the old order of aristocrats is characterized—in line with Nietzsche—by a sense of honor and pride, power and style. In his portrayal of the Lieutenant, however, these qualities tend to take on comic proportions. The Lieutenant is, for instance, too proud to admit his financial bankruptcy and continues to act as the generous aristocrat, supporting the livelihood of the peasants' children by giving them positions at his estate he neither needs nor can actually afford to have.<sup>54</sup> Determined to assert his overflowing power—his wealth that would like to give away and bestow—he plans to have a new church built. And while affirming his position as a determiner of values, he discards the minister's objections that they need to ask the authorities for permission (BTi 15-16). In this way the Lieutenant stubbornly maintains an order of rank which, as Nietzsche explains, is necessary to uphold nobility.

Clinging to his position, the Lieutenant derides the new upstarts, such as the doctor and the rest of the modern class of “de civile embedsmændene” [“the civil

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<sup>53</sup> Upon his return to Segelfoss from his education in Germany, Willatz IV, while reflecting on Holmengrå's loss of status, and wondering what has happened, concludes that he can't point his finger on it, but “æventyret var ute” [“the fairytale had reached its end”] (SB 85).

<sup>54</sup> “Dessuten gik nu lille Gottfred der, noget måtte gøres for ham. Og lille Pauline, skulde hun fares dårlig med? [“Besides, there was the young Gottfred, something had to be done for him. And little Pauline, she couldn't be forgotten either”], the Lieutenant reflects as he ponders a way to keep them busy at his estate when he himself has hardly anything left (BTi 164).

servants”] for their commonness (BTi 57). In his opinion, they are “et stakkars folkefærd” [“a piteous kind of people”]:

Søn efter far, slægt efter slægt kopister. Rekrutteret av bondegutter som “arbeider sig op.” De arbeider sig forresten ned gjør de, fra gode fiskere og jordbrukere til skrivere og præster ... Se dig om blandt dem – intet uten nødtørftige ævner og ringe fremfærd, almindeligheten florerer. Jævn hæderlighet, jævn dygtighet i faget, javel! Men overlegenhet, storhet? Søn efter far, slægt efter slægt det samme ... Det er ingensinde tale om litt skjæbne, lynet slår aldrig ned; farn har begyndt med å kopiere, sønnen skal gjøre det samme, dette kalder de å erhverve kultur.

[Son after father, generation after generation, copyists and clerks. Recruited from peasant lads who “work their way up.” Work their way down rather, from good fishermen and cultivators to scribes and pastors ... Do but look at them—nothing but mediocre abilities and stunted energies; the triumph of the commonplace. Average honesty and efficiency in their own departments, yes! But outstanding ability, greatness? No! Son after father, generation after generation the same ... No room is left for the play of chance, no thunderbolt ever falls; the father has begun by copying, the son must to the same; and this they call acquiring culture.] (BTi 57)

It is the slavish copying of the generations of civil servants, “sønner av kopister” [“sons of copyists”], that Lieutenant Holmsen is particularly annoyed with, in line with Nietzsche’s critique of the herd-like behavior of modern men (BTi 57). The civil servants, derides the Lieutenant, have no culture, only “skolekundskap” [“school knowledge”], and they have no “skjæbne eller uregelmæssighet” [“destiny or irregularity”] (BTi 58). They have, finally, no “storhet” [“greatness”] (BTi 58).

Scorning the mediocrity of civil servants, Lieutenant Holmsen, on the other hand, defends his sense of culture and, like Nietzsche, the respect for tradition:

For å leve på kultur må man som første vilkår fødes i rikdom og luksus i mange ledd, det nytter ikke å komme fra almindelige kår og jævn fattigdom i et embedsmandshjem. Denne rikdom og luksus i flere ledd skal avsætte den karakter i en som gjør mennesket til en personlighet. Lat det da leve på kultur.

[In order to live upon culture you must be born to riches and luxury handed down for many generations; to pass from common circumstances and unbroken poverty into an official residence is of no avail. Riches and luxury for several generations are required to lay the foundations of that character which gives a man individuality. Let such a man live upon culture.] (BTi 58)

The Lieutenant himself is only the third, and apparently also the last, of the lords at Segelfoss. Moreover, there is a great irony contained in the fact that the Holmsen house

was also started by a social climber. The first Willatz Holmsen is described in *Children of the Age* as “en tyk og gjærrig herremand som hadde vært tjener, han kjøpte gård efter gård i grænden for en billig penge og fik tilslut godset istand ... Samme Hr. Holmsen var nordmand som vi er nordmænd, men han hadde uniform og talte dansk” [“a fat and stingy landowner who had been a servant. He bought farm after farm round about at a low price until finally he had gotten together a great estate ... The said Herr Willatz Holmsen was a Norwegian as we are Norwegians, but he had a uniform and spoke Danish”] (7).<sup>55</sup> William Holmsen the third, on the other hand, is perhaps “ingen ordentlig stormand” [“not a really great man”], confides the narrator, but

kanske var han større end nogen anden herre på Segelfoss. En løytnant så latterlig utenfor tjeneste, en jorddrot som det gik genialt bakover med, javel, dertil kom at han i yngre år var hidsig og stivsindt uten måte, javel. Men samme løytnant hadde nogen værdifulde egenskaper også ... Løytnanten var en velstuderet mand og når han også med årene kom til å beherske sin hidsighet som en filosof så skete dette hverken av alderdom eller alderdumhet, men alene av mands modenhet ... Han var tredje ledd i rikdom og luksus, med ham var kjæden sluttet. Forresten kom han ikke på knærne. En mand med hans stivhet blir stående.

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<sup>55</sup> Norway was a fiefdom of Denmark until 1814 and all aristocrats and civil servants in Norway were Danish or at least they had Danish education. The Danish language thus belonged to the upper-class and was a mark of their class.

[perhaps he was greater than any other master of Segelfoss. There was no doubt something ridiculous about a lieutenant out of service, as there also was about a lord of the manor going jauntily downhill; add to this, he was in his younger years hot of temper and stubborn beyond measure. But this same Lieutenant had some valuable qualities too ... The Lieutenant was a well-read man, and when, as the years went on, he learned to control his temper like a philosopher, it was not because he had grown old and stupid, but solely because he had reached mature manhood ... He came in the last of three generations of riches and luxury; the succession ended with him. Besides, he was not brought to his knees. A man of his stiffness remains standing.] (BTi 9)

Hamsun's mocking portrayal of the Lieutenant represents the destiny, so to say, of the Nietzschean aristocrat in late nineteenth century Norway as Hamsun sees it; doomed to go under in his encounter with the modern upstarts. Hamsun recognizes the role the Lieutenant plays in the decline of the old order, failing to prevent it, or even aggravating its fall. Yet, he nonetheless portrays the Lieutenant as the last recourse in a declining age and he grants the Lieutenant a death in the form of a grand tragedy in which the Lieutenant stoically affirms his destiny. Adding extra momentum to the tragedy, he lets the novel end with the Lieutenant's demise.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> According to Olivier Gouchet, Lieutenant Holmsen is driven by a "death instinct" in line with the old Viking's sense of *mutatis mutandis*; that one has to fulfill one's destiny rather than being a passive observer to it. Gouchet explains "*mutatis mutandis*" as "den oppfatning de gamle skandinavere hadde

*Children of the Age* ends with the Lieutenant's death, and thus apparently with the death of an old order, however, just before he dies, the Lieutenant makes a fantastic find that seems to hold promises for the future. Buried on his land, the Lieutenant finds an old family fortune. Thus the future of his son is temporarily secured, but only by chance, foreboding the eventual tragedy luck cannot prevent.

Willatz Holmsen IV does not follow in his father's footsteps, but decides, instead, to become an artist, or rather, a composer. Not only does he thus dismay his father, but represents the degeneration of culture Nietzsche talks about in which the aristocrat—the commander—disappears. However, his mother, Adelaide, a lady of noble family from Hanover, has supported Willatz IV in his choice. Free from the Lieutenant's stubbornness and patience that borders on clownishness, as Ferguson puts it, she represents a nobleness that her son carries on.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Willatz IV is portrayed as a quite sympathetic person. Carrying his aristocratic heritage as a natural thing, he is relaxed and friendly around people. Whereas his father insisted on maintaining a wealthy image, his son is content to enjoy less extravagant food when times call for it, and even offers a helping hand to his workers (SB 82-83).

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av skjebnen: En må realisere sin skjebne" ["that idea which the old Scandinavians had about destiny: One must fulfill one's destiny"] (61).

<sup>57</sup> The Lieutenant "is proud to the point of clownishness" and "addicted to the playing of patience," remarks Ferguson (229).

Det var ikke meget skaperi ved eieren av Segelfoss gods. Men så meget desbedre var det. Næppe var han kommet hjem så syntes alle folkene om ham, han for i almindelighet sagte frem og blandet sig ikke i enhver småting, men han kunde også si ifra så det klemte. Og han hadde nogen mærkelige legemskræfter, slåtfolkene blev overrasket over dem en dag da de holdt på å tumle med en kjæmpeslipesten og de uventet fik hjælp.

[There wasn't much pretension about the owner of Segelfoss, which was all the better. He had just come home, and people seemed to like him already. In general he went about things slowly and did not interfere with minor things, but he could also speak up so everyone heard. And he had some remarkable powers. They astonished his mowing workers one day who had a hard time moving a huge grindstone and unexpectedly received help.] (SB 82-83)

That Willatz IV is a composer seems to make him more sensitive to feelings, those of others as well as his own. His relationship with Holmengrå's daughter Marianne, for instance, shows this.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, Willatz IV is a more complete human being, to borrow Nietzsche's words. This means, as Nietzsche says, that he is also a more complete

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<sup>58</sup> An argument between the two upon Willatz' return from his training in Germany, in which Marianne complains that he hasn't written to her, is resolved by Willatz realizing that he has hurt her feelings (SB 88). Whereas his father would have insisted stubbornly on keeping the overhand, his son does not feel that he has anything to lose by it. The relationship between Marianne and Willatz IV is another clue to the true nobility of the latter, seeing how she is portrayed as a heroine, as I shall show in Chapter V.

beast—a true aristocrat. And indeed, even when he struggles to compose and comes to doubt his own qualities as an artist, Willatz IV regains his balance; “men så blir han hersker igjen og skriker guddommelig over gården” [“but then he becomes the master again and strides like a god across his estate”] (SB 206). As Anton Coldevin remarks, “han er fra forrige århundrede” [“he is from last century”] (SB 182).<sup>59</sup> In *Segelfoss Town* we follow him one night walking home from Holmengrå where he has dined and enjoyed Holmengrå’s wine together with the host and two other guests, the local doctor and lawyer. Then Willatz bursts out into a long tirade against “embedstyper” [“the epitomes of a civil servant”], such as the doctor and the lawyer, echoing his father, being particularly annoyed with their snobbish modern fashion of “moving south” to the city:

Jeg blir mere og mere overbevist om at min far hadde ret, at embedstypen er en av de ringeste i et folk, at den er et fabrikkat ... Hvad oplever embedsfolk? Fraflytningen, gammelt virke på nyt sted. Nu aristokratiet! Dets styrke var at det hadde jord og hjem, at det hadde en større eller mindre verden å være herre over: det kjørte hester ut fra dets porte og bortover deres egne veier og marker, masser av folk levet av dets jordbruk. Det ikke bare grundla en slægt, men det rotfæstet den til stedet. Da aristokratiet blev utryddet anmasset embedsfolk sig til plassen. Hvorfor det? Fordi de hadde så syke hænder, de kunde bare sitte og ingenting gjøre

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<sup>59</sup> Anton, a rival suitor of Marianne, says this to her to win her over, while asserting that he himself belongs to the modern world, i.e. trade and money (SB 182). Marianne, however, prefers Willatz IV.

med dem, de sat i forvaltningen, de sat og skrev. Det blev fint å øve et slikt tjenerarbeide som å skrive bokstaver ... Der forfædrene slap træder efterkommern ind i stedet, hans fortid bestemmer hans fremtid, veien er kjendt, det gjælder bare å lakke den.

[I am more and more convinced that my father was right—the civil servant is one of the lowest types in a nation—an artificial product ... What adventures can civil servants have? Nothing but the move to the city, old routine in new surroundings! Now, as to the aristocracy; their strength lay in having lands and houses—in having a greater or lesser world in which to rule: they drove their horses out through their own gates, out over their own roads and fields—the cultivation of their land gave a livelihood to a number of people. They not only laid the foundations of a people, they planted it in the soil. When the aristocracy was put an end to, the civil servants arrogated to themselves the empty place. Why? Because with such useless hands as theirs, which they could turn to no manual labor, they could only sit in an office writing. It became genteel to do such servile work as writing the letters of the alphabet ... Where his forbears stepped off, there the descendant takes up the road—his past determines his future—he knows his way—he has nothing to do but follow it.] (SB 119-20)

While thus criticizing, like his father, the slavish copying of civil servants, Willatz's speech also echoes Nietzsche's portrayal of the overflowing power of the aristocrat.

Further, Willatz brings to mind Nietzsche's comparison of the aristocrat and the beast in his emphasis on horses as a symbol of the aristocrats' power. Hamsun doesn't go as far as to call the aristocrat a beast, but the Lieutenant is described as Adelaide's "mand med araberhodet" ["husband with the Arabic head"] or "araberen" ["the Arabic"], as if he was the finest riding horse himself (BTi 111). Everyone in young Willatz' family rides a fine horse, his mother of noble birth being the expert.

Finally, Willatz alludes to Nietzsche's point about the narrowness of human evolution—in which the herd instinct of obedience is inherited at the expense of the art of commanding—when he argues that whereas civil servants can go on being civil servants for generations, greatness can at best be maintained for three or four generations (SB 119-20). "Geni dør med indehaveren" ["Genius dies with the possessor"], he asserts (SB 120). In contrast to civil servants, great men exhaust the powers of a stock to the very dregs.

Bårdsen, the town's telegrapher, who is a master cello player and whom Hamsun hints might actually have come from a fine upper-class family, expands on Willatz' critique of modernity, lashing out against the age's consumerism. Bårdsen remains an enigmatic figure except for the rumors that he came from an upper-class family and that he was once an unsuccessful writer of plays. Playing his cello and drinking from his bottle he seems bitter, as if trying to forget a great sorrow. Yet, like Willatz IV, he is a

sensitive man and appears quite knightly in his brief relationship with Clara, the pianist in a group of entertainers that visits the town. Willatz Holmsen IV seems fascinated with Bårdsen and, praising his “deilige cellospill” [“delightful cello playing”], invites him over so they can play together (SB 89).

Moreover, Bårdsen has the capacity to draw a certain respect from people around him, including the upstart Theodor på Bua who is right out intimidated by Bårdsen during an evening of card games and drinking to which they have both been invited by a visiting businessman, intoxicated with his democratic gesture. It is during this evening that Bårdsen bursts into his tirade against the new age.

Vi oplever ingenting imot det som dengang var. Handel og vandel? Lapperier, masser av gule silketørklær. Vort liv er vikt ut av sporet, hestene er uten kusker, og da hestene vet at det er lettere å trække nedover end op så trækker de nedover. Ned med os, ned! Livet blir latterlig, hvad vi handler og vandler er til klær og mat, vi imiterer å leve. I gamle dager var det den store forskjjel, det var slottet og ørkenen, nu er alt likt; i gamle dager var det skjæbnen, nu er det daglønnen. Storhet hvad er det? Hestene har trukket det ned.

[We experience nothing in the least like the life in former days. Business and trade? Nothing but trash—heaps of yellow silk handkerchiefs. Our life has gotten off the tracks; the horses are without drivers, and as the horses know it’s easier to pull downhill than up, they pull downhill. Down with

us, down! Life is getting ridiculous; all we work for is clothes and food, we but make a pretense of living. In those days there were great extremes; there was the castle, the wilderness. All is equal now. Formerly fate was the ruler—now it's the daily wage. What is greatness? The horses have dragged it down.] (SB 34)

Thus Bårdsen reinforces both the Lieutenant's and his son's, as well as Nietzsche's point about difference as a prerequisite for greatness.

Moreover, like a true aristocrat, Bårdsen is proud and generous. He gives away all his money to the destitute old shoemaker Nils, whose trade has been ruined by the arrival of the ready-made shoe industry. Bankrupt, sick, and starving, he also makes him a present of his own warm winter boots, before wandering away from society to die alone and unseen, like a dog.

Bårdsen's tragic death makes his destiny resemble the Lieutenant's while it distinguishes him from Nietzsche's aristocrat. There is no sense of resignation in Nietzsche's portrayal of the noble man, whereas Bårdsen, confides the narrator, "hadde vel fra fødselen en naturlig hældning mot undergangen" ["probably had from his birth a natural incline toward ruin"] (SB 249). To the shoemaker Nils he goes on about the ancient Roman lords and how they either cut their wrists or starved themselves to death if they suspected that they had fallen out of the ruling class' favor (SB 249). Yet, when Bårdsen, like the ancient Romans, asserts that he is prepared to face death stoically, it is not without a sense of irony that suggests he is by no means a mere victim to resignation.

Han kjendte fuldt vel sin stilling, at han var færdig, at han var fallit, han realiserte. Liv og død var blit ham av ens værdi, det gjorde ham let tilmote. Endda for nogen tid siden foretrak han livet, men ved fortsatte grubliseringer fandt han at det kunde være likegyldig hvad hans lod blev ... Han stod på bunden. Ulykker kunde komme, værsgod, han snøt dem for enhver triumf.

[He was well aware of his position, that he was finished, that he was bankrupt, he realized that. Life and death were equal to him now, that made his heart feel light. Not long ago, he still preferred life, but after some further brooding, he'd come to feel indifferent about his destiny ... He'd reached the bottom. Accidents were welcome to come; he would dupe them from triumph.] (SB 250-51)

People in Segelfoss ridicule Bårdsen's megalomania, but both respect and fondness characterize the narrator's portrayal of Bårdsen. A central line, which can signify both resignation as well as irony, and which is spoken by Hamsun himself in his own autobiographic work, is expressed by Bårdsen in *Segelfoss Town*: "Om hundrede år er det jo allikevel ingen som husker os" ["In a hundred years no one will remember us in any case"] (SB 250). *Segelfoss Town* ends tragically with the outsider Bårdsen's death, parallel to *Children of the Age*, which ends tragically with the Lieutenant's death.

The portrayal of the outsider Bårdsen as a tragic hero clarifies Hamsun's definition of heroes and aristocrats. In line with Nietzsche's emphasis on the

psychological qualities of the aristocrat, Hamsun bases his definition on aristocratic qualities that transcend name and social class, though he appears to have somewhat different opinions on what these should or realistically can be. Another important clue is that Bårdsen, like Willatz IV, is an artist with a heightened sensitivity. Ferguson fittingly describes Bårdsen as a “spiritual aristocrat” whose “mode of dying places him on the same plane as the born aristocratic Holmsen” (231). Bårdsen embraces “his own death as the inevitable consequence of having strayed into a society and an age which seemed to him without meaning or values,” concludes Ferguson (231). In line with Nietzsche’s theory in *The Birth of Tragedy* that a great culture stands on the heroic tragedy, the deaths of Bårdsen and the Lieutenant represent the demise of a great age. It seems there could be no more tragedies without heroes of their kind.

#### **DINESEN’S NOSTALGIC DEFENSE OF THE LAW OF TRAGEDY**

Whereas Hamsun’s critique of modernity centers on his reaction against modern civilization, its greedy materialism, superficiality, and restlessness, Dinesen’s critique of modernity focuses in particular on the lack of aristocratic style among the modern bourgeoisie. Whereas Hamsun’s critique of modern civilization is enlightened by Nietzsche’s later critique of modernity, it is therefore in particular Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*—deploring modern art while praising the heroic tragedies of the ancient Greeks—that best informs Dinesen’s critique of modernity. Like the Nietzsche of *The*

*Birth of Tragedy*, Dinesen focuses in particular on the significance of tragedy to sustain nobility. Like Nietzsche, she emphasizes the affirmation of pain this implies.<sup>60</sup>

Dinesen's novella "Copenhagen Season," published in *Last Tales* (1957), is written as a defense of heroic tragedies while it satirizes the modern novel as pathetic. Dinesen herself described it (to Langbaum) as a "short novel," alluding, as Langbaum notes, to its "novelistic quality," satirizing the modern novel's portrayal of pathetic individuals who have lost the sense of great tragedy (236).<sup>61</sup> The events in the story take place during the winter season of carnivals and matchmaking, around the Vernal Equinox in Copenhagen in the year 1870 (LT 248). It was a time "characterized socially by the invasion of the town by the country nobility," hence the perfect opportunity to juxtapose the latter with the new age of townspeople (LT 248). Though nearing its end, the old world of aristocrats was at this time experiencing—"as is often the case in the eleventh hour of conditions and states"—an "abundant flowering" (LT 254).

The novella centers on the love story between the young Lieutenant Ib and his cousin Adelaide. As the daughter of Count Theodore Hannibal von Galen, Adelaide belongs to one of the first families of the country. Ib, though also from a vast estate, belongs to a different social class, for his mother, Count Hannibal's younger sister, married "a man outside her own sphere ... Vitus Angel, the last of a long line of big

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<sup>60</sup> According to Selboe, "Blixens tekst ... omhandler smerten og oppbruddet som fundament for kunsten" ["Dinesen's text ... is about pain and departure as the foundation of art"] (15).

<sup>61</sup> According to Langbaum, Dinesen also confessed to him that it was the story of which she was proudest, maintaining, moreover, that it was based on the actual history of her own family (236).

Jutland horse-dealers, whose father, after having made a fortune on his knowledge of horseflesh, in his old age had bought [the estate] Ballegaard for his only child” (LT 258-59). Ib knows that his love for Adelaide is hopeless, for he would never want to soil her pure name. Nonetheless, it is Ib who represents the heroic type whereas Adelaide, on the other hand, appears in the end not as a tragic heroine, but as a pathetic individual, the subject of a modern novel. Thus she represents the decline of the old order.

Obeying the law of tragedy, Ib prefers death to a secret and ignoble relationship with Adelaide. It is Adelaide who suggests the latter as an option, thus betraying her aristocratic role and hence the ideal of honor. Whereas Ib heroically takes his leave to join the French army, never to return to Denmark, Adelaide, feeling defeated by Ib’s decision, escapes to a churchyard to cry without being noticed. The novella ends with her leaning against the abandoned grave of an old ship’s captain whose headstone reads: “Here lie the remains of JONAS ANDERSEN TODE, Sea Captain ... Faithful in friendship, a helper of the afflicted, steadfast in adversity” (LT 314). As Ferguson notes, “in weeping at the bosom of this exemplary bourgeois, Adelaide has ironically fulfilled her destiny by manifesting her essentially bourgeois soul. She is therefore quite properly the subject of a novel” (243).

By portraying Ib as the tragic hero, Dinesen, like Hamsun who assigns the poor telegrapher Bårdsen a tragic role, defines a true aristocrat in terms of his aristocratic qualities which are not necessarily tied to a name. Indeed, Ib’s father Vitus, and in particular his knowledge of horses, affords a clue to Ib’s nobility. Like Hamsun, Dinesen

sees knowledge of horses as one of the marks of nobility, while it also represents an affinity for nature. Vitus wears this insignia as a horse-dealer who has, moreover, “an innate sense of soil and crops and a keen, almost uncanny eye for the quality of animals” (LT 259). Vitus thus also embodies a great love for the earth and a unique connection with it, in line with Nietzsche’s beast and barbarian, but in contrast to the townspeople and the decadent aristocrats.

In fact, “the particular blood mixture” Vitus passed on to his children, “had proved particularly true to breed” (LT 260).

Two or three strong and strange characteristics ran through the nature of the whole brood. One of these was a great, wild happiness at being alive, what in French is called *la joie de vivre* ... They were quiet in their manners and least of all self-centered, but they radiated a turbulent content, and their pride in being alive was almost vainglorious. (LT 260-61)

Further, while evoking Nietzsche’s praise of the aristocrat as the beast, Dinesen describes the Angels as good-looking and with a perfect physique; “their five senses were as keen as those of wild animals. They were fine dancers, shots and anglers; from their horse-dealing ancestors they had inherited a particular relationship with horses, and on

horseback would evoke the idea of a centaur even to people without a classic education” (LT 261-62).<sup>62</sup>

Ripe in their aristocratic greatness, the Angels’ children lived in a world which “was nearing its end; already it had one foot in the grave” (LT 254). Hence, “the last trait in the brood of Ballegaard was this: that they were doomed, each of them in advance marked down for ruin” (LT 263). Furthermore, while sharing the destiny of Lieutenant Holmsen and Bårdsen, Dinesen makes it clear that the tragedies of the Angels’ children—like the ancient tragedies Nietzsche commends—combine the painful with the beautiful to produce a sense of delight and contemplation. “In such a way,” she tells us,

coming disaster surrounded the young Angels with a gentle and gallant glow ... Later on, when the foreboding in the case of each of the brothers and sisters had been fulfilled, their friends remembered it with wonder and sadness; the people of older generations, who had felt a misgiving concerning them and something ominous in the atmosphere round them,

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<sup>62</sup> As Leander Hansen explains, Dinesen maintained that “iboende vildskab var betingelsen for høj kultur” [“innate wildness was the condition for aristocratic culture”] (194). In her memoirs from Africa, she returns to the lion hunt as a heroic feat. Further, as Leander Hansen notes, she “fremhæver gerne, at jæger og løve bliver ét under en løvejagt; dermed understreger hun ikke blot, i hvor høj grad menneske og dyr korresponderer med hindanden, men der er i videre forstand tale om et billede på menneskets lykkelige møde med vildskaen i sig selv” [“readily emphasizes that hunter and lion become one during the lion hunt. Thus she underscores not just to what degree human being and animal correspond with one another, she also presents an image of a human being’s joyous encounter with the wildness in herself”] (194). See, for instance, in *Skygger paa Græsset* [*Shadows on the Grass*] where Dinesen describes the lion hunt as a love affair in which the hunter is infatuated with the head of game which he follows and means to make his own: “Løvejagt er hver Gang igen et Stævnemøde ... fuldbyrdet i fuld Gensidighed, i dyb brændende Attraa og Ærefrygt mellem to jordiske Skabninger af vidt forskellig Art, men af eet Sind” [“The lion-hunt is every time an affair ... consummated in complete reciprocity, in deep, burning desire and reverence between two mortal creatures of different kind, but same mind”] (50).

now felt their suspicions confirmed: they had seen the goddess Nemesis stepping forth, and the sight left them bewildered. (LT 263)

We might explain the bewilderment of the older generation in the face of tragedy as a satire upon Euripides' audience, preferring sensible drama to the Dionysian spirit.

An old artist, who speaks to a group of aristocrats at one of the season's social functions, echoes Nietzsche, praising the capacity of tragedies to make life appear greater, giving quotidian experience the stamp of the eternal. This old artist explains tragedies as "the countermeasure taken by man against the sordid and dull conditions brought upon him by his fall. Flung from heavenly glory and enjoyment into necessity and routine, in one supreme effort of his humanity he created tragedy" (LT 275). All tragedies "are determined by the idea of honor," continues the old artist (LT 276). Like the myths of Attic tragedy, honor represents a core belief according to which the hero acts, or in the context of which the audience can understand his actions. "The idea of honor does not save humanity from suffering, but it enables it to write a tragedy," concludes the old artist (LT 276).

Foreseeing the demise of a heroic age, the old artist muses that "in a hundred years from now," there will "be very pleasant people, justly proud of having achieved great things in science and social condition ... They will be able to fly to the moon. But not one of them, to save his life, will be able to write a tragedy" (LT 274-75). Further, they "may produce great scientists and statisticians," but they will not be able to write a

tragedy (LT 276). Guided, like Euripides, by the laws of rationality, they will, in other words, not be able to create a tragedy that is faithful to the Dionysian spirit. Hence, they may be able to scientifically explain the pain of a hero's wound, but they will not be able to turn it into tragic art. "They will have debts—troublesome things—but no debt of honor, on life and death. They will have suicides—troublesome things—but the hara-kiri will be forgotten, or smiled at" (LT 276).

Compared to Hamsun, Dinesen is clear in her admiring preference for the old order. However, her critique of modernity is subtler. Where Hamsun scorns and satirizes, Dinesen mocks and teases. Nonetheless, her depiction of the tension between the old age and the new order is as pointed as his critique. Questioning the value of the learned world of modern men, their logic and rationality, Dinesen is not complimenting the city when she concludes that its "spiritual atmosphere" is "masculine" (LT 249). Even the women in the city represent the masculine qualities Dinesen thus derides:

The ladies of the wealthy bourgeoisie were solid and sensible women, consciously handling their domestic and social problems inside a restricted sphere of ideas. There was no Bohemia in Copenhagen, and no muses of a higher or lighter order. (LT 249)

The great country, on the other hand, is commended for its appreciation of the feminine and the authority of women. The women in the "great country" were taught at home by French, English and German governesses, had piano, singing and painting lessons and were sent to finishing schools in France;

and they would keep up their proficiency by reading French novels and playing the newest composers. Religious life on the big estates was exclusively the domain of the women ... when the vicar dined at the manor it was the lady who entertained him on pious and even theological matters. In a milieu where woman is looked upon as the supporter of civilization and art, the claims on her virtue are likely to be somewhat slackened. The young country girls might still be strictly supervised, but they married—most often very early in life—into freedom. (LT 250)

In this way Dinesen contrasts a puritan and repressive ethics in the city to a relatively bohemian and liberated ethics in the countryside. “The genuine individualist was to be found in the country,” asserts Dinesen (LT 252).

Like Nietzsche and Hamsun, Dinesen criticizes modern men for merely following one another in line, like a herd of sheep: “The townsmen had been schooled to walk, as to reason, along one line or another ... The people of the big estates,” on the other hand, “would still ride cross-country, and move unhindered in two dimensions. They had grown up ... with room round them and freedom to unfold their particular nature” (LT 252). Feeling, moreover, always naturally at home and in their right element, they saw themselves as “the one reality of the universe” (LT 253). Thus representing Nietzsche’s master morality, celebrating themselves as the center of the world, the Copenhageners, in contrast, appeared to them as “vast gray masses of humanity, individuals without a name, washing beneath them and around them, remain[ing] imperceptible” (LT 253). The

aristocratic class might not, unlike Nietzsche, employ the verb “despise” towards the masses, indeed, “the idea of the earthly pseudo-existence of such people, pervaded with want and struggle, was still acceptable to the mind” (LT 253). However, it was with “reluctance” that they thought of these people’s deaths, “leaving behind them nothing but nothingness” (LT 254). When they from time to time did so, their reaction was “*horror vacui*” (LT 254). The aristocrat, on the other hand, would pass on his respectable name and a noble tradition. Playing a tragic role, i.e. a role according to the ideal of honor, he could, moreover, give his life the stamp of the eternal.

#### **THE ARISTOCRAT’S PERFORMANCE: TRAGIC OR COMIC?**

Tragic destinies are plentiful in Dinesen’s tales. However, according to Johannesson, “the tragedy that springs from fidelity to the code of honor” is the only “one kind of tragedy” which is not denied aristocrats (104). Otherwise, tragedy belongs to the common people. Tragedy is thus “a human privilege, because it confers on us ordinary human beings a greatness which is denied the gods and the aristocrats, denied those who are liberated from necessity” (104).

It is the comedy, which is the aristocrat’s privilege, asserts Johannesson (101). Dinesen’s sense of comedy is, however, rooted in a tragic perception. According to Langbaum, tragicomedy is Dinesen’s “ultimate vision” (38). Johannesson similarly explains that “the world of Dinesen is permeated with a comic vision of life ... best

defined as a kind of romantic irony” (51). Johannesson further explains his point in terms of Dinesen’s sense of humor.

Humor blends laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. There is in Dinsen’s tales ... a feeling of “life as play, game, and as tragic seriousness.” Comedy and tragedy are interwoven ... Dinesen seems to feel that one must come to terms with contradiction, suffering, and pain before life can really begin. This is a conception of humor very close to that expressed by some of the German Romantics. (52-53)

While I find Johannesson’s comments enlightening, I would argue that Dinesen’s sense of comedy also can be understood in the light of Nietzsche’s praise of Attic tragedy. As we’ve seen above, Nietzsche attacks the tragedies and comedies of Euripides for their insistent portrayal of the common people, while he praises Attic tragedy for making its audience shudder at the sufferings that befall the hero while divine in them “a higher, overmastering joy” (BT 132). The “strong pessimism” of Attic tragedy is by no means without laughter. In his introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche asserts that this work was not intended to be a “pessimistic work” or “romantic moonshine, fit to ‘befog and intoxication’” (14), but a genealogy of tragedy which shows how the Greek mind turned to tragedy out of “sheer exuberance, reckless health, and power” (8). What he wants with this book, he asserts, is to teach the reader how to laugh (15). Speaking in the language “of that Dionysiac monster, Zarathustra,” he concludes his introduction, maintaining that “I have consecrated laughter. But not a single soul have I found strong

enough to join me” (15). Evidently, the laughter he calls for is not easily attained; it is rooted in tragic insight.

Just as Attic tragedy—with its joyous affirmation of the abyss—differs radically from Euripides tragicomedies and the New Attic comedy Nietzsche rejects, aristocratic comedy as Dinesen sees it is different from the superficial comedies she lists, as we shall see, together with the drawing-room play and the operatta. Its core is its tragic essence. For as we learn in “Sorrow-Acre” (*Winter’s Tales*), that which becomes a tragedy when it strikes the burgher or peasant, “with the aristocrat is exalted to the comic” (WT 52).

“Copenhagen Season” distinguishes between tragedy for the bourgeoisie and the common people (pathetic novels or tragedies à la Euripides) and tragedy for aristocrats (honorable, heroic, and affirmative à la Attic tragedy). “Sorrow-Acre” clarifies the comic dimension of aristocratic drama: its joyful affirmation of the tragic. Nietzsche can be helpful here to recognize the identity of Dinesen’s sense of aristocratic comedy as tragedy affirmed joyfully.

Set in late eighteenth century Denmark, “Sorrow-Acre,” like “Copenhagen Season,” depicts the difference between the old order and the new age, at least indirectly. According to Langbaum, “Sorrow-Acre” portrays “the last dance of a dying order” (36). The story is based on a Danish folk tale about a peasant woman who, in order to save her son from execution, accepts the lord’s stipulation: if she can mow a field of rye in one

day, her son will be set free.<sup>63</sup> Normally the task for three men, the old woman, Anne-Marie, succeeds, and her son is set free. Anne-Marie, on the other hand, dies from exhaustion.

Witnessing Anne-Marie's "supherhuman feat," as Langbaum calls it, are the old lord and his nephew, the young man Adam (31). Adam has been living in England and has been imbued with a number of the new liberal ideas: "of nature, of the right and freedom of man, of justice and beauty. The universe, through them, had become infinitely wider to him; he wanted to find out still more about it and was planning to travel to America, to the new world" (WT 34). Adam thus represents the new age versus the old order represented by his uncle. Through three dialogs between him and his uncle the differences between the new age and the old order are played out in one hot summer day.

During the first conversation, which takes place early in the morning, Adam and his uncle discuss mythology. Adam has been reading a tragedy by the Danish poet Johannes Ewald (1743-81) and at his suggestion the uncle also reads it during the course of the day. The book, probably *Balder's Death* (1775),<sup>64</sup> has made Adam think about the splendor of the Nordic gods, compared to the ancient gods of Greece and Rome. "I have

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<sup>63</sup> The old woman's son, Goske, is accused of having set fire to one of the lord's barns by the local keeper and the wheelwright who argue that they had seen him sneaking round the barn by nightfall. It remains, however, unclear if Goske is the guilty one, a fact the old lord clearly recognizes. As he explains to his nephew, "the keeper bore him a grudge upon an old matter of poaching, and the wheelwright did not like him either, for he did, I believe, suspect him with his young wife" (WT 40). Seeing that the judge is a "fool" who does only what he thinks the old lord would want him to do, the old lord determines instead to present the old woman with a stipulation by which she can rescue her son from death if she fulfills its requirements.

<sup>64</sup> Balder is one of the Nordic gods, son of Odin.

wondered, while I read,” explains Adam to his uncle, “that we have not till now understood how much our Nordic mythology in moral greatness surpasses that of Greece and Rome ... [The ancient gods] were mean, capricious and treacherous. The gods of our Danish forefathers are as much more divine than they as the Druid is nobler than the Augur. For the fair gods of Asgaard<sup>65</sup> did possess the sublime human virtues; they were righteous, trustworthy, benevolent and even, within a barbaric age, chivalrous” (WT 38). Adam’s uncle disagrees. Like Nietzsche, he rejects benevolence and favors the ancient Greek gods, arguing that it “reveals a weakness in the souls of our ancient Danes that they should consent to adore such divinities” as they did and who were not as “powerful” as the gods of Greece were (WT 38). The Nordic gods “had at all times by their side those darker powers which they named the Jotuns, and who worked the suffering, the disasters, the ruin of our world,” he comments (WT 39). The Greek gods, on the other hand, were omnipotent. “And power is in itself the supreme virtue,” concludes the uncle (WT 39).

At midday, the second conversation between Adam and his uncle takes place. The uncle has read Adam’s book which has made him, on the other hand, think about the difference between retributive justice and the modern humanitarianism. “A new age,” he deplores, “has made to itself a god in its own image, an emotional god. And now you are already writing a tragedy on your god” (WT 50). Adam replies that tragedy is “a noble, a divine phenomenon,” to which his uncle retorts that it certainly is noble, “but of the earth

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<sup>65</sup> Asgaard was the home of the Nordic gods, Æsene.

only, and never divine” (WT 50). “Tragedy should remain the right of human beings, subject,” the uncle continues, “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” (WT 50).

Adam’s uncle insists that “the true art of the gods is the comic. The comic is a condescension of the divine to the world of man; it is the sublime vision, which cannot be studied, but must ever be celestially granted” (WT 51). Further, the uncle maintains that “here on earth ... we, who stand in lieu of the gods and have emancipated ourselves from the tyranny of necessity, should leave to our vassals their monopoly of tragedy, and for ourselves accept the comic with grace ... Indeed ... the very same fatality, which, in striking the burgher or peasant, will become tragedy, with the aristocrat is exalted to the comic. By the grace and wit of our acceptance hereof our aristocracy is known” (WT 51-52).

The third and final conversation takes place after Adam has begged his uncle to stop the cruel tragedy that is being enacted on the cornfield. The old lord, on the other hand, explains that he has given Anne-Marie his word, and in his world the word is still the principle. “My own humble word has been the principle of the land on which we stand, for an age of man,” explains the uncle (WT 56). “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. I myself should feel so in her place,” concludes the uncle (WT 57). The old lord

does not interfere and eventually Anne-Marie completes her task after which the uncle grants her son freedom. She drops dead in her son's arms.

In line with Langbaum, Johannesson argues that “the conversations between Adam and his uncle are evidently designed to illustrate the differences between two worlds: the world of the eighteenth century and the world of the postrevolutionary and romantic nineteenth century; between the feudal and aristocratic eighteenth century and the sentimental and humanitarian nineteenth century” (102). Adam cannot accept the inhumanity of the uncle's forcing Anne-Marie to sacrifice her life for her son. However, eventually he is convinced that reconciliation must be possible. After the third conversation with his uncle, he realizes, as Johannesson notes, “that his uncle, too, is a tragic figure who has suffered as other human beings must suffer” (103). His uncle has lost his son and when Adam threatens to leave him too, his uncle's valediction—that his nephew will be granted “an easier bargain than this: That with your own life you may buy the life of your son”—overwhelm him with pity (WT 60). He now sees “the possibility of forgiving, of a reconciliation,” and he decides to stay (WT 60).

According to Johannesson, Adam thus also comes to realize “that the uncle is a comic figure, a representative here on earth of the comic-amoral divinities” (103). He is a comic figure because while remarried to the young noble woman, Sophie Magdalena, in order to produce an heir, it is suggested that the heir will be Adam's. Until the young woman gives birth to a son, Adam is still nominally the heir to the estate of his uncle, his father's brother. Moreover, an old gypsy woman has looked at Adam's hand and told

him, the reader learns, that a son of his was to sit in the seat of his fathers, i.e. the uncle's estate where Adam himself had been raised after his father passed away when Adam was still a young boy (WT 34).<sup>66</sup>

Johannesson concludes that when Adam is "able to accept the feudal-aristocratic world ... his acceptance is based on a kind of religious experience: he realizes that all which lives must suffer, and that, consequently, there are no easy bargains in life. Adam realizes the unity of all things and accepts the world as it is" (103-04). However, we can also read Adam's recognition as a result of an experience of having witnessed a tragedy that resembles Attic tragedy as described by Nietzsche. When Adam, delighted, "sees the ways of life ... as a twined and tangled design, complicated and mazy," reflecting that "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," he is echoing Nietzsche when he describes the delight tragedy produces by portraying both the suffering and the beauty of its heroes (WT 60). Indeed, Adam finds that "out of the contrasting elements concord rose. All that lived must suffer; the old man, whom he had judged hardly, had suffered, as he had watched his son die, and had dreaded the obliteration of his being. He himself would come to know ache, tears, and remorse, and even through these, the fullness of life. So might now, to the old woman in the rye field, her ordeal be a

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<sup>66</sup> That the uncle will be cuckolded by his wife and nephew is, argues Johannesson, "clearly indicated in the story" (103). The uncle's young wife is sexually frustrated, conscious of an absence, and wondering why no one else than a flea has the courage to risk its life for her. At the outset of the story it is suggested by the author that the real power in this aristocratic world is held by women and in the afternoon the old lord's young wife and Adam ride together in the field.

triumphant procession. For to die for the one you loved was an effort too sweet for words” (WT 61). Thus “the oneness of the world” is revealed to him (WT 61).

Recognizing the oneness of life through suffering, Adam is, however, intoxicated, not with Dionysian joy, but with Christian compassion. His uncle, on the other hand, persistently affirms his omnipotent power à la the Greek gods. Furthermore, whereas Adam’s uncle emphasizes the aristocrat’s freedom from necessity, Adam surrenders to destiny: “Anne-Marie and he were both in the hands of destiny,” he reflects in the end (WT 63). By resigning to destiny, Adam resembles Hamsun’s heroes, the Lieutenant and Bårdsen, more than Nietzsche’s aristocrat. It is the old uncle who appears more like the latter. It is he who—in his attitude against benevolence versus his estimation of power, while upholding his own word—brings to mind Nietzsche’s emphasis on the aristocrat as a powerful determiner of values above the herd morality of the lower classes.

Hence, if Adam sees his uncle as comic, he is himself both comic and pathetic, like Adelaide who resigns to her position. He lacks the heroic sense of honor asserted by Ib. Anne-Marie, on the other hand, represents both honor and heroism and is therefore the true heroine of the story. It is she who truly plays a tragic role in “Sorrow-Acre.” As Langbaum notes, her bargain with the Lord allows her “to transcend herself through suffering” (34). She is portrayed on the field as having a great calmness about her, fulfilling her task.

The bony and tanned face was streaked with sweat and dust; the eyes were dimmed. But there was not in its expression the slightest trace of fear or

pain. Indeed amongst all the grave and concerned faces of the field hers was the only one perfectly calm, peaceful and mild. The mouth was drawn together in a thin line, a prim, keen, patient little smile, such as will be seen in the face of an old woman at her spinning-wheel or her knitting, eager on her work, and happy in it ... with an ardent, tender craving ... bent upon her task. (WT 55)

The story ends with her dying in the arms of her son who is now free because of her feat. In a postscript we learn that the old lord later placed a stone with a sickle engraved in it, where the old woman died and the peasants named the field “Sorrow-Acre” in remembrance of the woman and her son.

In conclusion, the old lord holds tragedy—a tragic destiny—to be the right of human beings, but Dinesen herself modifies, as we’ve seen, his words, denying tragedy to the modern pathetic individual, such as Adelaide in “Copenhagen Season” and, we may add, Adam. Writing from Africa to her sister Ellen Dahl, September 13, 1928, Dinesen expresses her disgust with the modern middle classes and their lack of a sense of tragedy. “Jeg ved ... at jeg ... er Guds udkaarne Snob, og hvis jeg ikke kan være med Aristokratiet eller Intelligentsian, maa jeg ned i Proletariatet eller de herude dertil svarende Natives, thi med Middelklassen kan jeg ikke leve” [“I know ... that I ... am God’s elected snob, and if I cannot be with the aristocracy or the intelligentsia, I have to go down to the proletariat or out to the Natives here, because with the middle class I

cannot live”] (*Breve fra Afrika* II: 182). In her memoir, *Den afrikanske Farm* [*Out of Africa*], she explains as follows.

Det virkelige Aristokrati i Verden, og det virkelige Proletariat, de er begge i Forstaaelse med Tragedien og dens Idé. Den er for Dem selve Guds Plan med Verden, og Livets Toneart. Heri adskiller de sig fra det Bourgeois i alle Klasser, som fornægter Tragedien og grumme nødig finder sig i den, og for hvem det tragiske er ensbetydende med det triste i Verden eller med dens Ubeghageligheder.

[The true aristocracy and the true proletariat of the world are both in understanding with tragedy and its idea. It is to them God’s plan with the world and the mode of life. They differ in this way from the bourgeoisie of all classes, who deny tragedy, who will not tolerate it, and to whom the concept of tragedy is tantamount to everything sad in the world or all its unpleasantness.] (159)

Dinesen expresses these thoughts on the aristocrat’s sense of tragedy while reflecting on the destiny of the Swede Emmanuelson who was once a visitor at her farm in Kenya. A shady character that she had gotten to know as headwaiter in a Nairobi hotel, she learns during his visit that he is also an artist and actor. He appears at her farm one evening, announcing his intention to start the next morning on a three-day walk through the Masai Reserve in order to reach Tanganyika and get away from the animosity of

which he has become the target in Nairobi. It is almost certain death, but he has clearly to get out of Nairobi.

By launching forth on this dangerous mission, Emmanuelson impresses Dinesen by his capacity to make himself into a tragic hero. She invites him to spend the night at her farm and in the morning he appears at dawn as “et af de Lig i Legenderne, hvis Skæg vokser i Jorden. Men han kom ud af Graven med Anstand og var ganske rolig og ligevægtig ... Det var Emmanuelsons store Sortie” [“one of those corpses in the legends whose beard grows down into the earth. But he rose up from his grave with dignity and was quite calm and composed ... It was Emmanuelson’s great Sortie”] (158).

While ascribing, like Hamsun, aristocratic qualities to the artist, Dinesen thus again shows that her definition of the aristocrat goes beyond class distinctions. As Johannesson underscores, “Dinesen’s concept of aristocracy is not based on a class distinction. An aristocrat is one who has a particular view of life as well as a particular way of life” (90-91). Johannesson summarizes Dinesen’s aristocrat with these basic virtues: “a profound sense of honor; a great pride expressing itself in a passion for the grand gesture and the great repartee that will make one immortal; a yes-saying to life and to whatever fate may bring; and a lack of fear or pity” (91-92). Pathetic Adelaide, on the other hand, weeping by the Captain’s tombstone, represents the bourgeoisie. Among this class are the cautious, the humorless, and those with a limited sense of imagination. They

represent the obsession for law and order, for rules, for morality, in short, the degenerate modern age.<sup>67</sup>

## THE PATHOLOGY OF MODERNITY

Deploring the demise of a former great culture, Hamsun and Dinesen apply, like Nietzsche, certain pathological concepts, describing modern culture in terms of sickness—or at least a lack of health—and decay. It is in particular the Christian ethics of benevolence and self-denial that they, like Nietzsche, attack. While they may not see these as the root of the degeneration that has led to the disease of modern culture, they are at least symptomatic.

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<sup>67</sup> Leander Hansen likewise asserts that “modsatningen imellem det borgerlige og aristokratiske er dominerende i forfatterskabet, hvor der dybest set er tale om *livsholdninger*, som kan findes overalt uanset klassetilhørsforhold” [“the dichotomy between the bourgeois and the aristocratic dominates the *oeuvre* [of Dinesen] and it is basically a question of *attitude to life* that can be found everywhere, regardless of class”] (10). Thurman traces the root of the dichotomy to Dinesen’s own family, between her father’s family, the Dinesens, and her mother’s family, the Westenholzes. Whereas the Dinesens were “affable and lavish” the Westenholzes were “urban, literate, and squeamish” (3). “The Westenholzes were exemplary bourgeois. The men of the family were traders, self-made millionaires; rich by their own adroitness, hard work, and frugality ... Their energies went into practical or abstract projects, and mostly toward their own moral excellence. Life was like a long and costly mortgage to them; they were debtors in relation to existence, slowly paying off their souls” (3). The men of the Dinesen family, on the other hand, “tended to be virile and opinionated, the women elegant and pretty ... Their hands were free. Isak Dinesen remembered them to have, and felt she had inherited, ‘a great, wild joy at being alive’” (3). While Thurman thus rightly asserts the dominance of the two opposites in Dinesen’s work, Leander Hansen criticizes Thurman’s deterministic conclusion that Dinesen found an absolute pattern for destiny in the dichotomy of her family (163-64). According to Thurman, “the poles Isak Dinesen knew as Dinesen/Westenholz, freedom/taboo, aristocrat/bourgeois organized her way of feeling and her stock of images ... By the time Isak Dinesen began to write, she believed there was an absolute sense, a divine Intention to life” (5). However, as Leander Hansen argues, Dinesen has told us through her letters that she did *not* believe that she could not have been raised in another way or taken control at an earlier point of her life (164). Dinesen’s portrayal of both Ib and Emmanuelson as aristocrats reveal that Dinesen did not see a person’s family background as decisive.

Hamsun turned against Christianity early in his life. In a letter from his first visit to America, he writes that “jeg har længe tvivlet paa Sandheten af *hele* den gamle Kristendom” [“I have long had doubts about the truth of the *entire* old Christianity” (PS 45). In a series of articles published in *Dagbladet* during the fall of 1889, he wrote against Lars Oftedal, a conservative theologian, parish pastor in Stavanger and famous revival preacher, who was at that time also a member of the parliament. “Fra det lille befæstede Kontor i ‘Bethania’ har han styret sine verdslige Anliggender, fra Prækestolen i Petri Kirke har han hersket som en Vice-Gud over Sjælene” [“From a tiny fortified office in ‘Bethania’ he has governed his secular affairs, from the pulpit in Petri Church he has ruled as a Vice-God over the souls”], Hamsun sarcastically writes (PS 55). And his followers are “Fetischdyrkerne i Nationen, de umyndige og diende, som Børn efter Forældre i Slægt efter Slægt har ladet Pontoppidan fylde deres Hoveder og Præsten tænke deres Tanker” [“the fetish worshippers of the nation, the minors and sucklings, who have, as children after parents for generation and generation, let Pontoppidan fill their heads and their pastor think their thoughts”] (PS 92).<sup>68</sup>

In Norway and Denmark, Protestantism is the State religion and from the Protestant reformation in the 1530s pastors served as officials for the King. In modern times pastors were therefore among the first to become civil servants, representing the government. Like other civil servants, they become the target of Hamsun’s derision in his

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<sup>68</sup> Erik Pontoppidan, a Pietist, theologian, and bishop in Bergen 1747-54, was the author of *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed* [*Truth to Piety*] (1737), a widely used commentary to Luther’s Catechism.

Segelfoss-novels. Lars Lassen plays a central role in *Children of the Age* as one of the upstarts; a peasant son who receives theological education in the south, financially supported by Lieutenant Holmsen. Approached by Lars' request for support, the Lieutenant disapprovingly reflects that he is "typen ... bonden som arbeider sig ned til præst. Ja hvor han studerer videre! ... Lars var for legemlig lat til fiskeri" ["the prototype ... the farmer who works his way down to become a pastor. Oh, yes, just see how he keeps studying! ... Lars is too lazy to be a fisherman" (BTi 117). Yet, the Lieutenant decides to fund Lars' studies to assert his own status as the patriarch of overflowing power and generosity. However, when Lars returns from the south to work as a pastor in Segelfoss, the Lieutenant refuses to accept him as the presiding minister at his wife's funeral (BTi 157). In the eyes of the Lieutenant, Lars remains a peasant with cocky behavior. "Nu var han præst. Han kom hjem for å vise sig" ["Now he was a pastor. He had come home to show off"] (BTi 144).

Nietzsche describes priests as "the most evil enemies to have" and "the greatest haters in history," seeing how they have "succeeded in avenging themselves on their enemies and oppressors by radically inverting all their values, that is by an act of the most spiritual vengeance" (GM 167). Lars Lassen represents the priestly type Nietzsche scorns; the one who, out of revenge against the power of the aristocrat, turns inwards and defines goodness in terms of meekness.<sup>69</sup> He preaches "ydmyghet" ["humility"] and

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<sup>69</sup> While discussing priests as a type, Nietzsche demonstrates that "a priestly aristocracy" also existed before Christianity in other religions, hence, it is not a term that only be used to describe the priests of Catholic Christianity (GM 165-67).

“godhet” [“goodness”], but is portrayed as a despicable person, greedily devouring his food, and stuck-up, even against his family. (145-46). In line with Nietzsche, Lars is diagnosed as a sick creature. Hence, when returning from the city to work as the town’s pastor for a while, he is equipped with glasses and is in a frail health. Answering his brother’s inquiries about his health, he explains that “mit bryst er angrepet ... og øinene. Mit syn er svækket” [“my chest feels attacked ... and my eyes. My sight has deteriorated”] (146-47). Hamsun is sarcastic in his portrayal of Lassen who appears proud of his weak health and his new concave glasses, ignorant of the irony in seeking city-air to cure exhaustion, for like other civil servants, Lars wants to return to the city, arguing that he is “overanstrengt av studeringer og ikke tåler luften her” [“exhausted from his studies and cannot stand the air here”] (146). Lars presents his frail health as an insignia, setting him apart from the sturdy peasants. He finds his confinement to books not only comfortable, but refined.

Whereas Nietzsche is clear about the extent to which priests infect society, Hamsun’s satirical portrayal of Lars makes him seem less of a cunning agent causing the decline of society and more like a symptom. Yet, the awe with which Lars’ parents in their ignorance treat him and his books, indicates where things are going: they are going down.

Hamsun’s diagnosis of a life turned away from action is, like Nietzsche’s, that it is sick. As we’ve seen, it is, according to the young Willatz Holmsen, because the civil servants have such “syke hænder” [“sick hands”] that they end up in the position of

doing nothing, or merely copying letters from the alphabet (SB 119). Their minds as well as their eyes are, like those of Lars, numbed and weakened from their slavish book-reading.

In his article on playwright and cultural critic August Strindberg, Hamsun expands on his critique of the degeneration of men's health in modern society. "Mennesket har efter Strindbergs Aar efter Aar gentagne Lære udviklet sig bort fra Naturen og derved løsgjort sig fra det første Grundvilkaar for en organisk Tilværelse" ["According to Strindberg's persistent teaching, man has developed away from nature and thus detached himself from the essential condition for an organic existence"], explains Hamsun (*Artikler* 19). Moreover, "den uafbrudte Anstrængelse af vore aandelige Evner i Spørgsmaal som Videnskab, Kunst, Opfindelser o.s.v. har udviklet vore Tænkeorganer først og fremst paa Kroppens Bekostning" ["the consistent exertion of our intellectual capacities dealing with questions in science, art, inventions, etc. has developed the organs of our mind at the cost of the body"], he continues (*Artikler* 29). This has caused "Menneskets sørgerlige Trælleri under 'Overkulturen,' hvorved det har mistet baade Helsen og en Mængde fine Sjælsevner" ["human kind's pitiful slavery under 'High Culture,' by which they have lost both their health and a range of the fine qualities of the soul"] (*Artikler* 19-20). In conclusion, "den moderne Kultur har fordærvet vore Nerver og gjort os til svage Udartninger" ["modern culture has corrupted our nerves and turned us into weak offspring"] (*Artikler* 29).

Dinesen's critique of the Protestant repression of the body and of its natural instincts, including sexuality, is a recurrent theme in many of her stories. According to Juhl and Jørgensen, Dinesen's reasons for writing were "oprør mod borgerlige fordomme, og forkyndelse af sanselighed og kropslighed som tilværelsens uomgængelige udgangspunkt" ["rebellion against bourgeois prejudices, heralding the gospel of sensuality and the body as the absolute origin of existence"] (13). Leander Hansen likewise asserts that Dinesen's rebellion against "selvopofrelsen" ["the self-sacrifice"] in "den borgerlige livsform" ["the bourgeois form of life"] is a dominant theme in her work (190-91). "Hun anskuede problemets omfang på linie med Nietzsche, der ligeledes førte et storstilet felttog imod det asketiske ideal" ["She perceived the extent of the problem in line with Nietzsche, who likewise led a large-scale campaign against the ascetic ideal"], concludes Leander Hansen (190-91).

Referring to Nietzsche's critique of asceticism and the ascetic priest's denial of health, Leander Hansen argues that Dinesen likewise criticized the bourgeois subjugation of health and "naturkræfterne" ["the powers of nature"] (195). Her writing manifests in this way "en bredt anlagt civilisationskritik" ["a broad critique of civilization"], concludes Leander Hansen (194). Moreover, she is in particular critical against "præstegårdsmiljøet" ["the social setting of the parsonage"], portraying it as "en asketisk kammertilværelse" ["an ascetic closet existence"] (190). "Hos Karen Blixen findes friheden kun, hvor naturkræfterne kan udfolde sig. Således insisteres der i forfatterskabet på at give det erotiske den plads, som 'en af Livets største og vildeste

Kræfter” [“To Isak Dinesen there is freedom only where the powers of nature can unfold. Thus there is an insistence in her work to give room to the erotic as ‘one of life’s greatest and wildest powers”] (195).

Further, Leander Hansen discusses “Babette’s Feast” (first published in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, June 1950, included in *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958) as a key example of Dinesen’s critique of ascetism and defense of natural powers. “Det er en af de voldsomste beskrivelser af ødelæggende forældreautoritet i hele Karen Blixens forfatterskab, og af ødelæggende kirkelig autoritet” [“It is one of the most violent descriptions of destructive parental authority in the entire work of Isak Dinesen, and of destructive church authority”] (93).<sup>70</sup> In this tale we meet the two sisters Martine and Philippa, who have been raised as strict Lutherans by their father, the founder of a sect which renounced the world, for “all that it held to them was but a kind of illusion, and the true reality was the New Jerusalem toward which they were longing” (AD 21). The

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<sup>70</sup> Yet, as Stambaugh argues, the sisters “are satirized jovially and presented more sympathetically than in the majority of her stories” in which Dinesen criticizes Protestantism (79). Discussing Dinesen’s critique of Protestantism, Stambaugh refers instead to “Peter and Rosa” (*Winter’s Tales*). The story describes the adolescent love of two young people, the daughter and nephew of a Danish clergyman. According to Stambaugh, “it presents the conflict between Dionysian life and sexuality and Christian denial and negation” (70). Noting the parson’s loathing of life; the idea of mortality that fills the rooms of the parsonage, Stambaugh asserts that “Christian loathing for the flesh begets a perverted view of sexuality and ... women ... The parson’s Christian world, then, represents perverted sexuality, moral hypocrisy, and spiritual death” (71). Escaping the parson and affirming their love, Peter and Rosa drown together in the ocean. As Stambaugh concludes, “that their escape brings physical death evokes the paradoxical response associated with classical tragedy when the human spirit triumphs at the moment of catastrophe” (74). *Gengælsens Veje* [*The Angelic Avengers*], Dinesen’s only novel, also offers a grim portrayal of Puritanism. Set in England, the novel is the story about how two innocent girls, Lucan and Zosine, fall in with a puritanical old Scottish couple, the Reverend and Mrs. Pennhallow, who take them to a country house in France for the apparently philanthropic purpose of educating them. The girls discover that the Pennhallows are monsters who use their mask of holiness to ensnare young girls and sell them into white

sisters have been trained to renounce the flesh as trivial and illusionary and, true to their father's training, they are saintly ascetics who eat nothing but the meanest soup.

The members of the sect founded by the two sisters' father, likewise have "renounced the pleasures of this world" (AD 21). However, "sad little schisms" had arisen in the congregation as its members had become "somewhat querulous and quarrelsome" (AD 21). In contrast to the two sisters and the puritan congregation is the proletarian aristocrat Babette, exiled from France as a revolutionary. She has been sent by a mutual friend (the opera-singer Papin who was once in love with Philippa) to become cook and maid of all work to the ascetic sisters. Once a famous chef in Paris, she now finds herself in Berlevaag, a dour Norwegian coastal town. However, she shows neither regret nor resentment over her destiny. On the contrary, she stoically affirms it and creates a great feast to which all the members of the sect are invited. On her menu is Blinis Demidoff, Cailles en Sarcophage, grapes, peaches, and fresh figs, accomponaied by Veuve Cliquot 1860. Her meal becomes "a communion feast for the twelve diners with the thirteenth figure, Babette, in the kitchen" (Sara Stambaugh 81).<sup>71</sup> As Bjerring notes, Dinesen rejects "den mandlige kristne kærlighedsgud—Jesus" ["the male Christian God of love—Jesus"] and replaces him with a woman, "Venus,

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slavery. The two girls, however, are not to be sold, but are to be well treated in order to throw the police off the scent.

<sup>71</sup> As Stambaugh notes, "thirteen .... is the number not only of the Last Supper but also of a witches' coven, and the imagery associated with Babette and her preparations makes clear that she is a proper witch" (81). Witches often play the role as heroine in Dinesen's tales, representing her rebellion against repressive Protestantism and affinity for sensual paganism.

kærlighedsgudinden” [“Venus—goddess of love”] (62). While superior to the congregation’s ignorance and suspicion towards life and rejecting their asceticism, Babette serves as their priestess, delivering the members from their petty grieves and grudges to generous forgiveness, not through the Lord’s bread, but her sensuous meal.

Langbaum concludes that “the story ends well with Philippa’s fulfillment, matching Martine’s. Philippa’s understanding grows along with a growing tenderness for Babette” (254). Rejecting Langbaum’s conclusion, Leander Hansen, on the other hand, argues that the sisters do not understand Babette, while he insists that “medlidenheden og ømheden hos søstrene er i ‘Babettes Gæstebud’ udsat for en kritik af en skarphed og et omfang, der minder om Nietzsche” [“the compassion and affection of the sisters is in ‘Babette’s Feast’ subject to a critique of such a severity and extent that it brings Nietzsche to mind”] (134). Moreover, he notes that “Babette til det sidste understreger, hvor ‘små’ søstrene er” [“Babette until the very last underscores how ‘small’ the sisters are”] (134). Incapable to recognize and appreciate Babette’s superiority, the two sisters nearly choke Babette’s “livsudfoldelse i medfølelse” [“enlargement of life in compassion”], he concludes (135). Babette, however, refuses to be choked.

There are no pastors or congregations described in either “Copenhagen Season” or “Sorrow-Acre,” however, bourgeois ethics are indeed attacked. While noting the confinement of life in the city in contrast to the freedom of life in the countryside (including the “slackened virtues” of the women), “Copenhagen Season” extols the health of the free aristocrat. The tale contrasts the free play of life in the countryside’s

open air with the city, home of the Church and its divines. Uncorrupted by the city air, the Angels are characterized by their perfect physique and excellent senses. “Each organ of their bodies was flawless, so that there would be few such hearts or lungs, kidneys or bowels to be found in Denmark” (LT 261). The Angels’ children had, moreover, an exquisite sense of smell. According to the old artist, who bemoans the loss of tragedy in modern culture, the sense of smell will also, like tragedy, encounter its demise. “Let me tell you,” he tells his listeners,

that the five senses—and among them the sense of smell surely holds a high rank—make up the *savoir vivre* of wild animals and primitive people. When, in the course of progress, these innocents are blessed with a bit of security and comfort, and with a bit of education, nosing out things becomes an extravagant undertaking, noses will deteriorate and grow blunt, and with them good manners ... The middle classes of our civilization have obtained security and a bit of education—and where, my dears, are now their noses? With them the word of smell, even, has become an unseemly word. (LT 273)

Only at the aristocrats’ “lofty social level” does one “meet with keenness of the senses as with *savoir vivre*,” concludes the old artist (LT 273).

Like Nietzsche, the old artist describes cultural decay in terms of individual sickness, drawing a connection between the demise of heroic tragedies and the decay of noses. Before she has wept her tears, Adelaide feels an “agonizing ache at the back of her

nose [which] brought to her recollections of Ib's remarkable sense of smell" (LT 310). She notices, however, that she herself has lost her sense of smell. According to the old artist, this indicates that tragedy has gone out of her life (LT 311). The old artist would have told her so, confides the narrator. "You have left tragedy with your friend [Ib]," he would have said, "and you yourself, upon a flat, smooth path of life, have been handed over to comedy, to the drawing-room play or possibly to the operetta" (LT 311). Indicating the degeneration of the old age, the old artist himself has hardly a nose to talk about. Yet, being an artist, he is, as he asserts to his listeners, "the nose of society" (LT 276). Moreover, he can "speak with connoisseurship about honor," for the people whose portraits he paints "have still in their hearts the idea of honor, by which tragedy is created" (LT 276-77). Since, as Langbaum notes, "his aristocratic listeners half understand and half laugh off such talk, we see already the time when the artist will be the sole repository of the aristocratic ideal" (239).

Finally, while admiring the nose of Drude Angel, Ib's sister, the old artist claims that "it can be traced back directly to the audacious and loyal profile of the Arab mare" (LT 273-74). In this way he adds to the narrator's Nietzschean praise of the Angels' children as centaurs. The mare and the centaur, like the beast, represent health and self-glorification. Unlike the beast, the priest, or rather the Lutheran pastor, preaches self-denial, which to Dinesen stinks.

It is because of this Lutheran self-denial that Dinesen criticizes the middle class. As she writes in the letter referred to above, in which she complains about the middle

class while she praises aristocrats and proletarians, it is in particular the “frygtelige moralske Pindehuggeri” [“dreadful moral quibbling”] of the former that she finds detestable (*Breve fra Afrika* II: 181-82). Criticizing her mother and aunts for their constant moralizing, she argues that it has “en rædsom Evne til at gøre Livet svært” [“a dreadful capacity to make life difficult”] (181). She satirically lists all the dangers these women feel threatened by: “for at være verdslig og forfængelig, for at saare Madam Jensens Følelser, for at gøre Gæld, for ikke at tænke nok paa andre etc.—for ikke at tale om de aldeles grulige Farer og Rædsler som laa i alt, hvad som havde med sexuelle Forhold at gøre” [“to be profane and vainglorious, to offend Madame Jensen’s feelings, to fall into debt, to not show enough concern for others, etc.—not to mention all those wholly awful dangers and fears related to everything that had anything to do with sexual relationships”] (181). They are, moreover, always afraid of the Devil and that they might fall into disgrace.

Tired of their obsession with sins and evil, Dinesen asserts that she does not believe in either and that she “vil grulig nødig være sammen med Folk som tror paa Djævelen og al hans Gerning og al hans Slægt” [“dreads people who believe in the devil and all his doings and his entire lot”] (ibid. 181). She might, on the other hand, sell her soul to “en dristig og lystig Djævel for at opnaa forskellige Ting” [“a bold and lively devil in order to achieve some things”] (181).<sup>72</sup> Criticizing the Christianity of her

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<sup>72</sup> Characters in Dinesen’s tales frequently flirt with the devil. Stambaugh explains Dinesen’s alliance with the devil as “consistent with her emphasis upon witches, who have no place in the Christian world but owe their allegiance to the devil, who in Christian tradition often represents pagan fertility gods

mother's family and the Christian devil, she concludes her letter in praise of Venus and in particular Diana (183).

The old lord in "Sorrow-Acre" also admires the classic gods, though we learn at the onset of the tale that "this was a Christian country" (WT 29). However, while deriding the "emotional god" of the new age and asserting his personal affinity for ancient gods, the old lord turns not to a compassionate Christian god, but to a Hebrew omnipotent god. "You will have learned in school," the old lord says to his nephew, "that in the beginning was the word ... My own humble word has been the principle of the land on which we stand, for an age of man" (WT 56). True, continues the old lord to his nephew, the word "may have been pronounced in caprice, as a whim, the Scripture tells us nothing about it. It is still the principle of our world, its law of gravitation" (WT 56). The uncle's "Christianity" is thus rooted not in benevolence or charity, but in respect for the power that asserts itself as principle. In line with the omnipotence of the ancient gods, the old lord governs his land according to his own word in a world where he is omnipotent. Gods and aristocrats are creators of values like Nietzsche's noble race and thus they assert their power.

In line with her devotion to the goddesses Diana and Venus, Dinesen makes it clear, however, that the power is not entirely in the hands of lords and gods. As in

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displaced by Christianity" (59). As Stambaugh notes, Dinesen held God and the devil to be one. Stambaugh argues that the God Dinesen thus describes is a "pagan God ... pantheistic and characterized by 'imagination'" (59). Stambaugh, finally, compares Dinesen's pantheism with Nietzsche's Dionysian affirmation of life, suggesting we see *Babette* as a "Dionysian priest," an interpretation to which I subscribe (81). I shall return to Dinesen's Dionysian pantheism in Chapter IV.

“Copenhagen Season,” Dinesen emphasizes in “Sorrow-Acre” the significance of women’s power. The tale begins with a portrayal of the masculine landscape—“the lordly, pyramidal silhouette of the cut lime avenues—and a salute to “the big landowners,” who had held their ground here through many generations (WT 30-31). Dinesen, however, then quickly turns to the women, asserting that “female grace was prized in the manors” (WT 31). In fact,

the ladies who promenaded in the lime avenues, or drove through them in heavy coaches with four horses, carried the future of the name in their laps and were, like dignified and debonair caryatides, holding up the house. They were themselves conscious of their value, kept up their price, and moved in a sphere of pretty worship and self-worship ... how free were they, how powerful! Their lords might rule the country ... but when it came to that supreme matter of legitimacy which was the vital principle of their world, the centre of gravity lay with them. (WT 31-32)

With its emphasis on ancient gods and the power of women—even in a “Christian country” that at first sight appears quite patriarchal—“Sorrow-Acre” illustrates Dinesen’s own subversive use of Christianity.<sup>73</sup> Raised as a Unitarian, Dinesen rejected

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<sup>73</sup> Both Aiken and Stambaugh focus on how female subversion disturbs the authority of patrilineage in “Sorrow-Acre.” According to Aiken, “issues of patrilineage, though seemingly primary, are continually disturbed by a countertextual network of references to female origins and generation” (251). Stambaugh likewise asserts that “the godlike power of the old lord is constantly subverted by the female land upon which his power rests and by the free sexuality of the two central women of the story, the peasant Anne-Marie and the old lord’s aristocratic young wife, who is fated to bear the child of her husband’s nephew, Adam” (21). Alluding to Anne-Marie’s sexual freedom, Stambaugh refers to how she sacrifices her life

the dualism of the Protestant tradition, but she was well versed in the Bible, and she incorporates and appropriates, as both Svend Bjerg and Hans Holmberg shows, many Biblical stories in her own tales.<sup>74</sup> Her tales are indeed quite favorable in their portrayal of Catholicism, in contrast to Lutheranism, associating the former with sensual art, the latter with rigid puritanism. In “The Cardinal’s First Tale,” for instance, to which I shall return later, a Cardinal plays the role of both artist and priest. Babette plays a similar role.<sup>75</sup>

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“to preserve the principles of sexual freedom practiced by Dinesen’s female world,” that is, if her son did commit adultery as a jealous wheelwright seems to believe in this tale (22).

<sup>74</sup> According to Bjerg, Dinesen creates her own “frodige teologi” [“luxuriant theology”] by including Christianity in her work as storytelling or quotations from stories (25). Pahuus, on the other hand, argues that Bjerg over-interprets Dinesen’s stories in his search for their Christian elements; Bjerg “ser teologiske spøgelse” [“sees theological ghosts”], he concludes (134). Bjerg does not understand “radikaliteten i Blixens omtolkninger af de religiøse og kristne begreber, nemlig dette at hun tolker dem på en aldeles immanent eller ikke-metafysisk måde” [“the radical character of Dinesen’s re-interpretations of religious and Christian concepts, namely that she interprets them in a completely immanent or un-metaphysical way”], explains Pahuus (134-35). Closer to Pahuus is Holmberg who argues that Dinesen “skriver sig ind i den kristne idétradition via dens episke udtryk i biblen for at skrive om og omsider skrive sig fri” [“writes herself into the tradition of Christian ideas through the epic concepts in the Bible in order to *rewrite* it and eventually write herself free from it”] (91). In Dinesen’s work, art takes the place of religion, maintains Holmberg: “Madkunstneren Babette indtager Kristi plads” [“the artist of culinary cooking, Babette, takes the place of Christ”] (91).

<sup>75</sup> As the story, “Babette’s Feast,” goes, Babette is from France, a Catholic country. This intimidates the pious sisters who “had trembled ... at the idea of receiving a Papist under their roof” (AD 31). Later, “they would find her in the kitchen, her elbows on the table and her temples on her hands, lost in the study of a heavy black book which they secretly suspected to be a popish prayer-book” (AD 33). Leander Hansen, on the other hand, suggests that she may be a Muslim and that the black book the two sisters find her studying might be the Koran (104). Discussing Dinesen’s views on Islam (which Dinesen had gotten to know in Kenya), Leander Hansen explains that though Dinesen might at times have criticized this religion, she also admired it. Quoting from her letters in Africa, he notes in particular her appreciation of its erotic elements, its lack of a concept for sin, and its affirmation of all powers of life, including the darker ones (106). I shall return to Dinesen’s views on Islam in Chapter V. Stambaugh suggests that the black book Babette frequently consults is a book for witches, which she is studying while preparing for the feast (81).

As Bjerring writes, “i forhold til kristendommen; dens frelseslære; dogmet om den treenige Gud; godt-og-ondt adskillelsen i den såkaldte dualisme: ... i alt dette er Blixen dybt uenig” [regarding Christianity; its teaching of salvation; the dogma about the Trinity; the separation between good and evil in the so-called dualism: ... Dinesen disagrees with all of this”] (53). However, while emphasizing Dinesen’s humor in her use of Christianity, such as in “Babette’s Feast,” Bjerring concludes that “trods mange kritiske indvendinger tog Blixen netop ikke absolut afstand, men forholdt sig kritisk og humoristisk til de dele og tendenser, hun i sin egen tilværelse—både i Danmark og Afrika—havde oplevet som livsødelæggende” [“despite many critical objections, Dinesen did not dissociate herself entirely from Christianity, but was both critical and humorous about those of its aspects and tendencies which she in her life—both in Denmark and Africa—had experienced as destructive of life”] (55). Indeed, Dinesen’s portrayal of the pious sect is by no means marked by scorn, but by the author’s gentle humor. At the night of Babette’s feast, Berlevaag is covered by an unusual amount of snow—a factor that adds to the comic dimension of Dinesen’s portrayal of the old Dean’s flock. When the feast is over and the guests are on their way home, she describes them as they “wavered on their feet, staggered, sat down abruptly or fell forward on their knees and hands and were covered with snow, as if they had indeed had their sins washed white as wool, and in this regained innocent attire were gamboling little lambs. It was, to each of them, blissful to have become as a small child; it was also a blessed joke to watch old Brothers and Sisters, who had been taking themselves so seriously, in this kind of

celestial second childhood” (AD 54-55). However, though Dinesen could mock the ways of an ignorant pious sect in her fiction, she was at other times quite direct in her critique of Christianity. In an interview with Gunver Federspiel in 1934, published in *Blixeniana* 1980, Dinesen argues that “kristendommens mørke side, skyldbevidstheden, syndsbevidstheden, kan forårsage voldsomme følelser af ufrihed, uværdighed og skyld—desuden angst” [“Christianity’s dark side, its sense of guilt and sin, can cause severe feelings of oppression, shame, and guilt—besides fear”] (qtd. in Bjerring 55).

Dinesen’s disgust with Protestantism and her “selvstændige holdning til og vurdering af kristendommen” [“independent attitude to and assessment of Christianity”] is, as Bjerring notes, probably presented most clearly in her discussion of the novel *Rytteren* [*The Riding Master*] by the Danish author and humanist H.C. Branner, published in the aftermath of World War II in 1949 (57). Briefly put, the story concerns four characters who have all known and in different ways fallen under the spell of a riding master named Hubert. He is dead, trampled by a horse, but none of the characters can forget him, indeed, they seem obsessed with his memory.

The two central characters are Susanne, the former mistress of the Riding Master, also referred to as the centaur,<sup>76</sup> and Susanne’s current lover, a medical doctor named Clemens. A small, ungainly man, a bit overweight and prone to sweating, he becomes a heroic figure in the story. After he has rescued Susanne from an attempt to commit

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<sup>76</sup> This makes an interesting connection to the Angels in Dinesen’s “Copenhagen Season,” who evoked, according to the narrator, the idea of centaurs when riding their horses.

suicide, the novel ends as she relinquishes her obsession with Hubert in favor of Clemens.

Branner considered human nature a stage for the battle between good and evil and neither Clemens nor Susanne is portrayed as perfect ideals. Concerned to affirm a sense of humanism in the postwar period—a “third point of view,” as Sven H. Rossel calls it—Branner saw the solution to the conflicts of human nature in a merger between eros and charity, represented in the novel by Susanne and Clemens (393).<sup>77</sup> In her essay on Branner’s novel, “H.C. Branner: ‘Rytteren’” [“H.C. Branner: ‘The Riding Master’”], included in *Samlede Essays [Collected Essays]*, Dinesen derides Branner’s solution, noting that Susanne’s union with Clemens is at the expense of the lower part of her body.<sup>78</sup> She therefore takes sides with Hubert while she deplores Clemens as a Christ-like character.

I ‘Rytteren’s nutidige evangelium er Clemens frelseren, det gode menneskeliggjort, og han frelser ved godgørenhed. Og så længe som han i bogen praktiserer denne automatiske frelse, uden indsats fra deres side som han frelser, forløser han mindre end hand nedværdiger.

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<sup>77</sup> As Pahuus shows in his discussion of Branner’s novel and Dinesen’s review of it, the union between eros and charity in Branner’s novel is, however, at the cost of eros (173). Moreover, Pahuus is critical against both Branner’s position as well as Dinesen’s. “Der gør sig en vis ensidighed gældende hos begge forfattere—hvor de hver for sig gør henholdsvis den på naturen baserede selvvirkeliggørelse og godheden til det eneste ubetingede” [“there is thus a one-sidedness manifest in each of the author, seeing how they both on their own make the realization of the self either according to nature or according to goodness the only absolute”] (173).

[In the new gospel of *The Riding Master*, Clemens is the Savior, the personification of the good, and he saves through charity. As long as he practices this automatic salvation in the book, without cooperation from those he saves, he redeems them less than he demeans them.] (SE 148)

Moreover, argues Dinesen, Clemens demeans Susanne by holding her to a bourgeois existence and by letting their life together become a series of painful scenes where she, time after time, must offend him—even palpably—and, time and again, ask him for forgiveness (SE 150).

Danish readers, on the other hand, responded well to Branner’s humanism, and the novel secured him, as Emil Frederiksen notes, the reputation of being a “forkynder af et etisk budskab med kulturpolitiske sigte. Man kunne ikke undgå at se Clemens som udtryk for noget dybt ‘demokratisk’—mennesket, der gerne lader alle ydre fortrin falde, gerne kaldes svag, fordi han ikke vil være med til at hade og tvinge ... Man kunne heller ikke undgå at se Hubert som udtryk for, hvad der ... ytrer sig som autokratisk sindelag. Han er ‘overmennesket,’ naturkraftens sejrige menneske, blottet for og ligegyldig over for medmenneskelighed ... Han skal forestille en type, som i det 20. århundrede blev en af dem, der førte verden i ulykke” [“One could not fail to see Clemens as an expression of something deeply ‘democratic’—the human being who gladly lets all outer advantages fall, who gladly lets himself be called weak, because he will not be a part of hate and

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<sup>78</sup> Concluding her review, Dinesen questions Clemens’ capacity to make Susanne into a whole human being and wonders if Susanne ever can be anything else in his hands but “damen uden underkrop” [“the legless lady”] (SE 160).

compulsion ... One could also not fail to see Hubert as an expression of that which ... reveals an autocratic mind. He is 'the overman,' the victorious man according to the powers of nature, unacquainted with and indifferent to human compassion ... He is meant to represent the type of man who in the twentieth century became one of those that led the world into disaster"] (27).

In contrast to Frederiksen, who here reveals a typical Scandinavian suspicion against Nietzsche's "overman," Dinesen embraces the Riding Master as the novel's hero. As Pahuus explains, "Blixen har et ganske andet syn på natursiden i mennesket end Branner. Hun betragter ikke naturen i mennesket som noget problematisk, således at mennesket kun kan reddes ved at underkaste sig et moralsk imperativ. Hvor Branner tænker om naturen som noget, der både i det enkelte menneskes liv og i civilisationens liv skal overvindes af og underordnes under det åndelige, der tænker Blixen om naturen som noget, der til skade for mennesket er gået tabt. Hun opfatter således Hubert som en helt igennem positiv figur ["Dinesen has a quite different opinion of the human nature in man than Branner. She does not consider the nature in human beings as anything problematic in the sense that man can only be rescued by subjecting to a moral imperative. Whereas Branner considers nature something that must be mastered in the life of both the individual and civilization and subordinated the spiritual, Dinesen considers nature as that—which to the damage of human kind—has been lost. She therefore considers Hubert an absolutely positive character"] (170).

Nietzsche's terminology further elucidates the picture Dinesen's gives of Branner's novel. In its light, the Riding Master appears as the beastly aristocrat representing a master morality, whereas Clemens is the sick pastor representing a slave morality. The former is overflowing with power, the latter has turned the good to mean the weak and humble. The Riding Master is by Dinesen described in terms of his strong will, exuberant health, excellent physique, and knowledge of horses. Clemens, on the other hand, is obsessed with his guilt, wears glasses, has a pale complexion and eats too much. He is, finally, afraid of horses.

Moreover, Dinesen portrays Hubert as a beast beyond good and evil, living according to his own will, while she depicts Clemens with disgust as a coward man who thinks himself "good" the weaker he makes himself and the more he makes himself into a sacrifice. Hubert is "det vilde dyr [som] har—i frihed—altid sin ære i behold" ["the wild animal [who] has—in freedom—always his honor intact"], asserts Dinesen (SE 159). Clemens, on the other hand, "nedværdiger" ["demeans"] both himself and those he attempts to salvage through "godgørenhed" ["good deeds"] (SE 148).

In contrast to Hubert, the noble beast, Dinesen sees the other four characters as distinctly modern people, children of our time, and children in their ceaseless introspection. Though spellbound by Hubert, they all at the same time bear a grudge against the deceased. Dinesen thus depicts the dynamics of different ranks, required to sustain an aristocracy, but which also feeds the tension that causes the slave revolt to

destroy the beast, overturning his morality. When Hubert is no longer there, his greatness seems incomprehensible to the four.

Kentauren har i sit væsen harmonisk forenet menneskets og dyrets natur.

Mens de har haft ham imellem sig, har denne forunderlige harmoni grebet, betaget og bevæget de fire mennesker ud over alle grænser. Nu, efter at han er borte, forekommer den dem ubegribelig.

[In the centaur the natures of man and beast are harmoniously combined.

While they had him among them, this strange harmony moved and fascinated the four people tremendously. Now, after he is gone, they find it incomprehensible.] (SE 137)

Noting the dynamics of love and hate and repression in the relationships to Hubert, Dinesen suggests that Hubert is a victim of their resentment. Indeed, as she notes, it is a central question in the novel whether or not Hubert was murdered by one of the four characters; they all appear guilty in one way or another. Clemens accuses Susanne for being responsible, but Dinesen questions his allegation, arguing that Clemens is the guilty one. Isn't it true, she rhetorically asks, that Clemens has triumphed over and taken the power from all of the other characters in the novel? (SE 157). In other words, we can see Hubert's death as the result of a slave revolt in morality—a revengeful turning against the barbarian aristocrat.

Whether or not Hubert's death is the result of a slave revolt in morals, both Dinesen and Hamsun depict modern culture as if a slave revolt in morality has taken

place. Like Nietzsche, they depict modern culture as a degenerate culture, dominated by a herd mentality. Blaming in particular Christianity, Nietzsche dates the disease of modern Europe to the slave revolt of morals that took place in antiquity. Further, while he traces the increasing deterioration of health, he asserts that slave morality has infected, among others, the democratic movements. Considering the impact of science and philosophy on modern mentality, we must, however, also recognize Nietzsche's accusations against Socrates and Plato. In the following chapter I will investigate what exactly this implies for Nietzsche's, as well as Hamsun's and Dinesen's, understanding of modern philosophy.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ILLUSION OF TRUTH VS. THE TRUTH OF THE ILLUSION

“Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people,’” asserts Nietzsche in his preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE 32). His point is that it was Plato, not Jesus or Paul, who invented the idea of a “pure spirit and the good itself” (BGE 32). Before Christianity, Plato’s philosophy thus worked in the service of the slave morality, repressing nature in favor of illusions created by a degenerate will. In his later work, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche asserts that “what mankind has so far considered seriously have not even been realities but mere imaginings – more strictly speaking, *lies* prompted by the bad instincts of sick natures that were harmful in the most profound sense – all these concepts, ‘God,’ ‘soul,’ ‘virtue,’ ‘sin,’ ‘beyond,’ ‘truth,’ ‘eternal life’” (EH 256). “Everything that has hitherto been called ‘truth’ ... [is actually] ... the most harmful, insidious, and subterranean form of lie,” concludes Nietzsche, “sucking the blood of life itself” (EH 334).

According to Nietzsche, the desire for metaphysical and transcendent truths is, like the slave revolt in morality, rooted in a yearning for ideals that take the attention away from the nature of life. Like Euripides’ comedies, the desire for truth thus represents an escape from the fundamental abyss that holds no rational truths. Nietzsche therefore deplores the will to truth as symptomatic of a “fed-upness” and “weariness” which negates real life (GM 257). It is, concludes Nietzsche, the “morbidly of civilized man” that he—while fighting for survival—suppresses life as its “great negator” (GM

256-57). In conclusion, the adherence to transcendent truths is symptomatic of nihilism—a “will to nothingness, a revulsion from life, a rebellion against the principal conditions of living”—ravaging late nineteenth century Europe (GM 299).

Nietzsche sees an awakening recognition in late nineteenth century Europe that there is no foundation for the metaphysical truths to which men have clung; that there is no God or goal or unity to existence. Nietzsche does not see this as an original insight—the ancient Greeks, as we have seen, faced this terrible abyss. The danger of nihilism, on the other hand, is that modern men lack the required health to meet the abyss and create new values for the future. As nihilists they either deny everything as a false, or they continue to fight tooth and nail to protect their sense of ideal truth. The philosophers’ “will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is imperious and domineering,” is in this way characterized by a “strong inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the complex, to overlook or repel what is wholly contradictory: just as it arbitrarily emphasizes, extracts and falsifies to suit itself certain traits and lines in what is foreign to it, in every piece of ‘external world’” (BGE 160). While thus maintaining their truths to fit their ideals, their pursuit of truth is also characterized by “a sudden decision for ignorance, for arbitrary shutting-out, a closing of the windows, an inner denial of this or that thing, a refusal to let it approach, a kind of defensive posture against much that can be known, a contentment with the dark, with the closed horizon” (BGE 161).

Seeing the denial of life the “will to truth” causes, Nietzsche asserts that modern scholarship is “the most recent manifestation of the ascetic ideal” (GM 285).

Learning today is a hiding place for all manner of maladjustment, lukewarmness, self-depreciation, guilty conscience ... lack of ideals ... The solidity of our best scholars, their automatic industry, their heads smoking night and day, their very skill and competence: all these qualities betoken more often than not a desire to hide and suppress something. (GM 285)

Indeed, scholars today, Nietzsche declares scornfully, are driven by a “desire to stop short at the brute fact, the fatalism of *petits faits*” (GM 287). Thus they deny the power and creativity of a healthy will. In fact, they ignore “the very essence of life,” because, Nietzsche asserts, they overlook “the intrinsic superiority of the spontaneous” and deny the “active and shaping” will (GM 211).

While defending life’s spontaneity and creativity, it is Nietzsche’s point that we need to look at it from many perspectives. He rejects Plato’s philosophy, for “to speak of spirit and good as Plato did meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective* itself, the basic condition of all life” (BGE 32). Opposed to “philosophical labourers and men of science”—descendants of Plato—he portrays, on the other hand, his own favored philosophers as those who are “*able* to gaze from the heights into every distance, from every broad expanse with manifold eyes and a manifold conscience” (BGE 142). Rejecting “the innocuous Christian-moral interpretation ... this tyranny, this

arbitrariness, this rigorous and grandiose stupidity ... which teaches the *narrowing of perspective*,” they broaden their perspectives, explains Nietzsche (BGE 112). They do not escape from life by supposing transcendent truths, but affirm their own truths and laws. “*Actual philosophers ... are commanders and law-givers*,” concludes Nietzsche (BGE 142). “Their ‘knowing’ is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is—*will to power*” (BGE 143).

In other words, Nietzsche’s critique of truth does not imply a total rejection of truth. As Richard Schacht asserts in “Nietzsche’s kind of philosophy,” Nietzsche does not discard “truth,” “knowledge,” or “philosophy,” despite his rejection of “eternal truths” and the idea of truth as correspondence between thought and the “thing in itself” (153). On the contrary, Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” has “comprehension as its aim,” searching for “perspectives” from which something new may be learned (162).<sup>79</sup> It is the value of “truth” for our lives that he questions, while he “insists upon the distinction between the plausibility and soundness of various ideas, on the one hand, and their ‘*value for life*,’ on the other (between their ‘truth-value’ and their ‘life-value,’ as it were)” (154).

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<sup>79</sup> Criticizing the deconstructive readings of Nietzsche (the Nietzsche readings offered by “the French scene” and Derrida in particular) that reduce Nietzsche’s desire for truth to play, Alan D. Schrift in a similar vein emphasizes the criteria for truth that Nietzsche sets up. Schrift cautions that “until such protocols can be specified which satisfy their desire to open the text to the play of interpretation without, at the same time, allowing these interpretations to be ‘executed however one wishes,’ deconstructive reading will continue to run the risk of which Nietzsche himself was aware: ‘*the text finally disappeared under the interpretation*’ (BGE 38)” (118-19). Opposed to such deconstructive readings, Schrift underscores that Nietzsche—with his “demands of both perspectivism and philology”—does specify such “protocols” and sets forth a “new ‘objectivity’ as befitting the task of interpretation” (189). Schrift’s point is that contrary to the “deconstructive *différance*” and its “free play of interpretation” (118), Nietzsche’s “objectivity” of interpretation “requires mastery of the creative multiplication of perspectives as well as a rigorous attentiveness to the text being interpreted” (189).

Nietzsche's "basic concern [was] with the *character and quality of human life*," explains Schacht (154). While therefore insisting on a re-interpretation and re-valuation of "truths," he was, however, not primarily concerned to *refute* them, but to *dispose* of them "as unworthy of being taken seriously" (158).

Thus re-valuating truth, Nietzsche bids his favored philosophers and friends of knowledge, to unsettle the status quo, disrupting the illusions of truth set up by many a philosopher.

After all, you know well enough that it cannot matter in the least whether precisely *you* are in the right, just as no philosopher hitherto has been in the right, and that a more praiseworthy veracity may lie in every little question-mark placed after your favourite words and favourite theories (and occasionally after yourselves) than in all your solemn gesticulations and smart answers before courts and accusers! Better to step aside! Flee away and conceal yourselves! And have your masks and subtlety, so that you may be misunderstood! (BGE 56)

While participating in such a masquerade it is, finally, important that one does not lose one's "philosophical sense of humour" (BGE 56). The philosopher who, on the other hand, sacrifices himself for truth as if he were an actor of a great tragedy, has "degenerated into 'martyr,' into stage- and platform-ranter ... merely a satyr play" (BGE 57). Found among "the Spinozas and Giordano Brunos," he becomes one of the "refined vengeance-seekers and brewers of poison," often

under “the most spiritual masquerade and perhaps without being themselves aware of it” (BGE 56).

Though not as vehemently as in his attack on Spinoza and Bruno, Nietzsche criticizes the rationality of Immanuel Kant who held that man, as a subjective self, is equipped with categories by which he can perceive the order of his experiences as facts. Whereas Kant distinguishes between the “thing in itself” (*das Ding an sich*), of which we can know nothing with certainty, and the appearance of the thing as a phenomenon (*Anschauung*), which is our only access to the thing through our capacity to sense things, Nietzsche calls it “the dupe of linguistic habits” that one has not got rid of “those changelings” called the Kantian “thing-in-itself” and the “subject” as if there were an “agent” or a “being” behind the “doing” and “acting” (GM 179). First of all, experience, or life as such, is in this way confined and curtailed to fit man’s so-called categories, while ignoring that which does not fit into these. His truths thus deny reality. Secondly, the idea of a “being,” or a superior and ideal “soul,” demeans reality and physical nature, because it upholds man’s rational categories at the cost of his natural instincts that oppose the authority of rationality. Finally, it is the belief in an “ego” as “being” or “substance” that has caused the erroneous conceptualization of things, argues Nietzsche, because its believer “*projects* its belief in the ego-substance onto all things” and “only thus does it *create* the concept ‘thing’” (TI 38).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Despite his attacks on Kant, Nietzsche recognizes his contributions, asserting that “as Germans, we doubt with Kant the ultimate validity of the knowledge attained by the natural sciences and altogether everything that *can be known causaliter*” (GS 306). In *The Birth of Tragedy* he actually commends Kant

It is thus particularly the language of philosophy—its Kantian things-in-themselves, categories, and concepts—that Nietzsche objects to, arguing that language and logic are inferior tools to express life, incapable of conveying any significant insight about the truth of existence. He scorns “the tyranny of logic” and attacks the “fetishism” of reason and the crude veneration of language. What is idealized are “hollow idols,” maintains Nietzsche.<sup>81</sup>

In *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, a fragment from 1873 published posthumously, Nietzsche argues that “the truth”—set up in language as if to grasp “the thing in itself”—is the product of a mere illusion that is satisfied with “truth in the form of a tautology - that is, with empty shells” (45).<sup>82</sup> His point is that “truth” is a historical construction and nothing absolute. It is a “linguistic legislation” which “furnishes the first laws of truth,” asserts Nietzsche, and “only through forgetfulness can man ever achieve the illusion of possessing a ‘truth’ in the sense just designated,” i.e. as if “the

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for his “extraordinary courage and wisdom,” having shown that what we thought we knew about the universe was only the result of having raised “appearance—the work of Maya—to the status of true reality” (BT 111). Nietzsche at this time maintained that one could, through Dionysian intoxication, unveil the work of Maya, an assertion he later abandoned or at least rewrote (see my Chapter IV). See John Wilcox’ chapter on “Kant, the Thing-in-Itself, and Nietzsche’s Skepticism,” in which he discusses the development of Nietzsche’s attitude to Kant; suggesting that Nietzsche at first accepted the romantic idea of insight (through tragic art) into “the thing in itself” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, while denying this idea later (111).

<sup>81</sup> See for instance in *The Twilight of the Idols* in which Nietzsche declares his “war” and “sounding-out of idols” (22). “There are no more ancient idols in existence,” he continues, “also none more hollow ... That does not prevent their being the *most believed in*; and they are not, especially in the most eminent case, called idols...” (22). Nietzsche deplores language as belonging in its origin to a “rude fetishism” and an idealization of “grammar” (38).

<sup>82</sup> “A word,” continues Nietzsche, is “the image of a nerve stimulus in sounds,” and “the different languages, set side by side, show that what matters with words is never the truth, never an adequate expression; else there would not be so many languages” (45).

designations and the things coincide” (44-45). “What, then, is truth?” asks Nietzsche, and answers as follows:

A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (*On Truth and Lie* 46-47)

It is clear from Nietzsche’s critique of truth that he is keenly aware of the problem of how to speak if he wants to break out from the confinements of language and exchange worn out metaphors for new ones to pronounce his truths. To overcome the impotence of the language of philosophical treatises, Nietzsche—a trained philologist<sup>83</sup>—turns himself, as Sarah Kofman asserts, into a poet, excelling in aphorisms of both a fragmentary and poetic style.

As a rigorous philologist, and in order to dispel the metaphysical seductions and the misconstructions produced by deceptive interpretations,

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<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche studied classical philology at Bonn University in 1864, at Leipzig University from 1865. In 1869 he was offered the position as Professor extraordinarius of classical philology at the University of Basel, Switzerland, before he had his doctorate. He was promoted to full professor in 1870 and was employed by the University of Basel until he resigned in 1879.

Nietzsche strategically turns himself into a poet: he multiplies metaphors, repeating the traditional metaphors and attaching them to less usual ones, or pushing them to their ultimate consequences to see just where they can lead. (101-02)

Moreover, Nietzsche multiplies his perspectives and diversifies his styles. By thus manipulating language as a poet, Nietzsche unsettles and conquers its traditional meaning.

While rejecting the literature of realism, Hamsun and Dinesen also unsettle and conquer the traditional meaning of language, as we shall see in the following. As the literary manifestation of logical philosophy, realism is grounded in the same idea that language can objectively convey life—or “the thing in itself”— as it really is. At least the realism in Scandinavian literature both before and after the turn of the century asserts a concern to portray reality and contemporary problems as they are; to see things “realistically” or “naturalistically,” attaching first priority to the recording of perceived “truth” rather than the pursuit of idealized “beauty.”<sup>84</sup> The positivism of Auguste Comte, a doctrine that advocated the application of the scientific method of “positive spirit” to all aspects of human activity, claiming that all true knowledge derived from the examination, description, and classification of observable phenomena, played an influential role in the shaping of the Scandinavian realism.

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<sup>84</sup> Thus the realists reacted against the romanticists of the first part of the century for its glorification of the past and its wishful dreaming.

Recognizing the impact of a positivistic science on Scandinavian realism and the concerns represented by the latter to record reality from observation, the Nietzschean characteristics of both Hamsun's and Dinesen's attacks on the ideals of realist literature are enlightened.<sup>85</sup> Rejecting the idea that simply observing the surface can conclude truth, they reject the realist novel and underscore instead the fundamental complexities and contraries of existence that science and logic, such as Kant's categories, fail to affirm. Opposed to the realism of their contemporaries, Hamsun and Dinesen experiment with language in order to address what it ignores in the pen of realists. Arguing, moreover, that the way modern men think—in terms of their philosophical, scientific, and ethical standards—has alienated men from the power and spontaneity of nature, it becomes imperative for Hamsun and Dinesen to assert another way of thinking about life and creating truth. Like Nietzsche, they reject systems and doctrines, whether scientific, philosophic, ethical, or religious, while they emphasize the significance of the individual's creation of his or her own perspectives and values in order to address that which has been suppressed. These do not, however, result in any absolute standards for total conclusions about truth and ethics, but represent the continuous process of the individual's creative affirmation of life.

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<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche also criticizes realists. In *The Gay Science*, he writes “to the realists.—You sober people who feel well armed against passion and fantasies and would like to turn your emptiness into a matter of pride and an ornament: you call yourselves realists and hint that the world really is the way it appears to you. As if reality stood unveiled before you only ... That mountain there! That cloud there! What is ‘real’ in that? Subtract the phantasm and every human *contribution* from it, my sober friends! If you *can!*” (GS 121).

## HAMSUN'S ATTACK ON MODERN FASHION-LITERATURE AND LOGIC AS THE "GIBBERISH OF PARROTS"

Nietzsche's critique of modern philosophy and Kantian language elucidates Hamsun's critique of philosophy and language which constitutes a continuous element in his entire *oeuvre*. Criticizing the ideals of objective thinking and writing, Hamsun attacks the literature of realism. Arguing that the latter simplifies life, Hamsun attempts in his own texts to manifest the complexities of life and the impossibility of logically or realistically defining "truth" from one objective point of view. In the following I will focus mainly on *Hunger* (1890) and *On Overgrown Paths* (1949), his first and last books, since the concerns with writing and defining truth are particularly dominant in these texts. The protagonists in each of these books question and unsettle the validity of truths while they defend their own constructions, the *Hunger*-hero from first to last page where he sails off from Christiania, and—equally stubborn—Hamsun himself in *On Overgrown Paths*, his pseudo-autobiographic work. In the latter, Hamsun recounts the proceedings against him after the war when he was accused for having supported Hitler's Nazi regime in Norway. Rejecting the judgment of an entire nation, Hamsun stubbornly maintains his right to have spoken as he has while he questions the Court's justice and morality.

The protagonist in *Hunger*—the alienated journalist—is both lonely and starving, yet at times quite audacious; stalking strangers and pondering new ideas and titles for his future articles, such as "fremtidens forbrytelse" ["the crimes of the future"] and "viljens frihet" ["the freedom of the will"] (8). Like Nietzsche, he detests Kant. Among

his greatest projects would be a dissertation in three parts about “den filosofiske erkjendelse” [“the understanding of philosophy”] in which he would take the opportunity to “knække ynkelig nogen av Kants sofismer” [“break some of Kant’s pitiful sophisms”] (11).

The hungry journalist is, however, most of the time incapable of producing anything at all—his thoughts keep wandering off: “Men skrive kunde jeg ikke. Efter et par linjer vilde det ikke falde mig noget ind; mine tanker var andre steder og jeg kunde ikke stramme mig op til nogen bestemt anstrængelse” [“But I couldn’t write. After a couple of lines something would come into my mind; my thoughts were other places and I couldn’t shape up to any significant effort”] (18). Instead he enjoys playing around with words, naming people he doesn’t even know. To a young woman he sees one day on the street, he gives the name “Ylajali” (12). It is a name he has never heard before, but it has a “glidende, nervøs lyd” [“gliding, nervous sound”] to it that attracts him like she does (12). He also names himself arbitrarily, first as Wedel-Jarlsberg, alluding to the name of a distinguished aristocratic family in Norway (41), then as Andreas Tangen, journalist by profession (52).

Another word the starving journalist comes up with is “kuboå” (54). Ecstatic, he exclaims: “Det findes ikke i sproget, jeg har opfundet det, *kuboå*. Det har bokstaver som et ord, ved den søtteste Gud, mand, du har opfundet et ord ... *kuboå* ... av stor grammatikalsk betydning” [“It does not exist in language, I have invented it, *kuboå*. It has letters like a word, by the sweet God, man, you have invented a word ... *kuboå* ... of

great grammatical significance”] (54). Later he reflects about how he will use the word: “Det behøvet ikke å bety hverken Gud eller tivoli, og hvem hadde sagt at det skulde bety dyrskue? Jeg knyttet hånden hæftig og gjentar en gang til: Hvem har sagt at det skal bety dyrskue?” [“It didn’t need to signify either God or tivoli, and who has said that it should mean animal fair? I clenched my fist with intensity and repeated one more time: Who has said that it should mean animal fair?”] (55). After this private little conversation with himself, he proudly concludes that “et sådant ord som dette var det ikke vanskelig å finde mening til. Jeg vilde vente og se tiden an. Imidlertid kunde jeg sove på det” [“such a word as this one it would not be difficult to find a meaning for. I would wait and see. For the time being I could sleep on it”] (55).<sup>86</sup>

Hamsun develops his critique of language even more explicitly toward the end of his life in *On Overgrown Paths*. Having just created yet another word—“snididkar” for “snekker” [“carpenter”] (78)<sup>87</sup>—he here asserts the utterly arbitrary characteristic of language by considering words as mere “inventions:”

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<sup>86</sup> Noting the *Hunger*-protagonist’s joy in leaving the meaning of the word “kuboå” open, I disagree with Nettum’s conclusion that the protagonist desires to conclude the meaning of the word in order to find a point of security. “Klarer han å gi ordet ‘Kubooa’ en betydning, har han knyttet det til den ytre, konkrete virkelighet; dvs. han får et ankerfeste i den virkelighet mørket holder på å oppsluke” [“If he can give the word ‘kuboå’ a meaning, he will have connected it to an outer, concrete reality; i.e. he will have found an anchor in that reality which darkness is about to devour”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 67).

<sup>87</sup> Complaining that the word “snekker” [“carpenter”] “er så ribbet og tømt at det ikke har noget igjen av sit oprindelige indhold” [“has been plucked and emptied until nothing remains of its original content”] and that he “synes synd i snekker, det var ment til noget mere engang” [“feels sorry for ‘carpenter,’ it was originally meant for something more”], Hamsun sets himself the task of making “en opfindelse og restaurere snekker” [“an invention and restore carpenter”] (78). “Snididkar” is a compound of two Nordic roots, “snid” and “idkar,” argues Hamsun, and he for one is quite happy with his invention: “Jeg har ikke altid vært så heldig med mine opfindelser” [“I haven’t always been that lucky with my inventions”] (78). According to the etymological dictionary by Hjalmar Falk and Alf Torp, whom

Jeg har set sjalu i bladene, sjalusi (mord). Det er hverken norsk eller fransk, men skal dække et begrep, en sindstilstand. Vi har et tindrende godt ord for dette begrep i vårt skinsyke. Jeg husker at Hjalmar Falk vilde ha det stavet skindsyke—ja hvorfor? Fordi lapperne i Nord-Sverige har bruk for et garvet kalveskind når de frir til hverandre. Å, den Falk når han er språkfilosof på egenhånd uten å få med sig Torp. Svenskerne selv har ikke brydd sig om kalvskindet, men har svartsjuka for begrepet. Likesom vi har skinsyke, skindød, skinhellig, skinliv, skinfektning. Sjalusi er ingen ting hverken her eller hisset. Bare en oppfindelse.

[I have seen “sjalu” in the papers, “sjalusi” (murder).<sup>88</sup> It is neither Norwegian nor French, but is supposed to express an idea, a state of mind.

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Hamsun refers to in his next paragraph (79), the word “snekker” is derived from the old Norse “sniddeker” from the verb “sniddeken” for “to cut” or “to carve.” In other words, “snididkar” is not identical with the old Norse roots of “snekker,” as Hamsun claims. Moreover, according to Falk and Torp, “snid” can also refer to the expression “paa sneid” [“askew”]. Further, “kar” can refer both to a tub or a vessel, as well as a man or a fellow, and it is a term Hamsun himself applies while describing, for instance, other fellows of his age: “kjekke karer ... ungersveiner på sytti eller otti” [“lively fellows ... young swains of seventy or eighty”] (71). Did Hamsun intend “snididkar” to mean a fellow who is unwilling to follow the straight line of others? Hamsun asserts that “snididkar” is his *invention* and—in its puzzling form—he leaves it to the reader to ponder its meaning. Relishing such wordplay, Hamsun, like Nietzsche, is a challenge to translate. As Kaufmann comments on his translation of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “the problems encountered in translating *Zarathustra* are tremendous. Where Nietzsche does not deliberately bypass idioms in favor of coinages, he makes fun of them—now by taking them literally, then again by varying them slightly. Here too he is a dedicated enemy of all convention, intent on exposing the stupidity and arbitrariness of custom” (*Portable* 108). Referring to some of Nietzsche’s coinages in *Zarathustra*, such as “Übermut,” which Nietzsche associates with the Übermensch as a lightness of mind, a prankish exuberance, but which can also designate that overbearing which the Greeks called “hybris,” Kaufmann asserts that “few works of world literature can rival *Zarathustra* in its abundance of coinages” (109).

<sup>88</sup> “Sjalu” and “sjalusi” are the Norwegian spelling approximations of the French pronunciation of “jaloux” and “jalousie.”

We have a darn good word for this concept in our “sham sickness.”<sup>89</sup> I recall that Hjalmar Falk wanted it to be spelled “skinskyke”—and why? Because the Lapps in North Sweden make use of a tanned calfskin when they go courting. What a man that Falk is as a linguist on his own, without Torp.<sup>90</sup> The Swedes haven’t even bothered about the calfskin. Instead they have “black sickness” for the idea, just as we have “sham sickness,” sham death, sham holiness, sham life, sham fight. Jealousy is not one thing or the other. It is merely an invention.] (79)

In any case, Hamsun concludes, our use of words is in the end “uhyre likegyldig” [“utterly arbitrary”] (79).

Ol’Hansa, a fellow he knows from where he grew up, also expressed this idea, recalls Hamsun. He was “en stor fortæller og pratmaker” [“a great storyteller and windbag”], yet quite “kyndig” [“knowledgeable”] (79). Moreover, he was happy on his small piece of land and at times worked a bit as a journalist. His philosophy was that

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<sup>89</sup> “Skinskyke” is the older Norwegian word for jealousy. The literal translation of “skinskyke” would be “sham sickness.” Hamsun disliked the political attempts to revise and simplify written language to better fit the spoken language of the dialects, a program prompted by Norway’s independence from Denmark in 1814 and the desire for a new Norwegian language. In his article “Sproget i Fare” [“Our Language in Danger”], first published in *Aftenposten* in June 1918, Hamsun thus addresses the language-battles in Norway, arguing that our language has by now attained great capacities to express our visions in multiple ways, hence he attacks the political plan to “gjøre Sproget til Krypling, avkræfte det til Fordel for Maalet, vælte det og late det omkomme” [“reduce language to a cripple, enfeeble it in the name of dialect, overturn in and let it perish”] (PS 216). In other words, revising written language to make it more like spoken language would, according to Hamsun, simplify language to the extent of making it impotent and useless as a tool to express our visions.

<sup>90</sup> Hamsun was at other times critical against both Falk and Torp for their endeavors to simplify written language. They were both members of the parliament’s committee working to bring the dialects and

logic is irrelevant to life. “Se nu selvlyd og medlyd, sa han, hvad skal vi med slikt, hvis vi kan hjelpe os uten ... logiken, sa Ol’Hansa, den var nu heller ikke altid så strengt nødvendig” [“Just look at vowels and consonants, he said, what good are they to us if we can do without them ... logic, said Ol’Hansa, is for its part not so very necessary either”] (79). Ol’Hansa would sigh when he thought about all those insignificant things one must learn at school and for no use; “alle disse unødvendige ting som vi skal lære og siden gjemme på hele livet” [“all these unnecessary things which we’re supposed to learn and then hold on to the rest of our lives”], but, he would point out, “se på bladskriverne hvordan de gjør det. De bruker ikke denne papegøiekundskap mere, de hjelper sig uten og blir forstått” [“look at the journalists and how they do it. They don’t use that kind of parrot learning any more; they make do without it and are just as well understood”] (81). Certainly, if even journalists are capable of communicating without the trivial concerns of an entire “papegøiekundskap” [“learning of parrots”] taught at school as a “lapperi” [“patchwork”] of logic and grammar, then surely it cannot be all that significant (81).

Hamsun’s comment on journalism is double edged, for it is not clear that the journalists he addresses have made a conscious decision not to follow the rules of logic or grammar. Indeed, his comment on the journalists’ use of “sjalusi” indicates that he is critical of their tendency to go along with the trends.<sup>91</sup> Hamsun does, however, see an

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written language together and Hamsun attacks them in his article “Our Language in Danger” referred to above.

<sup>91</sup> This is an important reservation to make, considering Hamsun’s own hostility to reporters and his critique of the tabloid press, which he encountered early in his life in America and then later in Norway

alternative to the logical and realist writing of his contemporaries. He develops this alternative in his own fiction and defends it in print and on stage.

Hamsun first presented his program for a new psychological literature in a short essay published in 1890: “Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv” [“From the Life of the Unconscious”].<sup>92</sup> Hamsun here recounts how he one morning woke up to find that he’d written, in his sleep, a couple of brief pieces on hunting hares and cocks. Wondering from where he might have gotten the inspiration for these pieces, he later discovers that the source must have been an American-Norwegian newspaper he recently had read without really being concentrated on its content, but in which there was indeed some mentioning of hares. Hamsun concludes that his experience shows how the modern mind has become extremely sensitive to impression. However, he bemoans that both doctors and authors would define such an experience as he has had in terms of madness.

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with big headlines on murder and jealousy. In 1893, *Redaktør Lynges* [Editor Lynges] was published in which Hamsun attacks the politics of the newspaper industry, berating their lack of principles while private interests rule the articles’ approach to events. As Nettum explains, the novel is an attack against “sensasjonspressen i sin alminnelighet” [“the scandal press in general”] and the “amerikanske Overskrifter” [“American headlines”] in Lynges newspaper (*Konflikt og visjon* 191). The background for this book was the question of Norway’s seceding from the union with the Swedish crown, to become an independent nation. Ola Thommessen, the model for Hamsun’s editor Lynges, as Hamsun himself confessed, had taken over the Christiania newspaper *Verdens Gang* in 1878. Originally a radical paper and unequivocal supporter of independence, Hamsun was not alone in entertaining a suspicion that Thommessen, as the 1890s progressed, was editing his newspaper in an inconsistent fashion, and that his standpoint on particular issues, including independence, was dictated increasingly by considerations of money, social prestige, and even sexual advancement. (Ferguson 138). Moreover, as Ferguson explains, Hamsun had several personal experiences with unsympathetic journalists throughout his life which eventually “left Hamsun with a pathological contempt for the profession” (272).

<sup>92</sup> The article was published in the Bergen literary magazine *Samtiden* after *Hunger* had been published earlier in the same year. The article is included in Hamsun’s *Artikler* [Articles].

Hamsun, on the other hand, argues that men who experience such exceptional phenomena of the unconscious have “sunde og meget stærke Hjærner” [“healthy and very strong brains”] (43). In fact, Hamsun asserts, such men experience “et Sekund fyldt af ubevidst Fornemmelse af Væsensslægtskab med Naturen” [“a second filled with an unconscious sensation of an essential bond with nature”] (43). “Hvad om nu Literaturen i det hele taget begyndte at beskæftige sig lidt mere med sjælelige Tilstande, end med Forlovelser og Baller og Landture og Ulykkeshændelser som saadanne?” [“Now, what if literature were to explore psychological states rather than being so focused on engagements, formal dance parties, and excursions to the countryside and accidents as such?”], Hamsun therefore rhetorically asks (42). Answering his own question, he outlines his own psychological literature.

Man maatte da ganske vist give Afkald paa at skrive “Typer,” - som allesammen er skrevne før, - “Karakterer,” - som man træffer hver Dag paa Fisketorvet. Og forsaavidt vilde man maaske miste en Del af det Publikum, som læser forat se, om Helten og Heltinden faar hinanden. Men der blev til Gengæld flere *individuelle Tilfælder* i Bøgerne, og disse forsaavidt kanske mere svarende til det Sindsliv, som modne Mennesker i Nutiden lever. Vi fik erfare lidt om de hemmelige Bevægelser, som bedrives upaagtet paa de afsides Steder i Sjælen, den fornemmelsernes uberegnelige Uorden, det delikate Fantasiliv holdt under Luppen, disse Tankens og Følelsens Vandringer i det blaa, skridtløse, sporløse Rejser

med Hjærnen og Hjærtet, sælsomme Nervevirksomheder, Blodets Hvisken, Benpipernes Bøn, hele det ubevidste Sjæleliv. Og da vilde der blive færre Bøger med den billige ydre Psykologi, som aldrig trevler en Tilstand op, aldrig dukker ned i den sjælelige Ransagelse.

[One would then of course have to let go of describing “types,” - who have all been described before, - “characters,” - whom one encounters every day at the fish market. One might perhaps lose that part of one’s audience which reads to see if the hero and the heroine get each other. But there would, on the other hand, be more *individual cases* in books, and these would probably more accurately describe the life of the soul of mature human beings today. We would get to know a little about the secret stirrings that go on unnoticed in the remote parts of the mind, the incalculable chaos of impressions, the delicate life of the imagination seen under the magnifying glass; the random wanderings of those thoughts and feelings; untrodden trackless journeyings by brain and heart, strange workings of the nerves, the whisper of the blood, the entreaty of the bone, all the unconscious life of the mind. And then there would be fewer books with the cheap inner psychology which never tracks down a state of being, which never delves into the investigation of the soul.] (42)

Thus defending a new psychological literature, Hamsun bemoans in his conclusion that “Literaturen, den har hovedsagelig havt to Slags Mennesker:

kloge og gale—allesammen ‘Typer.’ Er der da en Person, hos hvem der er iagttaget sjælelige Ekstraforeteelser, saa sendes han enten til Gaustad eller til Hospitalet” [“our literature has basically portrayed two kinds of people: wise and mad—all of them ‘Types.’ If there is a person in which exceptional unconscious phenomena occur, he is either sent to Gaustad or the hospital”] (43-44).<sup>93</sup>

Hamsun expounds on his critique of “Typedigtning” [“Type literature”] the year after, in 1891, when he traveled around in Norway lecturing on Norwegian literature.<sup>94</sup> Criticizing the social realist school of Norwegian literature—“Samfundsdigtning” [“social literature”]—as both superficial and stereotypical, he again calls for a literature that takes psychology—and the intricate phenomena of the unconscious life—seriously (31). Norwegian literature is, says Hamsun, a literature for “et Bondefolk med yderst borgerlige Bestræbelser. Det er en Literatur, som er artsbestemt af de demokratiske Nyttebestræbelser, som har regeret vort Aarhundrede. Den er i sit Væsen materialistisk; den har som Samfunnskildring interesseret sig mer for Sæder end for Mennesker, mer altsaa for Samfundsspørgsmaal end for Sjæle” [“a peasant people with rather middle class endeavors. It is a literature which is determined in its nature by the democratic demands for utility that have ruled our century. It is in its nature materialistic; it has as social criticism been more interested in ethics than in people, more interested, that is, with social questions than with souls”] (18). From Hugo to Zola in France, and from

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<sup>93</sup> Gaustad is a psychiatric hospital outside Oslo.

<sup>94</sup> These lectures were later published as *Paa Turné* [*On Tour*] (1960).

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Alexander Kielland, and Jonas Lie in Norway—the four great realists in Norwegian literature that attained the role of literary patriarchs at the turn of the century—Hamsun sees only the production of “Samfundsreformation og Typedigtning” [“social reformation and stereotypical writing”] (21-22). The canon of the four Norwegian realists, Hamsun declares decisively, “har da faaet sit Præg af, ja for en god Del endog sit Inhold ved engelsk Madmoral og lidt europæisk Realisme” [is thus marked by, yes, even has its content from, English petty ethics and some European realism”] (20). Their literature, finally, is directed by “materielle Interesser ... nyttige og nærende Ting ... gennemtrængt af det demokratiske Nytttehensyn i alle Maader” [“material interests ... useful and nutritious things ... permeated by the democratic concern with utility in every way”], he concludes sarcastically (23-24).

While Hamsun claims that he does not want to dismiss the “social literature” all together, he bemoans how it rules at the cost of “Poesien og Psykologien” [“poetry and psychology”] because it typifies people as “Karakterer” [“characters”] and “Typer” [“types”] (26-27). This is simply “for grov og for overfladisk Psykologi” [“too coarse and too superficial of a psychology”], he argues (27). Taking Kielland’s novel *Else* as one of his examples, Hamsun criticizes the superficial portrayal of the blond fellow in the novel. “Faar man noget inde fra hans *Sjæls Indvolde?* er der nogen Ransagelse af den Mands Instinktrødder” [“Does one get anything from the inside of his *soul’s intestines?* Is there any investigation of the roots of that man’s instincts?”] Hamsun asks

sarcastically (27-28). His answer is no, for the fellow was thought of as a “Type paa en Mand, som var ‘flink med Laase’” [“type of a man who was ‘clever with locks’”] (28).<sup>95</sup>

Kielland personally defended his own portrayal of types as a strategy to reveal social injustice. In a letter to Georg Brandes, November 6, 1884, he defends his realism, arguing that,

jeg mindre interesserer mig for det enkelte Menneske som saadant, men mere for Menneskene i Forhold til hinanden og til en eller anden Last eller Daarskab. Jeg tænder ligesom et Baal i Midten, hvor jeg vil brænde et eller andet Samfundsonde, og rundt dette grupperer sig en Flok Personer, om hvilke Baalets Lys falder stærkere og svagere, men altid kun Belysning fra Baalet; derfor blive mine Figurer ensidigt belyste eller—som man siger—overfladiske.

[I am less interested in the individual as such, and more in people as they stand in relation to one another or to some vice or folly. I light a bonfire in the middle, as it were, in which I want to burn some social evil or other; and around this are grouped a flock of characters upon whom the gleams

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<sup>95</sup> About Ibsen, Hamsun likewise writes that he has “ladet sig nøje med den stejleste og enkleste Karakterpsykologi ... *Er der nogen* Mand i vor Literatur, som har skabt ‘Karakterer’ i al deres stejle Enkelhed, saa er det ham, har nogen formaaet at ‘holde’ en Skildring saa krampagtigt fast, at intet saakaldt ‘uvedkommende’ fik flyde ind i en Figur, saa er det ham. Og dette grunder sig lige saa meget paa den Digtform, som denne Forfatter altid bruger, som paa den naturlige Stejlhed og Nuancefattigdom i hans Følelsesliv” [“been satisfied with the most stiff-necked and simple psychology of characters ... *If there is any* man in our literature who has created ‘characters’ in all their unyielding simplicity, then it is him, if anyone has been able to ‘fix’ a characterization so convulsively that nothing ‘unauthorized’ has been able to flow into any figure, then it is him. And this is both because of the form this author always uses, and because of the essential stiffness and lack of nuances in his emotional life”] (*Paa Turné* 31-32).

of the fire fall more or less strongly, but always only illuminated by the fire. My characters are therefore one-sidedly illustrated or—as some say—superficial.]<sup>96</sup>

Kielland was faithful to his social conscience, showing moral outrage over many of the contemporary institutions and practices in his novels, such as the rigorous schools, the suppression of women, and the hypocritical clergy. He disliked the emerging new psychological literature of the 1890s as an escape from social questions. “Den nyeste moderne Sving liger ikke jeg” [“I do not like the new modern turn”], he writes to Bjørnson on May 21, 1889 (164). Writing to Bjørnson again a year later, on May 22, commenting on Zola’s work, he asserts that, “Jeg bryder mig ikke stort om Korrektheden i de perverse Fænomener inden Sjælelivet” [“I do not care much about the accuracy of the perverse phenomena of the unconscious”] (167). To Georg Brandes, finally, he writes on July 17, 1890, that he cannot understand how in a time ridden by the worst vices in human relations, business, politics, and everyday life—“at i en saadan Tid Literaturen føler Trang til at krybe under en Sten, forat være psykologisk!” [“that literature in such a time feels the need to crawl under a rock in order to be psychological!”] (170).

Hamsun, on the other hand, rejects the shallow psychology of realist literature with its focus on “den ydre Handlingens Poesi” [“the poetry of the outer action”] and calls for “den indtrængende sjælelige Undersøgelse” [“the penetrating investigation of the soul”] (*Paa Turné* 30). The characters in realist literature are “rigtig fine levende

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<sup>96</sup> Qtd. from Kielland’s *Brev [Letters]*, ed. By Francis Byll (118).

Apparater med Mennskenavne” [“quite fine living apparatuses with human names”], Hamsun says scornfully; “de er ikke splittet og delt, ikke sammensat af dybt indviklede Flerartetheder og fine Disharmonier” [“they are not split and fragmented, not combinations of deeply intricate multiplicities and fine disharmonies”] (31). Hamsun, on the other hands, wants literature to pay attention to “*alle* Yttringer av Liv” [“*all* expressions of life”] (43), and to delve into “det komplicerede moderne Menneske” [“the complicated modern man”] (47). Hamsun explains that “den almindelige Nervøsitet har gennemtrængt vort Grundvæsen og farvet hele vort Sindsliv ... Metafysiken, Politiken, Moralen har forandret sig siden Shakespeares Tid, Mennesket er kommet ind i det moderne Nervalivs Tempo” [“the prevailing nervousness has permeated the root of our character and colored the entire life of our soul ... Metaphysics, politics, morality have changed since Shakespeare’s time. Man has entered the tempo of the modern life of the nerves”] (49). This has, he continues, complicated how people think and feel. “Det menneskelige Væsen er omskiftelig og splittet” [“The human character is vacillating and fragmented”], Hamsun asserts, and he, in contrast to the realist literature, therefore wants to pay attention to “‘Modsigelserne’ i det menneskelige Indre” [“the ‘contradictions’ of man’s soul”], desiring, moreover, “en Literatur, der har Mennesker, hos hvem Inkonsekvensen bogstavelig er Grundkaraktertræk” [“a literature that has human beings whose inconsistency is literally their essential characteristic”] (66).

Attacking, finally, the authority of modern science and the veneration of “Kendsgærninger” [“facts”], Hamsun argues that “der er Omraader i vort Væsen, som levnes uberørte af et Faktum, og der foregaar i vore indre Territorier højst forunderlige Bevægelser, som ikke kan udtrykkes i en matematisk Formel, som et Faktum er, og ikke kan gaa ind under en saadan” [“there are areas in our nature which remain untouched by a fact, and in our inner territories quite extraordinary movements take place that cannot be expressed in a mathematical formula as a fact, or be categorized as such”] (*ibid.* 54). It is the goal of his new psychological literature to delve into those untrodden territories to investigate the strange movements of the soul.

Hamsun’s critique of the trivial and material concerns of modern literature echoes Nietzsche’s critique of modern men whose philosophy deals with the “all too human facts” (BGE 31); whose ethics are obsessed with utility; and whose psychology fails to go into the depths of man. Nietzsche feels as if he “can no longer endure the bric-à-brac of concepts of the most various origin such as so-called positivism brings to the market today,” and he is disgusted by “all these reality-philosophasters in whom there is nothing new or genuine” (BGE 40). Opposed to their shallow theories, Nietzsche upholds “that sublime inclination in the man of knowledge which takes a profound, many-sided and thorough view of things and *will* take such a view ... provided he has hardened and sharpened for long enough his own view of himself” (BGE 161).

Moreover, according to Nietzsche, “all psychology has hitherto remained anchored to moral prejudices and timidities: it has not ventured into the depths” (BGE

53).<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Hamsun criticizes modern psychiatry for its pretension to know the structure of the mind. In *On Overgrown Paths* he aims some of his most vehement blows against the learned bookishness of Professor Langfeldt, the psychiatrist who examined Hamsun after the war to determine his fitness to stand trial for treason.

Jeg synes han er typen på en seminarist som er kommet tilbake fra seminaret med al den boklige viten han har hentet sig av skolebøker og lærde verker ... Han er så tryg i sin viten. Men det er ikke det samme som å være tryg i den gamle visdom: intet visst å vite!

[I consider him the prototype of a graduate who has returned from the teachers' college with all the bookish knowledge he has procured from schoolbooks and learned works ... He is so comfortable in his learning. But that is not the same as feeling confident in the old wisdom that nothing can be known with certainty!] (59-60)

Reacting against the Professor's investigations of his private life, including his marriage, Hamsun wryly comments that "Professor Langfeldt vet med sig selv at han ikke er meget skikket til å trænge ind i og tukle med intimiteter i et fremmed ekteskap. Han er for fast og firkantet, hans hode er fuldt av lærte ting, og disse ting hører til i rubrikker, i liv og lære" ["Professor Langfeldt knows in his heart that he is hardly the man to delve into and

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<sup>97</sup> Further, Nietzsche attacks "the English psychologists" as "men who are simply dull old frogs who hop and creep in and around man as in their own element—as though man were a bog" while always, "whether intentionally or not, engaged in the same task of pushing into the foreground the nasty part of the psyche, looking for the effective motive forces of human development" (GM 158).

meddle with the intimacies in someone else's marriage. He is too rooted in square boxes, and his head is full of learned things; things that belong in tables and categories"] (63).

In line with Nietzsche, Hamsun thus asserts the complexities and contradictions of one's self; the lack of a sovereign rational "being" governing our actions. Hence, while accusing the "big four" for typifying their characters with dominant characteristics, he commends August Strindberg, on the other hand, for portraying the complexity and contradictions of men's characters. Strindberg, says Hamsun in his article on Strindberg from 1891, "skildrer ... sine Personer vaklende, splittede, sammensat af gammelt og Nyt; hans Sjæle er Konglomerater af svundne og nærværende Tidens Kulturbrokker, Stumper af Bøger og Aviser, Stykker af Mennesker" ["depicts ... his persons vacillating, fragmented, combined out of the old and the new; his souls are conglomerations of past and present times' bricks of culture, bits of books and newspapers, pieces of human beings"] (*Artikler* 26).

Interviewed by the doctors after the war about his "karakteregenskaper" ["qualities of character"], Hamsun explains that "fra jeg begynte [å skrive] tror jeg ikke det finnes i hele min produksjon en person med en slik hel, rettlinjet herskende evne. De er alle uten såkaldt 'karakter,' de er splittet og oppstykket, ikke gode og ikke onde, men begge deler, nuanserte, skiftende i sitt sinn og i sine handlinger. Og slik er utvilsomt jeg selv" ["from the time I began [writing] I don't think that there is in my entire production one person with such a whole, linear governing quality. They are all without so-called 'character,' they are split and fragmented, neither good nor bad, but both, nuanced,

shifting in their souls and in their actions. No doubt I am like that myself”] (Langfeldt 82-83).

The starving journalist in *Hunger* experiences himself dissolved into parts, including his shoes. “Ved å kaste øinene på mine sko var det som jeg hadde truffet en god bekjendt eller fått en løsreven part av mig selv tilbake ... Det var noget av mit eget væsen gåt over i disse sko, de virket på mig som en ånde mot mit jeg, en pustende del av mig selv” [“Glancing at my shoes it was as if I had encountered a friend or gotten a severed part of myself back again ... Some of my own self had gone over into these shoes, they affected me as a breath on me, a breathing part of myself”] (19). As if suffering from multiple-personality syndrome, he quarrels with himself about the meaning of his new word “kuboå,” alone in his room. “Nei egentlig var ordet egnet til å bety noget *sjælelig*, en følelse, en tilstand—om jeg ikke kunde forstå det?” [“No, actually the word was qualified to signify something *spiritual*, a feeling, a condition—as if I couldn’t understand that?”], the *Hunger*-protagonist reproaches himself—“Og jeg husker mig om for å finde noget sjælelig. Da forekommer det mig at nogen taler, blander sig ind i min passiar, og jeg svarer sint: Hvadbehager? Nei din idiotiske make findes ikke! Strikkegarn? Reis til helvede! Hvorfor skulde jeg være forpligtet til å la det bety strikkegarn når jeg specielt hadde imot at det betydde strikkegarn?” [“And I search my mind to think of something spiritual. Then it seems to me as if someone is talking, interfering in my own private little chat, and I answer, angry: What did you say? No, there is no match to your idiotic suggestion. Knitting yarn? Go to hell! Why should I be

obliged to let it mean knitting yarn when I am specifically against it signifying knitting yarn?" ] (55). On the stage of his mind, split thoughts and perspectives thus oppose one another and play out an entire battle.

While vindicating his own new literature, Hamsun—suspicious of anyone’s claim to present the truth—warns, however, against overestimating authors and deplores the idealization of “great men,” such as Henrik Ibsen. In his lecture to students at the University of Christiania on January 30, 1897, “Mod Overvurdering af Digterne og Digtningen” [“On the Overestimating of Writers and Writing”], he argues that

Store Digtere har i lang tid været altfor store for vort lille Land, de har slaaet under sig Ledelsen af hele vort aandelige Liv og ophævet al Balance ... De er Herrer i Kunsten, de skjætter Politiken, de forkynder Religion, de besørger Tænkningen ... Da vi ingen Filosofer har fostret, indtager Digterne Filosofernes Plads.

[Great authors have for a long time been too great for our small country. They have taken control of our intellectual life and overturned the balance ... They are masters over the arts, they look after politics, they preach religion, they take care of our thinking ... Since we have not produced any philosophers, they have taken the place of philosophers.] (122)<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hamsun’s speech was published in the national newspaper *Aftenposten* February 7, 1897 and is reprinted in *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter* [*Hamsun’s Polemical Writings*] (119-26).

Hamsun is clearly critical of such manipulation of our thoughts. Though asserting that literature does and should serve a role in people's intellectual life, he warns against the deification of authors that dulls individual thinking.

On the other hand, Hamsun favors authors who disrupt our traditional ways of thinking, forcing us to reconsider things. Taking Strindberg as his example, he commends him as "en rød Klud" ["a red cloth"] and confesses that "Strindbergs Trang til at modsige alle engang etablerede Anskuelse" ["Strindberg's desire to contradict every established opinion"] impresses him (*Artikler* 14). "Han har undersøgt det meste og angrebet alt" ["He has investigated most things and attacked everything"], continues Hamsun, "fra Videnskab til Kunst og Opfindelser, fra Kultur til Religion og Gud; med en Art jublende Raseri har han kastet sig over alle Ting i dette Liv og det tilkommende" ["from science to art to inventions, from culture to religion and God; with an exultant rage he has dived into all things in this life and the coming one"] (*Artikler* 15).

In Hamsun's portrayal, Strindberg appears as a Nietzschean step-child to society. Wanting to shock his reader, Nietzsche asserts that "I am no man, I am dynamite" (EH 326). As a "man of tomorrow" he is bound to be "in contradiction to his today" (BGE 143). Moreover, he knows that in the eyes of his contemporaries he is a bugbear: "I am the *anti-ass par excellence* and thus a world-historical monster," Nietzsche chuckles (EH 263). But, he concludes, "whoever is related to me in the height of his aspirations will experience veritable ecstasies of learning; for I come from heights that no bird ever reached in its flight, I know abysses into which no foot ever strayed" (EH 263).

In a Nietzschean spirit, Hamsun and Dinesen defend their favored writers as “step-children” to society, saluting the poet as the potential disrupter and reformer of traditional understandings of “truth.” In the introduction to his first lecture in 1891, Hamsun says of himself that he wants to “forarge” [“shock”] and “angribe” [“attack”] the schools of literature; he “rydder gamle Tomter” [“is clearing old land”] (*Paa Turné* 17). A writer and recurrent figure in Dinesen’s tales, Charlie, similarly describes his work in terms of attack, musing that “the relation of the artist to the public is amongst the most monstrous” (WT 291). In “A Consolatory Tale” he confesses that he has behaved to his reader “as the Lord behaves to Job ... I have laid a wager with Satan about the soul of my reader,” explains Charlie, and “I have marred his path and turned terrors upon him, caused him to ride on the wind and dissolved his substance” (WT 293-94). He concludes that he cannot “give the public peace,” but must continue to haunt his reader (WT 294).

#### **DINESEN’S OVERTHROWAL OF THE PHALLOCENTRIC NARRATIVE IN DEFENSE OF THE GREAT STORY AND THE UNSPOKEN WORD**

We have seen that Nietzsche feels suffocated by the smoke fuming from the brains of modern philosophers. It is the dust of their heavy books that suffocates Dinesen. In “A Country Tale,” she reveals the failure of “human knowledge and wisdom” stored “in the tall, heavily bound books” to guide man in making his decisions (LT 236). The tale deals with the question of changelings and how the wrong people may thus in a sense stand wrongfully accused of a crime. Thus we encounter Master Eitel who realizes that

he, the lord, is actually the peasant son, and that Linnert, the boy who is awaiting his death sentence, guilty of manslaughter, is actually the master's son. The woman, Lone, who raised Linnert as her son and who was once Master Eitel's nurse, reveals the fact to Master Eitel while Linnert is awaiting his punishment, confessing that she swapped the two boys when they were babies.

Realizing that his position as the lord is at the cost of another man's life, Master Eitel is in despair about what to do and he wonders if perhaps the shelves of books may help him; "did any of them have anything to tell him tonight?" (LT 236). It is, however, not the heavy books that Master Eitel has planned to study, "expecting the visit of a learned old man from Copenhagen" (LT 218), but a tale in "an old storybook from his boyhood" that finally gives Master Eitel a clue about what to do (LT 236).

At length at the end of the room he found on a shelf an old storybook from his boyhood. He took it down and laid it on the table. He let it fall open at random, and, standing up, by the light of the candles read one of the old tales through. (LT 236)

The tale is about a baron who, ridden by guilt because of a crime he has never found the means to atone for, strikes the king in his face in order to be punished by him. However, as the king asserts, only the man who the baron originally struck can determine the just retribution. Until that day, the king concludes to the baron, "you will be ... forever lonely, the loneliest man in my kingdom" (LT 237). Having read the tale, Master Eitel sits back in his chair and reflects that both he and Linnert are as lonely as the baron

with no means to atone for the original crime that has directed their lives. “I shall go to him,” Master Eitel decisively asserts (LT 238). Thus relieved to have found what he must do, he sighs that “now, after all, I shall sleep tonight” (LT 238).

Disclosing the fruitlessness of philosophical treatises and other heavy books to advise men on what to do, Dinesen underscores the superiority of tales. In this vein she also attacks Kant’s logic, letting a monkey supersede his authority. As we saw in last chapter’s discussion of “Copenhagen Season” and “Sorrow-Acre,” the women in Dinesen’s tales assert a subversive power against masculine authority. In “The Monkey” (*Seven Gothic Tales*) Dinesen develops this theme of masculinity versus femininity further until the authority of the former, represented by Kant, is defeated by the power of the latter.

“The Monkey” tells us the story of how the Virgin Prioress of Closter Seven arranges a marriage for her nephew, Boris, a lieutenant in the Royal Guards, brought to her after a homosexual scandal. Governing a secular cloister “of no religious nature,” but rather a retreat “for unmarried ladies and widows of noble birth who here pass the autumn and winter days of their lives in a dignified and comfortable routine,” the Prioress takes great delight in her role as matchmaker (SGT 109).<sup>99</sup>

Boris is, however, surprised by the Prioress’ decision to make Athena, “a strong young woman of eighteen, six feet high and broad in proportion,” his intended wife (SGT

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<sup>99</sup> As Aiken notes, the name “Closter Seven” suggests the “ambiguous and anomalous character” of the convent as “a hybrid coinage that crosses the lexicons, fusing English *cloister* with Danish *kloster*” (134).

129). Seeing how she breaks the traditional code of feminine seductiveness, he was certain that his mother and aunt “had been joining forces to keep him and Athena apart” since their childhood (SGT 118). The Prioress surprises not only Adam, but also the reader. Introduced as a highly respected woman, representing refinement, dignity, good sense, and benignity, she changes dramatically as the story progresses. Indeed, acting as matchmaker, she appears increasingly undignified. Boris is at times astonished to see her “strength and cunning” dealing with the matter, reflecting that women, “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” (SGT 119). Wearing a “hard and fine little smile” as she plots the caging of Athena, her face becomes “deadly white” when Athena refuses to marry Boris (SGT 135-36). In a rage she gasps for air, sneers, and, deriding Athena, concludes that “here we have a fanatical virgin” (SGT 137).

Refusing to give up, the Prioress arranges a final “supper of seduction” (SGT 139). After the dinner, she sends Boris—who at this point is reluctant to pursue Athena—to the virgin’s room, fortified by his aunt’s aphrodisiac. Boris finds Athena in the middle of the room, where she appears to him as “a sturdy young sailor boy” (SGT 152). During the ensuing battle, Athena nearly kills him, but Boris is finally able to grate his teeth against her teeth. The following morning, the Prioress convinces Athena that the grating of the teeth has made her pregnant and that she must therefore marry Boris.

It is at this point that we learn why the Prioress has been acting so unlike herself. As Aiken notes, “the ‘Prioress’ has, quite literally, *not been herself*” (137). In the silence following the Prioress’ conclusion that Athena must marry Boris, a monkey enters the room through the window. Though this appears to be the Prioress’ monkey which had been given her by her cousin on his return from Zanzibar and which she was very fond of, as the reader learns on the first page of the story, the Prioress ends up in a fight with the monkey. As the monkey jumps upon her and tears off her lace cap, a metamorphosis occurs:

The old woman ... forced to the floor; she was scrunched and changed.

Where she had been, a monkey was now crouching and whining ... And

where the monkey had been jumping about, rose, a little out of breath from

the effort, her face still a deep rose, the true Prioress of Closter Seven.

(SGT 162)

Acting as the matchmaker was, in other words, not the Prioress known to the outside world, but the Prioress acting according to the monkey inside.

The connection Dinesen makes between woman and monkey is not original to her. Referring to H. W. Janson’s work, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1952), Aiken points out how the ape has been “almost exclusively associated with female qualities” (138). Moreover, since the middle ages, the ape has had a “reputation for wiliness, an unstable temper, and sensuality,” and has also been “associated with sexuality, especially the ‘dangerous’ forces of feminine seductiveness

and desire” (138). Athena’s father, Count Hopballehus, gives us another clue to the Prioress’ dual nature. Upon Boris’ visit to the Count to ask for Athena’s hand in marriage, the Count talks about a Wendish idol; the goddess of love. This goddess “had the face and façade of a beautiful woman, while, if you turned her around, she presented at the back the image of a monkey” (SGT 130-31).

As matchmaker, the Prioress represented the Wendish goddess and embodied the monkey. However, even after the monkey has come out, her nature remains uncertain, for her name, Cathinka, evokes, as Aiken notes, “Dinesen’s description in *Out of Africa* of ... ‘those Russian wooden dolls ... which are sold under the name of Katinka,’ and ‘which ... have ... got another doll inside them, and another inside that’” (150). We can, in other words, not be certain that there is not yet another monkey inside of the Prioress and that she embodies an “infinite reversibility between Prioress and primate” (150-51). Moreover, considering the monkey’s untamable nature, we should be cautious to think it stayed. In fact, as the tale reaches its climax, the monkey overpowers the authority of rational logic.

... it jumped in a light and graceful leap onto a pedestal, which supported the marble head of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and from there it watched, with its glittering eyes, the behavior of the three people in the room. (SGT 162)

As Aiken comments, “the gesture, in effect, makes a monkey out of Kant—and, implicitly, out of the traditional Western metaphysics and the male philosophical

genealogy his bust monumentalizes” (150). Following Nietzsche and Hamsun’s *Hunger*-protagonist, Dinesen thus makes Kant a main target of her satire.

As woman and monkey combined the Prioress transgresses the laws of the patriarchy and creates, as Boris’ godmother and goddess of love, her own matriarchy. In the last line of the tale, the Prioress bids Boris and Athena to obey the law and not hold the gods in contempt: “*Discite justitiam, et non temnere divos*” (SGT 163). Having witnessed the metamorphosis, Athena is actually ready to be conquered by the goddess of love. She gazes at Boris and in this look she was “laying down another law” that would separate the two from the rest of the world (SGT 162).

Langbaum, while vaguely defining Dionysus as life force and Apollo as chastity, interprets the Prioress’ command to obey the laws as meaning “obey ... both Apollo and Dionysus” (88).<sup>100</sup> Further, he compares the ending of “The Monkey” to Milton’s portrayal of Adam and Eve:

They have finally seen evil ... and because they have had the moral experience together, are bound together in guilt, they are ready for human love—the kind Milton gives to Adam and Eve when he describes them in the end as taking, ‘hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,’ their ‘solitary way’ out of Eden. (88)

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<sup>100</sup> Without further defining his use of the concepts, Langbaum writes that in Boris there is “the Dionysian injunction to be a Don Giovanni and serve the life force. On the other hand, there is the Apollonian injunction to be chaste and serve an ideal in the sky” (84-85). About the Prioress, he says that “in working to bring about the violation of Athena’s virginity, the Prioress is Dionysian force; but she is Apollonian in her attempt to cage the splendidly wild and free young girl” (86).

Considering the Prioress' uncertain nature and the likelihood of her carrying a number of monkeys and prioresses within her body, Aiken, on the other hand, warns us against seeing the ending as "Athena's entry into another version of paternal name and law" (147). True, the Prioress' last dictum is quoted from Vergil's *Aenid*, "that most phallogentric of epics" in Aiken's opinion, but it is not spoken by Vergil's narrator (149). It is, on the other hand, spoken by the Sibyl, "bajadere ... og Forførererke" ["bayadère ... and seductress"], as Dinesen describes the Sibyl in her essay "Daguerreotypier" ["Daguerreotypes"] (SE 188). Moreover, the Sibyl is linked, as Aiken points out, with "scattered 'leaves, the mockery of the rushing wind's disorder;" she has a "hundred voices;" and she speaks, finally, in riddles (151-52). "In the tale's last, contradictory passage Dinesen enacts," concludes Aiken, "the oracular, sibylline nature of her own textuality—utterly undecidable, challenging classification, a dynamic play of difference in which all categories, all categorical imperatives, begin to falter" (152).

Years later, Dinesen said in regard to this story, that "when men by way of their conventions have got themselves into difficulties, then let the monkey in, he will find the unattainable solution" (qtd. in Langbaum 88). Langbaum interprets this to mean that we must "let in the irrational, unconscious, biological forces" (88). Aiken, on the other hand, argues that "to 'let the monkey in'" means "to import that enchantment legendarily associated with the Sibyl's leaves and 'hundred voices'" (152). Without taking sides, we can conclude, while borrowing from Kofman's discussion of Nietzsche, that Dinesen, by attaching a traditional metaphor (the monkey) to a less usual one (the Prioress), has

managed to escape from the seduction of conventional language, making a conclusive interpretation impossible.

Moreover, while concluding the tale without a final answer to the nature of the Prioress, the tale protects the affirmation of all complex qualities in our nature. As Aiken explains, “‘The Monkey’ enacts an alternative vision of psyche” while “interrogating the phallogocentric epistemologies which construct the ‘self’ and its representations according to an absolutist hierarchical logic that would split human from animal, mind from body, subject from object, self from other, ‘man’ from ‘woman’” (133-34). In other words, like Hamsun, Dinesen rejects the authority of a rational self while emphasizing the contraries and complexities that go into the human psyche. However, unlike him, she is more concerned to direct our attention toward the fruitfulness of affirming the combination of opposites and complexities in the creation of ourselves, like the Wendish goddess and the Prioress herself.<sup>101</sup>

Dinesen develops this theme further in “The Cardinal’s First Tale” (*Last Tales*) where the self is described as a textual and undecided product while contraries are nonetheless affirmed. The tale begins by a Madame, “the lady in black,” posing the question: “Who are you?” to Cardinal Salviati (LT 3). To answer, the Cardinal tells a story, for, as he concludes at the very end of the tale, “within our whole universe the

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<sup>101</sup> Hence, though her characters are, as Johannesson writes, “types, never individuals, never ‘characterless’ (as Strindberg called the complex figures of his psychological dramas),” they nonetheless hold great complexities and contraries (26).

story only has authority to answer that cry of heart of its characters, that one cry of heart of each of them: ‘*Who am I?*’” (LT 26).

A recurrent figure in Dinesen’s tale, the Cardinal is not a regular Christian priest, just as Boris’ aunt is not a regular Christian Prioress. He represents, like the Prioress, Dinesen’s appropriation of Christian myths and characters in her own philosophy. In the story the Cardinal tells the Madame to explain to her who she is, he presents himself as both an artist and priest. His story is about a boy, the son of Princess Benedetta, who has attained freedom from her former sheltered life, convent bred in Italy, through her own education in music.<sup>102</sup> Opposing the patriarchal authority of her husband, who informs her six weeks before the Princess’ confinement that he wants the child to be a “pillar of the Church” and that the child’s name should be Atanasio, she decides that “the child to come was to be the son of his mother, and the godson of the Muses. His name should be Dionysio, in reminiscence of the God of inspired ecstasy” (LT 11). Prince Pompilio is “deeply shocked, to hear his wife, to his face, defy Heaven and him,” but Princess Benedetta reminds him that “the child was of one mind and body with her, and that it

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<sup>102</sup> Princess Benedetta once found her way to the old library of the palatial villa in the mountains—to which her husband had taken her as a safe residence, protecting his wife from “the temptations of a worldly life” (LT 5)—when her husband was gone for a day. The library becomes her abode, however, her husband finds her “excessive reading” harmful to her health and mind and prevents her from pursuing her study (LT 6). She then gives herself up to music, in particular “the deceptive cadenza, the *cadenza d’inganno*, of which musical dictionaries will tell you that it makes every preparation for a perfect finish and then, instead of giving the unexpected final accord, suddenly breaks off and sounds an unexpected, strange and alarming close” (LT 7). As Sara Stambaugh notes, the cadenza “reflects the free and brilliant life she adopts in her adulthood as opposed to that anticipated by her husband” (23). The musical figure also anticipates the final stage of her education, explains Stambaugh, a musical performance by the castrato Marelli. Her reaction to his singing is described as “a birth, the pangs of

would follow her in whatever course she took. There was, indeed, nothing to prevent the two of them from walking out of the house and joining, say, a band of gypsies” (LT 11).

Six weeks later she gave birth to twins. “The elder of the boys was christened Atanasio, and had for sponsors the Cardinal Rusconi and the Bishop of Bari. The younger boy was christened Dionysio, and his sponsors were the poet Gozzo, the composer Cimarosa, and the young sculptor Canova” (LT 13). The conflict between the Prince and the Princess was, however, not resolved. During a fire, one of the children dies. The Princess decides that the one who survived is Dionysio, though the pale-blue silk ribbon he was always wearing to distinguish him from Atanasio, was gone. She also gives him the pet name Pyrrha (LT 15-16). To the rest of the household, however, the surviving boy remains Atanasio, determined for a career in the Church—to be a Prince of the Church and the glory of his father’s name (LT 18). In this way he went about as Dionysio-Pyrrha-Atanasio.

The boy was “schooled in Greek and Hebrew and the Fathers of the Church,” however, he was also influenced by his mother who was “ever a loyal and dauntless seeker of happiness” (LT 17). In the palazzo or the villa of the young Princess, with her circle of friends gathered, she filled the air with “wit, splendor, elegance and romanticism” (LT 17).

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which were sweet beyond words ... in which, undergoing a total change, she triumphantly became her whole self” (LT 7).

[The boy] was a favorite in his mother's circle and at home in the great world; he was as happy on horseback as with the classics, and, during the family's sojourns at the villa, he took delight in lonely wanderings in the mountains ... To the mother the pretty boy—apart from being his own adorable self—was the child-prophet of earthly beauty and delight. (LT 18-19)

Further, she made him her confidant of her love affairs “in her smiles and sighs,” and “the child was thus at an early age schooled in the art of equipoise” (LT 19). Thus raised, the boy came to look upon the world as both a priest and an artist; “the spiritual physician and gardener” (LT 19).

Upon the conclusion of his tale, the Madame wonders if the boy, eventually a priest and then a bishop (and now a Cardinal), while “early trained in the art of equipoise,” we may add as a prophet of earthly beauty and delight, “was left to promenade in the high places of this world, in one single magnificently harmonious form, two incompatible personalities” (LT 20). “Oh, no, Madame,” replies the Cardinal, speak not of incompatibility” (LT 20). As artist and priest he is “at the same time medium and creator” (LT 22).

As we saw above, the Prioress confuses the boundary between monkey and woman. Moreover, as Lanbgaum concludes, we cannot always know “which of the two Prioresses” is talking; if it's the Dionysian or the Apollonian (88). As an artist and priest combined, the Cardinal likewise explains to the Madame that “you may meet one of the

two, speak to him and listen to him, confide in him and be comforted by him, and at the hour of parting be unable to decide with which of them you have spent the day” (LT 20). The Madame confesses that this causes her to feel uneasy. “He no more looks to me quite human,” she explains, “and alas, I am not sure that I am not afraid of him” (LT 23).

The Madame feels intimidated by the uncertainty the Cardinal’s answer gives with respect to who he is. The Cardinal, however, is unwilling to reduce the art of his self to simple facts while affirming his role as both priest and artist. Hence, instead of reassuring the Madame with a clear answer, he tells her that

I have been telling you a story. Stories have been told as long as speech has existed, and *sans* stories the human race would have perished, as it would have *sans* water. 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 be a little afraid of them. That is all in the order of things. (LT 23)

Reluctant to define his identity, the Cardinal prefers to celebrate his role as a luminous character in a story. Like the tragedies extolled in Dinesen’s tales and Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, the stories praised by the Cardinal elevate the character’s life through art, transcending the humdrum of terrestrial life.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> In favor of Princess Benedetta, both Aiken and Stambaugh, on the other hand, want to conclude the issue of who the Cardinal is and thus they reduce his art of himself as a character. According to Aiken, the Cardinal has attempted “to contain—incorporate and encrypt—the mother who made him” through the story he tells, turning from admiration to “dismissive condescension ... But even as he enfolds her in his discourse, seeking thereby a hermeneutically grounded mastery over her (and thus himself), he

Creating a character of his self, the Cardinal leads life as art, to borrow from the title of Nehamas' book on Nietzsche. Indeed, Nehamas finds a view of the "self" in Nietzsche's writing that is quite similar to Dinesen's. As discussed above, Nietzsche rejects the idea of a "being" behind our actions, arguing that it all comes down to "doings." Yet, as Nehamas notes, there is an ambiguity in Nietzsche's attitude on this issue (174). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche says, while criticizing the "great majority" who "chatter" and sit in "moral judgment," that "we, however, *want to become those we are*" (GS 266). Here, as Nehamas comments, it seems as if Nietzsche is suggesting that there is a self that exists prior to our doings. However, Nietzsche's explanation of becoming "those who we are," is to be "new, unique, incomparable;" to be those "who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (GS 266). As Nehamas concludes, "the self, even if it is to be at some point discovered, must first be created" (174).

Nietzsche's critique of a "being" behind our actions is related to his critique of abstract definitions that assert the unity, rather than the plurality of life. Nehamas explains Nietzsche's critique of the "unity" of the self (or the idea of an "indivisible soul") in the light of Nietzsche's emphasis on "the subject as

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ineluctably discloses her continuing power as a mobile, uncontainable force, eloquent and compelling as the fragrance of her womblike flask or 'the divine art of the story'" (20-21). Stambaugh, on the other hand, focuses on the power struggle between the Prince and the Princess which the Princess wins, because "the Prince 'was overpowered and laid low' and eventually 'came to accept ... the role of a saintly, dethroned king' (LT, pp. 17-18). The story, after all, is 'The divine art' which 'immortalizes its hero' (LT p. 24), who in this story is undoubtedly the Princess Benedetta. The answer to the question of who the artist-priest really is, then, is that he is his mother's son. The conclusion should not be surprising in the work of a proud and very feminine woman who is herself the artist-priest, 'God's mouthpiece' and 'the bow of the Lord' (LT pp. 21, 22)" (26).

multiplicity” and “the continual transitoriness and fleetingness of the subject” which he talks about in *The Will to Power* (177-78). It is not unity itself that Nietzsche rejects, Nehamas maintains, but unity which is theoretically presupposed (182).

The unity of the self, which ... is not something given but something achieved, not a beginning but a goal ... of such unity ... Nietzsche is not at all suspicious ... Nietzsche does not think of unity as a state of being that follows and replaces an earlier process of becoming. Rather, he seems to think of it as a continual process of integrating one’s character traits, habits, and patterns of action with one another. (182-85)

The Cardinal’s unified self is indeed the product of a continuous process of integrating his different traits and strengths. It is a process which he began when he was a boy and which he continues to develop as a Cardinal.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Discussing “det centrale identitetsspørgsmål ... Hvem er jeg?” [“the central question of identity ... Who am I?”] in Dinesen’s work, Leander Hansen likewise asserts that “fortællingerne giver det klare svar, at der ikke gives én fast identitet, hvilket personerne altid erkender med befrielse, for de har følt sig fanget i den kunstige forestilling om det fasttømrede ‘jeg.’ Friheden ligger i at kunne være mange personer, hvor vi her har motivet om at skifte masker. Enheden i den enkelte person opstår, når man evner at spille de mangfoldige roller, der tilsammen er udtryk for ens væsen. Fraværet af én fast identitet udelukker for Karen Blixen ikke, at man kan have væsen og karakter, hvilket man altså får, når man lever alle sider af sin natur ud. Det sætter én i stand til at danne forestillingen om ‘sig selv,’ og derved kan man *skabe* ‘sig selv’” [“her tales give the clear answer that there is no certain identity. Her characters always realize this with a sense of liberation, for they have felt caught in the artificial idea that there is a fixed ‘I.’ Freedom resides in being many characters, from where we get the mask motif. The unity of the self comes into existence when one is able to play the manifold roles that together express one’s *being*. The absence of a fixed identity does not preclude, according to Isak Dinesen, that one can have a being and a character, which one, in other words, attains when one realizes all the aspects of one’s nature. This enables one to create the idea about ‘oneself,’ and one can thereby *create* ‘oneself’”] (27).

Praising the poet as the creator of characters who are elevated into heroes and heroines in his pen, the Cardinal bemoans, on the other hand, the emergence of the modern novel whose characters remain ordinary individuals and who are not developed any further beyond their individuality. “I see, today, a new art of narration, a novel literature and category of belles-lettres, dawning upon the world,” says the Cardinal, “and this new art and literature—for the sake of the individual characters in the story, and in order to keep close to them and not be afraid—will be ready to sacrifice the story itself” (LT 23). Just as Nietzsche deplores Euripides’ comedies for being a womanish escape from the myths of heroes in the name of individuals, the Cardinal thus criticizes the modern novel as a cowardly escape from the great heroic story, also in the name of individuals. “A story,” on the other hand,

has a hero to it, and you will see him clearly, luminous, and upon a higher plane. Whatever he is in himself, the immortal story immortalizes its hero ... But by the time when the new literature shall reign supreme and you will have no more stories, you will have no more heroes (LT 24).

Like Attic tragedy, which Nietzsche praises, the story the Cardinal defends has the capacity to raise life above the ordinary and give it the stamp of the eternal. The modern realist literature, on the other hand, will make everything even and uniform while focusing on the affairs of common individuals. It will therefore be, concludes the Cardinal, “at the best, a poor time, a sad time, for a proud maiden ... will have to come down from her milk-white steed to trudge on a dusty road” (LT 25).

A plea for great stories, as opposed to modern novels, is also the message of Dinesen's tale "The Young Man with the Carnation" in which we encounter the writer Charlie as a young man. Feeling disillusioned about his writing, Charlie thinks about how his father-in-law would thunder against "modern literature:" "'Superficiality,' the old man had thundered, 'is the mark of it. The age lacks weight; its greatness is hollow'" (WT 5). Charlie has apparently not done much to help improve the situation, for in a dialogue with God he is reproached for having "run aground here, in a room of the Queen's Hotel, when God has given him "all the world to sail and float in" (WT 25). The young man is rescued from despair by resolving to write stories instead of novels; stories to adorn the world, making life transcend everyday life, writing, for instance, "a great and sweet tale" about love, and stories that revere "the beauty of young women" (WT 24-25).

In line with both the Cardinal and Charlie, the poet Yorick, in "Converse at Night in Copenhagen," further praises the role of the poet for supplementing "logos" with "mythos" (LT 333). "Verily, verily," the poet exclaims in converse with the king during a rather unusual encounter in which the two meet at the home of a prostitute,

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. And in time to come ... this mythos of mine shall remain after me on earth. (LT 333)

Instead of trivializing life into a number of quotidian events and feelings, the poet thus eternalizes life by creating myths.

According to Johannesson, storytelling was for Dinesen a vehicle to “recreate in her tales the world she had lost,” i.e. “a life of excitement and adventure,” like the one she had had in Africa (145). Thus Dinesen’s stories lift the reader up and away from his or her everyday life. Aiken, furthermore, focuses on the subversive narratology and de-centering of Dinesen’s stories. “Dinesen’s narratives use what Hegel called ‘incalculable multiplicity’ to evoke not chaos, but ‘infinity’ ... Dinesen’s textual structure also ‘challenges the mind to imagine the unimaginable’” (71). Nietzsche’s praise of his ideal philosopher, who looks at life from multiple perspectives, gazing on life from the heights, is thus indeed fitting to describe Dinesen as a storyteller. Her tales also afford the reader different perspectives on life, placing the reader on heights from which s/he can gaze into distant lands, using his or her imagination to attain limitless perspectives on life.

To further unsettle traditional perspectives on life and attain others, Dinesen underscores the significance of the mystery and the secrecy of the unspoken word. In “The Blank Page” (*Last Tales*) we hear the story about the fine white linen sheets that are made by sisters of the Carmelite order at a convent in Portugal and which are used by the Royal house during wedding nights. The convent has a gallery, which in frames shows the central piece from the wedding sheet for each princess that, as a tradition, is always returned from the Royal house. From these one can see the omens that were drawn and then reflect upon their later fulfillments.

Among these is a square cut from a wedding sheet, which is snow-white from corner to corner, a blank page, returned to the convent according to the tradition of “eternal and unswerving loyalty” (LT 104). The canvas remains a mystery, for “on the one plate no name is inscribed” (LT 104). As Marianne Stecher-Hansen notes, “a number of suggestive possibilities present themselves: does the blank page suggest that the princess circumvented sexual initiation by telling tales in the manner Scheherazade stayed her own death? Or does the virginal white of the linen suggest that the princess was *not* a virgin at the time of consummation, or does it symbolize the mystery of the Immaculate Conception? (9).<sup>105</sup> As a mystery the canvas is nourishment for the imagination, hence it is in front of this canvas, we are told, that the old princesses of Portugal, their noble old playmates, bridesmaids, and maids-of-honor, and old and young nuns “have most often stood still” and it is here that they “sink into deepest thought” (LT 105).

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<sup>105</sup> Asserting all these possible interpretations, Stecher-Hansen criticizes Susan Gubar’s feminist reading of the tale as “a reading which overlooks that it is open to multiple interpretations” (8). Gubar’s analysis of “The Blank Page” is based, as Stecher-Hansen explains, on a particular Anglo-American theory of women’s literary creativity which Gubar and Sandra Gilbert developed in their collaborative work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and which focuses on women as victims in Victorian England and how they survived by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards (8). However, as Stecher-Hansen asserts, the view of “woman as *victim*” is notably absent in this tale; “rather, there is in Dinesen’s tales an implied sense of feminine superiority, that is indeed ‘both sacred and secretly gay,’ in its possession of both ancient wisdom and wicked frivolity” (8-9). Selboe also rejects Gubar’s reading, seeing the blank page as a symbol of resistance that may eventually be written on by a woman. “Not to be written on, is in other words, the condition of new sorts of writing for women,” asserts Gubar (259). Gubar thus ignores silence itself as a generator of the best stories, concludes Selboe (91). “Denne type feministisk lesning impliserer med andre ord en utopi, et håp om at det ubeskrevne skal opphøre å være ubeskrevet, blankt, for en gang å fylles—med blekk istendfor blod” [“This kind of feminist reading implies, in other words, a utopia, a hope that the unwritten shall cease to be unwritten, blank, in order to be filled—with ink instead of blood”] (91). Selboe, on the other hand focuses on how the story depends

The story about the white canvas is told to us by a story-teller who claims she has told stories for two hundred years. She tells the story to illustrate the art of storytelling, which her grandmother again taught her. “‘Be loyal to the story,’ the old hag would say to me,” she recounts, for

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. (LT 100)

It is, finally, silence that tells the finest tale and it is upon the blank page one can “read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book” (LT 100).

Without reducing life to the quotidian life of the individual, or to rigorous expositions of factual truths and events, the unspoken word leaves things open for the reader to ponder on its meaning. Parallel to Dinesen’s use of the unspoken word, is Nietzsche’s frequent use of question marks, which signal no clear answers, and his use of aphorisms, whose brevity deny the reader any sense of confidence in his or her interpretation. Commenting on the brevity of his aphoristic style in one of his aphorisms in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche underscores, however, that his point is not to simply mislead or obscure meaning, but to reach out to those who can understand him. Hence,

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on the blank, the silent, in order to speak (95). “Tausheten ... er fravær, men ikke tomhet” [“Silence ... is absence, but not emptiness”], asserts Selboe (95).

while he asserts that “one does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood,” he is careful to add that “I don’t want either my ignorance or the liveliness of my temperament to keep me from being understandable for *you*, my friends” (GS 343). His point is that “all the nobler spirits and tastes select their audience when they wish to communicate,” and he for one does not want to be understood by just “anybody” (GS 343).

As Kofman explains, Nietzsche’s aphoristic writing “wants to make itself understood only by those who are linked by having the same refined impressions in common; it wants to banish the *profanum vulgus* and attract the free spirits ‘on to new dance floors’” (114-15).<sup>106</sup> By extolling the story that speaks through silence and its faithful adherents, Dinesen also selects her favored reader by implicitly banishing the school of realism and its followers.

Moreover, the unspoken word disappoints the (realist) reader’s expectations of having things fully and realistically explained. Thus it departs from the norm, producing an effect similar to the one Nietzsche desires from his use of language through metaphors and aphorisms, deviating from its traditional usage to dispel its metaphysical seduction. Selboe comments on how the effect of deviation functions in “The Blank Page:”

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<sup>106</sup> Nietzsche’s use of the dance as a metaphor for his philosophy is a telling example of his language. While criticizing in particular German intellectuals for the “stiffy awkward air” by which they surround themselves—their “clumsy hand in grasping” that has “no *fingers* for nuances”—Nietzsche asserts that “*dancing* in any form cannot be divorced from a *noble education*, being able to dance with the feet, with concepts, with words: do I still have to say that one has to be able to dance with the *pen*—that *writing* has to be learned?—But at this point I should become a complete enigma to German readers...” (TI 66). Thus ends this aphorism, illustrating also Nietzsche’s rhetorical use of question marks.

Fascinasjonen og effekten ligger ikke i det blanke eller ubskrevne i seg selv, men i det at det atskiller seg fra alle de andre lerretene. Det er som *avvik* det taler, som brudd på regelen—og på tilskuerens (og leserens) forventning. I det ubskrevne bladet er det sjokket som dominerer .... i det lerretet som *atskiller* seg fra de andre, mangler dette gjensynet med noe kjent. Det mangler tydelige tegn som lar seg avlese og tolke, det mangler i en viss forstand betydningsinnhold, mening.

[The fascination and the effect is not the blank or unwritten in itself, but in how it deviates from all the other canvases. It is in the *deviation* that it speaks, as a break of the rule—and of the spectator's (and the reader's) anticipation. In the unwritten page it is the shock that dominates ... in the canvas that *deviates* from the others, the encounter lacks the recognition with something familiar. It lacks clear signs that can be read and interpreted, it lacks in a sense content, meaning.] (93-94)

The blank page, or the silent word, is, like the word “kuboå” Hamsun's *Hunger*-protagonist comes up with, an undefined metaphor. Thus it stimulates a search for meaning among many possible meanings as opposed to one final conclusion. As Selboe concludes, “mens det ubeskrevne blad betegner og betyr i en stadig utsettende bevegelse—uten selv å være betegnet—så slutter de betydningstunge blodbildene seg om et betegnet, et signifikat” [“while the blank page signifies and connotes in a constantly

postponing movement—without itself being signified—the blood stained canvases, which are heavy with meaning, close around the signified”] (94).

In line with her emphasis on the mystery of the unspoken word, Dinesen also defends the mysterious aura of women of the old order. We have already seen how Dinesen upholds the feminine against the masculine in “Copenhagen Season,” “Sorrow-Acre,” and “The Monkey.” In “The Old Chevalier” she elaborates on the signification of the *mystery* of a woman. Set in the early twentieth century, we meet the old Baron von Brackel who nostalgically reflects back on his amorous adventures in the Paris of the 1870s in conversation with the author of the story. Deriding the dresses of modern women as “a few perpendicular lines, cut off again before they have had time to develop any sense,” the Baron reminiscens about the clothes of women in his younger days as “a being, an idea of their own” (SGT 93). Deriding the modern dresses’ lack of profundity, the baron asserts that in those former days,

a woman’s body was a secret which her clothes did their utmost to keep ...  
Clothes then ... made it their object to transform the body which they encircled, and to create a silhouette so far from its real form as to make it a mystery which it was a divine privilege to solve ... A woman was then a work of art, the product of centuries of civilization. (SGT 93-94)<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> In her essay “Daguerreotypier” [“Daguerreotypes”] Dinesen similarly reflects on how in former times “skørtet, —det lange klædeben, —var blevet et så betydningsfuldt, ja afgørende symbol på kvindens værdighed” [“the skirt—the long leg wear—had become so significant, yes, such a decisive symbol of a woman’s dignity”] (SE 180). Indeed, women a century ago were “fra midien til jorden ... mysterier, hellige gåder” [“from their waist to the ground ... mysteries, sacred riddles”] (SE 180). Stecher-

In this world of femininity, continues the baron, the dissecting enterprises of science did not govern men's thinking, but the mysterious aura of women.

To you, who are taught statistics in your kindergartens, there is no doubt, I suppose. And it is but justice to say that your world does in reality look as if it had been made experimentally. But to us even the ideas of old Mr. Darwin were new and strange. We had our ideas from such undertakings as symphonies and ceremonials of court ... The idea of Woman—of *das ewig weibliche*, about which you yourself will not deny that there is some mystery—had to us been created in the beginning, and our women made it their mission to represent it worthily. (SGT 95)

Indeed, “the women of old days,” the Baron concludes, were “keeping the world in order, and preserving the balance and rhythm of it, by sitting upon the mystery of life, and knowing themselves that there was no mystery” (SGT 96). Their power was, in other

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Hansen's comments on the superiority of women in Dinesen's tales, in her article on “The Blank Page,” elucidate Dinesen's statement on women as “sacred riddles.” As Stecher-Hansen explains, Dinesen, while portraying women as “both sacred and secretly gay ... reject[s] the binary oppositions of Western patriarchal culture according to which erotic *jouissance* and virginal chastity are in deadly opposition. As opposed to various doctrinaire approaches, Dinesen's ‘feminism’ is a holistic vision that embraces all aspects of female experience” (10-11). Hence, women in Dinesen's tales, such as “Copenhagen Season” and “Sorrow-Acre,” affirm their sexual freedom and power, as well as their sacredness. Stambaugh, on the other hand, who, like Gubar, tends to see women in Dinesen's tales as victims, though they exert a subversive power, fails to recognize the power of a woman's dress while arguing that Dinesen's portrayal of women's clothing in nineteenth century Europe symbolizes their “entrapment” (20). Indeed, Dinesen asserts in “Daguerreotypes” that “de korsetter, som datidens damer bar, og som nåede til armhulerne, var virkelige torturinstrumenter” [“the corsets which the ladies of that time wore, and which reached the armpits, were really instruments of torture”] (SE 206). However, Dinesen also maintains that comfort is a new value in contrast to the values of symbols and rituals, which governed the lives of men and women of an older age. Though less torturous than the clothes of women, the clothes of men at that time were not very comfortable either, (SE 206).

words, the result of an illusion, but as opposed to the illusion of the truth of scientists, it was faithful to its identity as illusion or art.

Whereas the art of the woman titillates the mind to create ideas of divine proportions, the truth of logicians satisfies the common desire for closure. In line with the Baron, Miss Malin in “The Deluge at Norderney,” “old Miss Nat-og-Dag ... whose name meant ‘Night and Day’” (SGT 9), uses legs to exemplify the former and facts the latter. The “missionaries of truth ... may have the facts of life on their side, while the legs of the women, under their petticoats, are ideas,” Miss Malin asserts (SGT 25-26). It is “the people who go forth on ideas,” she continues, “who have the true heroism. For it is the consciousness of hidden power which gives courage” (SGT 26). Going forth on their own ideas, such people are their own “commanders and law-givers,” to speak with Nietzsche, whose will have been sufficiently hardened and strengthened.

“The Deluge at Norderney” follows the conversation between four aristocratic vacationers (a Cardinal, Miss Malin, her niece, and a young man) who meet on the coast of the North Sea in Norderney during a terrible storm in 1835. They spend the night together in a hayloft, telling stories about themselves, waiting for rescue. Intoxicated by the presence of an audience, Miss Malin seizes the opportunity to play her role and defend the significance of theatric art. Hence, alluding to how she at times has come close “to playing the rôle of a goddess,” Miss Malin asserts that

the very last thing which I have wanted from my worshipers has been the truth. "Make poetry," I have said to them, "use your imagination, disguise the truth to me." (SGT 25)

"Truth is for tailors and shoemakers," argues Miss Malin, but "the concealed truth," she concludes, is "sweeter than all illusions" (SGT 24-25). In other words, sweeter than the illusion of truth, is the truth of the illusion as art.

Dinesen's views on women may seem dated to feminists, yet she has become a favorite subject for feminist criticism.<sup>108</sup> While known as a virulent misogynist, Nietzsche is today also discussed approvingly by several feminists, in particular for his critique of logic (as a critique of phallogentrism) and the ascetic suppression of the body (as a liberation of suppressed voices).<sup>109</sup> In fact, there were women in Nietzsche's own time who were feminists of some type and involved in women-centered political action and intellectual activity, who were interested in him and influenced by his ideas. These women, such as Lou Andreas-Salomé and Hélène Stöcker, were, as Kathleen J. Wininger shows, in particularly interested in Nietzsche because of "the freshness of his critique of

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<sup>108</sup> See, for instance, Susan Hardy Aiken, Susan Gubar, Sara Stambaugh, Charlotte Engberg, Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen.

<sup>109</sup> The anthology *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, includes articles by feminists and other Nietzsche scholars focusing on Nietzsche's remarks about woman and femininity, questioning to what extent Nietzsche was a misogynist, and discussing how his philosophy can be useful to feminists theory. Contributors are Debra Bergoffen, Maudmarie Clark, Daniel Conway, Jacques Derrida, Jean Graybeal, Kathleen Higgins, Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, Tamsin Lorraine, Kelly Oliver, David Owen, Marilyn Pearsall, Lynne Tirrell, Ofelia Schutte, and Kathleen Wininger. See also Caroline Joan S. Picart *Resentment and the "Feminine" in Nietzsche's Politico-Aesthetics*.

patriarchal authority and the extent of it ... despite his overt misogyny and hostility to feminism” (244).<sup>110</sup>

Dinesen shares Nietzsche’s critique of patriarchal authority, i.e. rationality and logic, the suppressive aspects of Christianity, and democratic politics. There is thus a connection between Nietzsche and Dinesen in terms of their radical critique against authority. However, there is also a connection between the two in their apparently reactionary portrayal of women. The old Baron in Dinesen’s story, for instance, who is dismayed with modern women’s lack of style, suggests that the “emancipation of woman” was the cause of women’s fall from their former greatness (SGT 87). The Baron admits that the movement had its lure for women “blinking at the sun and wild with desire to try their wings,” but, he concludes, “poor, tame, male preachers of emancipation ... spoiled the style and flight of the whole thing by bringing it down to earth and under laws of earthly reason” (SGT 87-88).

Dinesen was herself critical of the women’s movement. Invited in 1939 to speak at an international women’s conference, Dinesen declined with the answer that she was not a “kvindesagskvinde” [“feminist”] (SE 214). She responded, however, fourteen years later in “En baaltale med 14 Aars Forsinkelse” [“Oration at a Bonfire, Fourteen

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<sup>110</sup> Kathleen J. Wininger’s “Nietzsche’s Women and Women’s Nietzsche” (Oliver 236-51). Wininger explains Nietzsche’s critique of “patriarchal authority” in terms of his critique of Christianity, its political heir, democracy, and intellectual partner, rationalistic philosophy. She concludes that, “while contempt for females is often expressed, Nietzsche has undermined many forms of patriarchal authority. He does this by exposing them as cultural phenomena that are the result of power and authority. They do not exist because they are right; rather, they exist because some people exercised their power and exerted authority” (249).

Years Late”], delivered as a talk to a Danish teachers’ seminary, and also broadcast on Danish radio January 11, 1953.<sup>111</sup> Dinesen begins her oration by asserting that she does not understand feminism and she is herself not a feminist (SE 213-14). Referring to her emphasis on the significance of having a difference between classes,<sup>112</sup> and concerned that the significance of difference between the genders has been lost on the feminists, Dinesen then continues to assert that the dissimilarity of traditional male and female roles is necessary to inspire and form a union of opposites.<sup>113</sup> She defines “denne dybe indspirerende forskelligartethed hos menneskeheden to køn” [“this profoundly inspirational difference between the two sexes of mankind”] as follows: “Mandens tyngdepunkt, hans væsens gehalt, ligger i, hvad han i livet udfører og udretter, kvindens i,

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<sup>111</sup> The oration was published the same year. It was included in her essay collection *Essays* (1965), in the enlarged essay collection *Mit livs mottoer og andre essays* (1978), and in her essay collection enlarged again as *Samlede Essays* (1985) from which I’ve quoted.

<sup>112</sup> In “Daguerreotypes” which had been broadcast two years earlier in 1951. Discussing the value of symbols and rituals in the old order, as opposed to the obsession with comfort in modern times, Dinesen praises in this talk, as we’ve seen, the skirts of women a hundred years ago—deriding pants as “et klædningsstykke uden værdighed” [“a piece of clothing without dignity”]—(SE 180). Dinesen then goes on to defend the old class society of servants and masters for its sense of style and beauty. Recounting a story her aunt once told her about her dear friend Margrethe, the young mistress of a grand mansion, Dinesen describes how the old order worked according to the principles of difference. Baffled by her maid’s question as to why the servants eat different food than their masters (Dinesen interprets this questions as symptomatic of the new age and its concerns with comfort), Margrethe concludes that only because of this difference is it possible to maintain a house with servants and parties. If the masters were to eat the same food as their servants, there would in the end be no need for any servants, and her maid would be among the first who would have to leave the house and lose her job (SE 190-95). Margrethe’s point is that to maintain a household that supports the life of a range of people, difference is required. Thus she upholds, like Nietzsche, the “*pathos of distance*.” This is not to say that other alternatives are excluded, but that in order to have a culture of great parties and dinners, like those Margrethe is the hostess of in her house, a class society is required.

<sup>113</sup> Already in her essay “Moderne ægteskab og andre betragtninger” [“On Modern Marriage: And Other Observations”], written in Africa in 1923-24, but not published until 1977 in *Blixeniana*, had Dinesen introduced the notion that the ideal relationship develops only where there is distance and dissimilarity

hvad hun er” [“A man’s center of gravity, the substance of his being, consists in what he has executed and performed in life; the woman’s, in what she is”] (SE 220).<sup>114</sup>

Dinesen readily gives credit to the advancements gained by her foremothers, however, without whom she could not have been so free to study and travel and have her own work published (SE 225). But she urges women of her day not to imitate patterns established by men, like the early feminists who, writes Dinesen, “gjorde deres indtog i forklædning, i en mental og psykisk mandsdragt” [“made their entry in disguise, in a costume which intellectually and psychologically represented a male”] in order to attain the rights they desired (SE 226). Rather she bids women to be in their own way and repossess their femininity. In this Dinesen resembles more recent feminists who reject the early feminist movement as a desire to be like men. As Aiken points out while discussing the connections between Dinesen and recent feminists, the suffrage movement to which Dinesen’s spinster aunt Bess Westenholz subscribed was indeed problematic for Dinesen;

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between men and women. The essay was published on its own in 1981 and included in *Samlede Essays* in 1985.

<sup>114</sup> Dinesen’s sense of woman as being “what she is” cannot be interpreted as an idea of woman as passive and resigned. As Dinesen explains, “kvindens virke er at udvide hendes eget væsen” [“the woman’s function is to expand her own being”] (SE 220). As we’ve seen, Dinesen holds Diana higher than Venus in her letters from Africa, and her heroines are actively affirming their destinies. When she, as Bjerring notes, later comes to extol Venus, this goddess also plays a role that is “oprørsk” [“rebellious”] (113). It is clear from her letters that Dinesen personally objected to the Protestant and patriarchal oppression suffered by women in Denmark by going to Africa—where she attained more freedom for herself—when she married Bror Blixen. Moreover, while Stambaugh’s discussion of the misogyny portrayed in Dinesen’s tales tends to see women as victims, despite her focus on their subversive power, she is right in asserting the critical picture Dinesen does render of patriarchal authority—such as in her portrayal of the conflict between Prince Pompilio and Princess Benedetta. As we’ve seen, the princess is eventually empowered in this tale by her study of books and music and does not allow herself to be victimized. The point is that her power is highly feminine, in contrast to the feminists of the early women’s movement who, according to Dinesen, compromised themselves in their desire to be like men.

“it emerged ... from Protestant, quasi-Puritanical traditions” (35). In the context of the current fluid and heterogeneous term “feminism,” on the other hand, continues Aiken, “Dinesen’s rejection of the women’s movement seems less clearly ‘antifeminist’—seems, indeed, extraordinarily contemporary, a major anticipation of recent theoretical speculations on the revolutionary possibilities of woman’s *jouissance* as related to a different, ‘feminine’ writing” (35).<sup>115</sup>

Like the old Baron and Dinesen herself, Nietzsche attacks the emancipation movement as a cause of de-feminization.

The “emancipation of woman” ... is ... a noteworthy symptom of the growing enfeeblement and blunting of the most feminine instincts. There is *stupidity* in this movement, an almost masculine stupidity, of which a real woman—who is always a clever woman—would have to be ashamed from the very heart. To lose her sense for the ground on which she is most sure of victory; to neglect to practise the use of her own proper weapons ... to destroy man’s belief that a fundamentally different ideal is *wrapped up* in woman, that there is something eternally, necessarily feminine ... what does all this mean if not a crumbling of the feminine instinct, a defeminizing? To be sure, there are sufficient idiotic friends and corrupters

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<sup>115</sup> Stecher-Hansen likewise explains that Dinesen’s remarks against feminism are directed at an early feminist phase of the women’s movement (8). Like Aiken, Stecher-Hansen also asserts that Dinesen, “in her emphasis on the importance of sexual difference and women’s erotic freedom ... reveals her true stature as a feminist advocating views well ahead of her time ... corroborated by such contemporary feminist theorists as Hélène Cixous” (5).

of woman among the learned asses of the males sex who advise woman to defeminize herself in this fashion and to imitate all the stupidities with which “man” in Europe, European “manliness,” is sick—who would like to reduce woman to the level of “general education,” if not to that of newspaper reading and playing at politics. (BGE 168).

While Nietzsche thus criticizes women of the emancipation movement, his truthsayer Zarathustra, on the other hand, courts life as the eternally pregnant woman, the unexhausted procreative womb of being, and in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche himself describes life as the “Original Mother, who, constantly creating, finds satisfaction in the turbulent flux of appearances” (BT 102). Kelly Oliver suggests we read these different “positions of woman” in Nietzsche as the “castrated woman” and the “affirming woman” (67).<sup>116</sup> The castrated woman is the feminist who negates woman in order to affirm herself as man. The affirming woman, on the other hand, “affirms herself without man and his logocentricism” (76).

As Oliver asserts, who women are in Nietzsche’s work is an ambiguous question, and so is the question of truth. In her article “Woman as Truth in Nietzsche’s Writing,” Oliver discusses how the two questions are related, seeing that Nietzsche himself connects the two.<sup>117</sup> In his preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche posits as follows:

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<sup>116</sup> Qtd. from Oliver’s article “Woman as Truth in Nietzsche’s Writing” (Oliver 66-80).

<sup>117</sup> Oliver is responding to Jacques Derrida’s *Spur* where he sets up a triad for describing Nietzsche’s relationship to women: “He was, He dreaded this castrated woman. He was, He dreaded this castrating woman. He was, He loved this affirming woman” (*Spur* 101).

Supposing truth is a woman—what? is the suspicion not well founded that all philosophers, when they have been dogmatists, have had little understanding of women? that the gruesome earnestness, the clumsy importunity with which they have hitherto been in the habit of approaching truth have been inept and improper means for winning a wench? Certainly she has not let herself be won—and today every kind of dogmatism stands sad and discouraged. *If* it continues to stand at all!

(BGE 31)

We can read this section as a suggestion of woman as a stronghold against the authority of male rationality, logic, and dogmatism; against (masculine) “will to truth ... that celebrated veracity of which all philosophers have hitherto spoken with reverence” (BGE 33).<sup>118</sup> As Schacht comments in his discussion of the section, Nietzsche ridicules the “dogmatist” who, like Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, wants the “truth” to be “more like a man” and who wants to deal with truth in “the direct manner of manly games in which the rules are simple and straightforward, with victories won by sufficiently forceful frontal assault” (“Nietzsche’s kind of philosophy” 170). “The game to be played is a much trickier and more delicate business,” continues Schacht, “in which such assaults are doomed to failure, and a sensitive mix of more indirect approaches is much more likely to be successful—even though success in achieving one’s heart’s desire is never

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<sup>118</sup> Discussing this section, Debra B. Bergoffen suggests we “think of truth as a woman and of philosophers as inept, failed suitors” (“Nietzsche Was No Feminist” in *Oliver* 227).

complete and final, and one can never be certain of its attainment” (170). In line with Nietzsche’s perspectivism, which has advanced comprehension as its goal while it rejects eternal truths and final conclusions, the question of who woman is remains ambiguous. As Oliver comments, “both truth and woman are elusive—distance is their power” (66).

Pondering the connection between woman and truth in Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is necessary first to distinguish between the different kinds of women in Nietzsche’s texts. Oliver sees, on the one hand, castrated woman who, explains Oliver, imitates man. She is the one who “suffers from the will to truth; that is, she lays claim to objective truth ... In this way she resembles the dogmatic philosopher ... The ‘feminist,’ like the metaphysician, worships the ‘in-itself,’ or the ‘as-it-is’” (69).<sup>119</sup> The affirming woman, on the other hand, woman as procreative life itself, “has no need for truth ... She is the inarticulate ‘truth’ which is more original than the metaphysic of truth or the illusion of art” (76).<sup>120</sup>

If we apply Oliver’s interpretation of “woman” in Nietzsche’s philosophy to Dinesen’s work, the castrated woman would appear as the puritan feminists and the modern women in perpendicular dresses, who Dinesen criticizes, and the affirming

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<sup>119</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche scorns that “woman wants to be independent: and to what end she is beginning to enlighten men about ‘woman as such’—*this* is one of the worst developments in the general *uglification* of Europe” (163).

<sup>120</sup> “Woman are considered deep—why?” Nietzsche asks in *Twilight of the Idols* (25). He answers that it is “because one can never discover any botton to them. Woman are not even shallow” (25). Oliver explains this to mean that woman “is hollow like a womb. She is the space, the womb, from which everything originates” (77).

woman as the *woman who is*, the woman Dinesen praises in her oration.<sup>121</sup> But what about the woman who creates a mystery out of herself in her clothes or Miss Malin acting the rôle as a goddess? Which “position” does she take as a woman?

We have seen the role Nietzsche assigns to the heroes in Attic tragedy as Apollonian art necessary to cure the eye who has faced the Dionysian force. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he also assigns this role of healing art to a woman. When man has faced the terrifying power of Dionysian will, “art, that sorceress expert in healing, approaches him; only she can turn his fits of nausea into imaginations with which it is possible to live” (BT 52). When woman is not assigned the role of procreative life or lapsed feminist, she is described by Nietzsche as an artist.

Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not *have* to be first of all and above all else actresses? Listen to physicians who have hypnotized women ... What is always the end result? That they “put on something” even when they take off everything. Woman is so artistic. (GS 317).

Like Dinesen’s mysterious women, artistic women veil themselves and discard truth. “She does not *want* truth: what is truth to a woman! From the very first nothing has been

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<sup>121</sup> In line with Nietzsche’s focus on woman as the procreative power of life, Dinesen describes “woman as she is” as “*identiteten imellem væsen og kraft*” [“*the identity between being and force*”] (SE 230). Using the metaphors of an engine and an acorn to explain the difference between the power of men and women, she explains that in contrast to the engine, the acorn expresses force and energy in itself and through its own growth (SE 230-31). The creations of women are rooted in their being as expansions of their power and being, explains Dinesen (SE 223).

more alien, repugnant, inimical to woman than truth—her great art is the lie, her supreme concern is appearance and beauty” (BGE 164).<sup>122</sup>

Nietzsche’s artistic woman completes Oliver’s triad for interpreting Nietzsche’s discussion of woman and truth. She is, says Oliver, Nietzsche’s “castrating woman:”

She is the actor or the artist who plays with truth; undermining the metaphysician’s authority, she will persuade us of one truth only to abandon that one for another ... As the artist the castrating woman cuts the power of the metaphysic of truth by replacing it with equally convincing disguises. She substitutes her illusions for the science of the metaphysician. For, according to Nietzsche, the illusion of the artist, the Apollonian will to illusion, is more profound, complete, and effective than the will to truth. The castrating woman chooses appearance over reality, the “as-it-appears” over the “as-it-is.” She learns that illusion is more effective than reality. (72-73)

Whereas the castrating woman thus de-authorizes objective truth through illusion, the affirming woman, on the other hand, is outside the discourse of truth. Moreover, she is, as the procreative Dionysian force, the origin of all force. Yet, as Oliver underscores, “it is a myth, an origin which does not exist. The will to power is layer after layer of

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<sup>122</sup> “Let us confess it, we men,” Nietzsche continues: “it is precisely *this* art and *this* instinct in woman which we love and honour: we who have a hard time and for our refreshment like to associate with creatures under whose hands, glances and tender follies our seriousness, our gravity and profundity appear to us almost as folly ... We men want woman to cease compromising herself through enlightenment” (BGE 164).

masks with no face behind the costumes” (77).<sup>123</sup> Hence, the affirming woman is not an object in the distance, rather she is distance.<sup>124</sup> As Nietzsche says, “the value of the world lies in our interpretations ... by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e., in the will to power ... The world with which we are concerned is false; it is ‘in flux’ as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting nearer the truth; for there is no ‘truth’” (WP # 616, 330). It is, finally, the castrating woman who bridges the distance and masks the horrible abyss of the Dionysian flux of the will to power (Oliver 78).

Like Nietzsche’s artistic woman, Dinesen’s mysterious woman knows that the power of her mysterious aura is a product of her own art. In fact, her power is based on the fact that she *knows* this as a fact. Had Nietzsche met Miss Malin, he might have been thinking of her when he writes tongue-in-cheek in *The Gay Science* that “I am afraid that old women are more skeptical in their most secret heart of hearts than any man: they consider the superficiality of existence its essence, all virtue and profundity is to them merely a veil over this ‘truth,’ a very welcome veil over a pudendum—in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and no more than that” (GS 125). In fact, if we understand

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<sup>123</sup> Oliver notes that though Nietzsche explicitly refers to the Dionysian vision as a myth he also suggests, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that there is an original Nature which tragedy, through music, can uncover as the thing-in-itself. However, as I said above, Nietzsche later abandoned this idea.

<sup>124</sup> Jacques Derrida similarly asserts that “woman’s seduction operates at a distance, distance is the element of its power ... There is no essence to woman because woman separates and separates from and of herself. She submerges, veils through the depths, without end, without ground, all essentiality, all identity, all propriety. Blinded here, philosophical discourse plummets, left to plunge to its ruin. There is no truth to woman but its because this abyssal separation of truth, this nontruth is the ‘truth.’ Woman is a

the skepticism of old women—denying any essence beneath the surface—as an expression of Nietzsche’s own perspectivism, they appear indeed as kindred spirits to his favored philosopher.

### **THE TRUTH OF ILLUSIONS**

The veils of Nietzsche’s old women and the clothes of Dinesen’s ideal woman are, as art, illusions that do not pretend to be facts. As illusions they are therefore more truthful than dogmatic truths which are illusions without this truthfulness towards their identity as illusions or perspectives. Nietzsche was clear about man’s desire for illusion. As Ahern explains, “for Nietzsche, illusion is absolutely essential to life. It is not only the means through which we have been able to feel at home in the world but also the path to revering ourselves and the world” (141). However, while focusing, as we’ve seen, on a perspective’s life-value, Nietzsche distinguishes between illusions created by a healthy will and illusions created by a degenerate will; illusions that are truthful to their identity as illusions or perspectives, and illusions that pretend to be absolute and True.<sup>125</sup> The

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name for this nontruth of truth” (Oliver 53). Derrida’s essay, “The Question of Style” was first published in *Nietzsche aujourd’hui* (1973).

<sup>125</sup> As Ahern underscores, Nietzsche’s evaluation of illusions (fictions, perspectives, interpretations) sets him apart from the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. “What distinguishes Nietzsche’s thinking from deconstruction ... is that in spite of his pointing to the multiplicity of interpretations, he sees them all betray the symptomatic codes of sickness and health ... Generally speaking, deconstructionists see each of what Nietzsche would consider multiple perspectives as somehow possessing an equal status within any interpretation. But again, what separates Nietzsche from deconstruction is his inclination to rank interpretations according to the standard mentioned above: sickness and health. For this reason, Nietzsche does not see an egalitarian or democratic relation between the perspectives embedded in any interpretation” (4).

Apollonian art in the Greek tragedies belongs to the former category, Socrates' philosophy to the latter.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche therefore complains about those “enthralled by the Socratic zest for knowledge” whose “avid will finds means to maintain and perpetuate its creatures in life by spreading over existence the blandishments of illusion” (BT 108). Our whole modern world is caught in the net of Socratic culture, he complains, invaded by Socrates' optimistic spirit—“the baneful virus of our society” (BT 110). While rejecting the illusions of Socrates' metaphysics, he extols, on the other hand, dreams. Describing “empiric existence” as an illusion of being, Nietzsche sees dreams as “illusions of illusions” and thus with the potential to afford “a still higher form of satisfaction of the original desire for illusion” (BT 33). The “naïve” artist, such as Raphael, also creates illusions of illusions (BT 33). In fact, asserts Nietzsche, “the fair illusion of the dream sphere, in the production of which every man proves himself an accomplished artist, is a precondition not only of all plastic art, but even ... of a wide range of poetry” (BT 20).

In other words, the poet and the artist can still escape the scientific optimism of a Socratic culture. Discussing the connection between the poet and the dreamer in *Human, all too Human*, Nietzsche focuses on how their work can invite our “dream imagination” which, free from the truth of “stricter logical thought,” deduces “the ostensible cause ... from the effect and conceived *after* the effect ... with extraordinary rapidity, so that judgment gets confused, just as it might in watching a magician, and something

successive can appear to be simultaneous, or even to occur in a reverse order” (HAH 25). In this way “the brain produces a host of impressions of lights and colors,” and the “understanding” in “combination with the imagination ... reworks this play of colors, in itself formless, into distinct figures, forms, landscapes, animated groups” (HAH 24). Thus the poet, like the dreamer, has the capacity to produce not only solacing illusions, but alternative explanations for cause and effect that subvert the authority of logic.

Moreover, according to Nietzsche, “in sleep and dreams we go through the lessons of earlier humanity once again,” for “dreams take us back to the distant circumstances of human culture” (HAH 23-24). What these lessons tell us, is that the “imagination” and more “primitive forms of deduction” used to guide men’s thought, free from the later development of “a stricter logical thought, a more rigorous perception of cause and effect” (HAH 25). “Dreams are therefore recuperation for a brain that during the day has to satisfy the strict demands of thinking, as they have been established by higher culture,” concludes Nietzsche (HAH 24). Finally, “that which we experience in dreams, if we experience it often, is in the end just as much a part of the total economy of our soul as is anything we ‘really’ experience: we are by virtue of it richer and poorer, feel one need more or one need fewer, and finally are led along a little in broad daylight and even in the most cheerful moments of our waking spirit by the habits of our dreams” (BGE 116).

While dreaming is a precondition for art and affords recuperation for the brain, it is not granted that a dream is always a healthy illusion. That is the difference between

Apollonian art and dreams. For, as Nietzsche explains, “the image of Apollo must incorporate that thin line which the dream image may not cross, under penalty of becoming pathological, of imposing itself on us as crass reality: a discreet limitation, a freedom from all extravagant urges, the sapient tranquillity of the plastic god” (BT 21). Dreams have, however, a tremendous potential to expand our perspectives on life. And, as Nietzsche asserts in his writings, this is a significant value: “that every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and means believing in new horizons—this idea permeates my writings” (WP #616, 330).

The complex identity of dreams as Nietzsche sees them, is a key to understand the portrayal of dreams in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen. Like Nietzsche, both Hamsun and Dinesen defend dreams as a way to enrich our lives and expand our perspective on life. Nagel in Hamsun’s *Mysteries*, for instance, often expounds on his dreams—ranging from a reverie of having been in a boat of scented wood with a crescent-shaped, pale-blue silk sail, having the feeling that he’s out fishing with a silver hook, to once when his night turned into a fairy tale in which a lantern man led him to a tower where blind angels entertained him with their sweet music—while defending their impact on his life. Dreams give him, he explains, “en sælsom, overnaturlig nydelse” [“a singular, supernatural pleasure”] (92).

At a dinner party hosted by the town’s local doctor, Nagel is invited to recount one of his dreams. Out of false modesty, he this time declines, alluding, merely, to a

white forest of silver (76). On the other hand, he takes great delight in ridiculing Gladstone's calculations and obsession with numbers and truth.<sup>126</sup> "At to og to er fire er for ham den største sandhet under solen" ["That two and two make four is for him the greatest truth under the sun"], derides Nagel;

Og skal vi benægte at to og to er fire? Naturligvis ikke, jeg sier det også for å vise hvorledes Gladstone har evig ret. Det beror da bare på om man er sandhetsgal nok til å la sig det by, om ens erkjendelse er blit såpas lærseig av sandhet at den endnu kan la sig stuteslå til marken med en slik sandhet.

[Can we deny that two and two is four? Of course not! I merely mention it to show that Gladstone's logic always wins out. The question is whether one is crazy enough about truth to accept it; whether one's sensitivity has become so blunted by truth that one can be struck down by it.] (71)

Like Nietzsche, who scoffs at "that hocus-pocus of mathematical form in which, as if in iron, Spinoza encased and masked his philosophy," Nagel thus discards mathematical

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<sup>126</sup> Commenting on Nagel's derision of Gladstone, in contrast to his celebration of the exceptional man, Nettum explains that "når Gladstone i Nagels øyne blir eksemplet på den motsatte mennesketype, massemennekset, er det nettopp fordi han følger trivialitetens brede landevei. Han representerer nivelleringen, og for Nagel med hans krav til personligheten, er nivellering det samme som demoralisering" ["when Gladstone in the eyes of Nagel becomes the example of the opposite type of man, a man of the herd, it is exactly because he follows the broad path of trivialities. He represents the leveling, and according to Nagel and his demands for a great personality, leveling is the same as demoralizing"] (*Konflikt og visjon* 135). Moreover, Hamsun's choice of Gladstone as Nagel's target follows Hamsun's own critique of Gladstone and the English people in general—as opposed to the Germans—a point I shall return to in Chapter V. In an article against "Autoriteter" ["Authorities"], published in *Dagbladet* September 9, 1890, Hamsun complains about how Gladstone is always consulted

truths opposed to which he holds his dreams to be far superior (BGE 36). Whereas Gladstone's logic narrows our perspective on life, dreams have the potential to enlarge it.

During a later party, hosted by Nagel in his hotel room, Nagel confronts the doctor with the following question:

Hvad vinding er det i grunden endog rent praktisk talt at man ribber livet for al poesi, al drøm, al skjønn mystik, al løgn? Hvad er sandhet, ved De det? Vi bevæger os jo frem bare gjennem symboler, og disse symboler skifter vi efterhvert som vi skrider frem.

[What are we actually gaining, in practical terms, by robbing our life of all its poetry, its dreams, all its beautiful mysticism, every lie? What is truth, do you know? We can only struggle along by using symbols, and we change them as we alter our views.] (158)<sup>127</sup>

Like Nietzsche, Nagel thus rejects the obsession with truth as a proponent of ever-changing views and symbols, poetry and dreams.

Though Hamsun rejects the rules and truths of rational logic, he does not dismiss truthfulness per se. In his work on Hamsun's "disillusionment novels," *Luft, vind, ingenting* [*Air, wind, nothingness*], Kittang discusses how fantasies and fictions, or

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in all kinds of matters. "Er Bismarcks Navn saa meget mindre end Gladstones?" ["Is Bismarck less of a name than Gladstone"], he then asks bitinglly (PS 113).

<sup>127</sup> Like Knut Hamsun in *On Overgrown Paths*, Nagel is sarcastic about the authority of the doctor's science. He defends, for instance, the curative powers of the patient's will, belief, and disposition as opposed to the doctor's medicines. "Så man ikke eksempler på at patienter kom sig av det klare vand når man bare indbildte dem at det var et utsøkt lægemiddel?" ["Were there not examples of patients who

illusions, in Hamsun's work represent *roads to insight* that may not be reached by other paths. Thus there is a tension between truth and illusion, but also "*illusjonens sanning, dvs. av fantasilivets rolle i tilværet vårt*" ["*the truth of illusion, i.e. the role of the imagination in our existence*"] (30). Likewise Lionel Trilling says about Dinesen's tales that they are told "with an air that leads us believe that they are involved with truth of a kind not available to minds that submit to strict veracity" (7). It is through fantastic events (such as the metamorphosis of the Prioress) that her characters (such as Athena) reach their insight. We can understand the truth of the fantastic, or the illusion, in terms of its power to subvert logical thinking while inviting the imagination to look at life from another perspective.<sup>128</sup>

Hence, like Nietzsche, who commends men in former times for their use of imaginative thinking of which our dreams are a reminder, Dinesen commends her heroes and heroines as superb dreamers. The Angels' children in Dinesen's tale "Copenhagen Season," for instance,

all dreamt vividly and beautifully. The moment they fell asleep in their  
beds, tremendous landscapes, vast deep seas, strange animals and people

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recovered from pure water if one simply made them believe them that it was an exquisite remedy?"]], he rhetorically asks (79).

<sup>128</sup> Leander Hansen argues that "med det fantastiske ville Karen Blixen give et mere omfattende virkelighedsbillede" ["Isak Dinesen desired with the fantastic to give a more comprehensive world view" (25). She would without doubt, he asserts, have subscribed to Dostoyevsky's definition of reality, maintaining that "hvad flertallet kaller fantastisk og umuligt, er for mig undertiden virkelighed i egentlig og dybeste forstnad: den sande virkelighed. Dagligdagens hændelser og deres protokollering er for mig langtfra realisme, snarere det modsatte" ["what the majority call fantastic and impossible is for me at

created themselves within their minds. They were too well brought up to entertain strangers with their dreams, but among themselves they would recount and discuss them in detail. The eldest sister, the tallest of the lot and the finest horsewoman, toward the end of her life said to her children: "When I am dead you may write on my tombstone: 'She saw many hard days. But her nights were glorious.'" (LT 264)

In her memoir *Skygger paa Græsset* [*Shadows on the Grass*] (1960), a brief sequel to her most famous memoir *Den afrikanske Farm* [*Out of Africa*] (1937), Dinesen applies this line when commending her own dreaming as a talent that runs in her family. She tells us that "en af mine gamle Tanter ønskede paa sin Gravsten sat: 'Hun saa mange svære dage. Men hendes Nætter var skønne'" ["one of my old aunts wanted the inscription on her tombstone to say: 'She saw many hard days. But her nights were glorious'"] (88). Reflecting on her own magnificent dreams, Dinesen characterizes her nightly world by its

Vidde—eller Ubegrænsethed. Jeg færdes i vældige Landskaber, mellem mageløse Højder og Dybder og med uendelige Udsigter til alle Sider ...  
Jeg flyver i Drømme aldeles uhindret, jeg svømmer, dykker og driver i bundløse, flaskegrønne Vandmasser ... Drømmens Verden er uden Tyngdelov, dens Atmosfære er Befrielse, dens Højdepunkt er—

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times reality in its actual and deepest sense: the true reality. Everyday events and their recording are for me far from realism, rather the opposite" ] (25).

uforklarligt for eller stik imod den vaagne Logik—Erkendelse af Triumf. Thi vi har i vore Drømmes Kosmos sagt os fri for alt Forhold til Verdens opholdende og ordnende Magter, til en universel Samvittighed. Vi har i dem givet os i Hænderne paa, og sluttet en Pagt med Verdens uberegnelige, vilde, skabende Magter: den universelle Fantasi.

[vastness—or infinity. I move in mighty landscapes, among tremendous heights, depths, and expanses and with unlimited views to all sides ... I fly, in dream, to my altitude, I dive into bottomless, clear, bottle-green waters ... It's a weightless world. Its very atmosphere is joy, its crowning happiness, unreasonably or against reason, is that of triumph. For we have in the dream forsaken our allegiance to the organizing, controlling, and rectifying forces of the world, the Universal Conscience. We have sworn fealty to the wild, incalculable, creative forces, the Imagination of the Universe.] (90-91)

Further, while asserting that her dreams are more vivid and frequent now than when she was younger, Dinesen also, like Nietzsche, suggests the close connection between dreamers and artists. In fact, in *Out of Africa*, Dinesen argues that the freedom of people who dream resembles the freedom of artists.

De Mennesker, der drømmer, naar de sover, kender til en egen Slags dyb Tilfredshed ... Henrevethed og Lethed om Hjertet ... Drømmens egentlige

Henrykkelse ligger i den Følelse af ubegrænset Frihed, som den bringer med sig. Det er ikke en Tyrans Frihed ... men en Kunstners Frihed.

[Those people who dream when they sleep know a kind of deep satisfaction ... the heart's exhilaration and lightness ... The dream's true delight resides in the feeling of unlimited freedom which it brings with it.

It is not the freedom of a tyrant ... but the freedom of an artist.] (72)

Discussing the connection between dreaming and art, or, more specifically, storytelling, in Dinesen's two memoirs, Aiken explains that Dinesen's

description of dreaming/fiction-making as a radical subversion of 'the organizing, controlling and rectifying forces of the world' ... parallels psychoanalytic concepts of dreaming in relation to the repression of the feminine as the 'unconscious' of culture and psyche and anticipates theoretical speculations on women as speaking subjects who inhabit a 'wild space' beyond official discursive boundaries. It is from this 'elsewhere' ... that the possibilities of an other, feminine discourse may be imagined. (52)

Dinesen makes the dream her elsewhere, concludes Aiken. Rejecting the phallogocentric discourse based on logic, she creates a narrative for herself, based on the dream imagination.

Selboe offers a specific analysis of how Dinesen's use of the dream imagination is represented in the form and style of her fiction. Focusing in particular on how dreams escape the rigorous rules of logic, Selboe points out that they also represent the extinction of the separation between the subjective and the objective, abstract and concrete, literal and metaphorical meaning (81). Dreaming is therefore essentially metonymic in its structure (82). Taking Dinesen's tale "The Dreamers" in *Seven Gothic Tales* as her example, Selboe explains that it is a tale whose "komposisjonsprinsipp er en form for analogi basert på nærhet ... metonymisk i sin struktur" ["principle for composition is a form of analogy based on nearness ... metonymic in its structure"] (82).

"The Dreamers" begins on a dhow on its way from Lamu to Zanzibar on a full-moon night of 1863. Among its passengers is "the much-renowned story-teller Mira Jama himself, the inventions of whose mind have been loved by a hundred tribes" (SGT 272). Mira Jama has, however, apparently lost his ability to tell tales and therefore cannot entertain the other passengers. Mira Jama's inability to tell stories becomes, however, the precipitating condition for the story recounted by another passenger, Lincoln Forsner, about the opera singer Pellegrina who once lost her voice in a fire, but who took her loss as an opportunity to get rid of her former imprisonment in a fixed identity. Further, Lincoln's story includes multiple narratives by other men about Pellegrina acting under her different names after the fire. I shall return to the content of these narratives in the following chapter. Selboe concludes about their form as follows:

I “Drømmerne” avløses den ene hendelsen av den andre, uten at noen av historiene får en egentlig avslutning. Avslutningen blir stadig utsatt og avbrutt av en ny historie, men like fullt ... med et implisitt løfte om avslutning og oppfyllelse. Dette poetologiske prinsippet—avbrudd og utsettelse—er nettopp drømmens, men med den narrative *logikk* som drømmen gjerne mangler.

[In “The Dreamers” one event is succeeded by the other without actually giving a closure to any of the stories. The conclusion is continuously postponed and interrupted by a new story, but still ... with an implicit promise of closure and fulfillment. This poetological principle—interruption and postponement—is exactly the principle of the dream, but with that narrative *logic* which the dream usually lacks.] (82)

While rejecting the fixed rules of rational logic, Dinesen has thus appropriated the floating form of the dream as her own logic in terms of form and style.

Aiken brings out another aspect of “The Dreamers,” arguing that it is a fictionalized autobiography which offers a linguistic link to Dinesen’s autobiographical meditations on her own dreams and creative projects.<sup>129</sup> Alluding to Mira Jama’s lost capacity for telling tales, Aiken argues that Dinesen, in the tale’s frame story, “develops a

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<sup>129</sup> Jørgensen, on the other hand, who focuses his entire book *Siden hen* around “The Dreamers,” and who criticizes the tendency to interpret Dinesen’s work in terms of her life and her ideas about destiny, argues that the “later on” perspective is far more important than the “dream” image in all of Dinesen’s work, including “The Dreamers” (2).

poetics of displacement which ... specifically equates dreaming, dis-ease, exile, and loss with the ecstatic engenderings of narrative”(50). Indeed, Aiken continues, “late in life Dinesen would repeatedly speak of Pellegrina’s lost voice as a figure for her own loss of her life in Africa. If, out of Africa, she imagined her existence as an exile, a living death, a ‘dream,’ by a great act of courage and imagination she also plunged into those depths, turning the space of that dream—the dislocations of that life—into the site of restorative creation” (64).

The dream thus has a dual nature of death and creativity. Mira Jama portrays this in an allegory, using the coffee tree as a metaphor for dreaming. To his companions he explains that

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

Mira Jama’s metaphor for dreaming underscores its bittersweet essence. As Langbaum concludes, “the artist dies in this sense, by letting his thoughts and his heart run out in all directions in his various characters” (104). However, as Selboe

points out, the death of identity is to Dinesen the liberation of the self. When the question of identity is freed from its strict and logical definition, it can be affirmed according to the imagination and the logic of the floating dream, which rejects the separation between subjective and objective, abstract and concrete, literal and metaphorical meaning (70). The suicide of well-mannered people that Mira Jama refers to, continues Selboe, is the death of the structures imposed on reality that are in turn imposed on the individual. When the difference between “drøm og realitet *oppheves*, så blir drømmen i Miras formulering ‘velopdragne Menneskers Form for Selvmord’” [“dream and reality *are cancelled out*, that’s when the dream in Mira’s words become ‘the well-mannered people’s way of committing suicide’”] (81).

On the other hand, as Selboe further explains, death is the condition that necessitates storytelling; “spenningen mellom væren og framtrede” [“the tension between being and appearance”] on which the story thrives (96). The silent words and interruptions in Dinesen’s tales allow the tales to continue as tales because they “forhindrer sammenfallet mellom framtrede og væren—det sammenfallet som betyr avslutning og død” [“prevent the collapse between appearance and being—that collapse which would mean closure and death”] (97).<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Hence why Mira-Jama can at this point not tell any tales, for, as he tells Lincoln, “I have become too familiar with life” (SGT 274).

Moreover, the dream is, as Selboe asserts, “som fantasiens arnested ... selve paradigmet på den vellykkede historie” [“as the hearth of the imagination ... the paradigm of the successful story”] (81). Empowered by the imagination, dreams, like tales, can create a larger perspective on life. Dinesen herself prefers dreams and tales to the tedious humdrum of daily life. In her memoir *Shadows on the Grass*, she confesses that she often feels that “Dagen er et Tidsrum uden egentlig Betydning eller Mening, og at det er med Tusmørkets Komme og idet de første Stjerner tændes paa Himlen, og de første Lys i Lysekronerne, at Livet omkring mig vaagner, faar Realitet og træder mig imøde” [“the day is that time without any actual significance or meaning, and that it is with the coming of dusk and when the first stars are lit in heaven, and the first lights in the chandelier, that life around me awakes, gets its reality and approaches me”] (93). That is when she pictures herself moving from “Dagens Verden—fra de opholdende, ordnende og skelsættende Magters Omraade—til Fantasiens og Inspirationens Sfære” [“the world of the day—from the area of the organizing, controlling and rectifying powers—to the sphere of fantasy and imagination”] (93).

Finally, while exalting the imagination, Hamsun and Dinesen also commend artistic lies or fabrications in line with Nietzsche who comments on artistic woman’s talent for lying. Like dreams, lying is a form of art whose illusions subvert the authority of logic. We have seen that Nagel includes lies in his list of arts to defend in his speech to the doctor, defending them together with poetry, dreams, and mysticism. Lying is,

moreover, one of the favorite pastimes of the starving journalist in *Hunger*. Chatting with a blind man sitting next to him on a bench in a park in Christiania, whom he has never met before, the journalist suddenly begins to lie. “En løgn stod mig med ett fuldt færdig i hodet. Jeg løi ufrvillig, uten forsæt og uten baktanke” [“A complete lie suddenly appeared to my mind. I lied involuntarily, without intention and without motive”] (21). He claims to live in apartment no. 2 at St. Olav’s square and gives his fictive landlord the name Happolati. The blind man, however, buys into this story, or the journalist hit a lucky strike, at least the blind man gives the impression of knowing Mr. Happolati. Hence the dialogue continues, our hungry hero startled by the development of it all.

Dette begyndte å bli interessant. Situationen løp av med mig og den ene løgn efter den andre opstod i mit hode ... Jeg opfandt endnu et par desperate løgne, drev det til hazard, ymtet om at Happolati hadde været minister i ni år i Persien.

[This was beginning to be interesting. The situation ran away with me and one lie after the other came to my mind ... I came up with a couple of desperate lies, pushed it to the hazardous, hinted that Happolati had been minister for nine years in Persia.] (22)

In the end, however, the journalist is infuriated with the blind man who accepts all his lies for truth. As Nettum comments, “selv om mannen ved sin godtroenhet inspirerer til fornyet fantasiutfoldelse, skuffer han som publikum. Mannen fatter ikke at dette er en kunstprestasjon, han tar historien som et stykke faktisk virkelighet” [“even though the

man's gullibility inspires an exaggerated display of fantasy, he disappoints as audience. The man doesn't get the art of the show, he understands the story as actual reality"] (*Konflikt og visjon* 79). The allure of lying disappears in his listener's willing approval of them, turning fantastic lies into trivial truths.

However, the *Hunger*-protagonist does not give up his art, but persists in lying. He lies about having two vases in a rug that he asks to have wrapped up, claiming that they are to be sent to Smyrna, whereas he's actually simply feeling embarrassed about walking around with the rug on his way with it to the pawn shop (30). He later lies again about the package (the rug wrapped up under his arm), when he runs into an acquaintance, claiming to be carrying some new clothes he has just bought, adding that he now works as a bookkeeper for a wholesale dealer, another lie (31). The most spectacular incident of his lying, is when he hires a coachman, even though he has no money, to drive him wildly from false address to false address in search of the fictional Kjerulf (102-05). He even goes in to find the man he knows is not there and is amused when the coachman contributes to the fictional development of this invented character by asking about details of his personal appearance. The protagonist knows that he is "et bytte for de galeste indfald" ["a prey to the craziest whims"], yet he ecstatically continues in his pursuit until he calms down again (104).

The starving journalist enjoys the games of lying as an art that has the capacity to surprise, countering the expected, thus unsettling the norms for normalcy and enriching his life, transcending the humdrum of urban life. As soon as they become too much like

everyday reality—as in his conversation with the blind man in the park—he resents lying just as much as truth.

In contrast to the lying protagonist of *Hunger*, lying becomes a more substantial form of art in Dinesen's tales as her protagonists' assume various roles, recreating their identities. The Cardinal in "The Deluge of Norderney," for instance, is actually his former servant Kasparson. I shall return to Kasparson in the next chapter, discussing his roleplay in terms of the artistic-existential projects of Dinesen's heroes and heroines. Important to note in this context, however, is how the existential roleplay of her protagonists unsettles the idea of there being any essential truths or identities. As Kasparson as the Cardinal explains, "this world of ours is like the children's game of bread and cheese; there is always something underneath—truth, deceit; truth, deceit!" (SGT 26). Discussing the roleplay—the use of masks—in Dinesen's work, Selboe explains that the mask is also a metaphor for the art of the storytelling. "Som kunsten verken kan eller skal den 'si alt'" ["Like art, it neither can nor is it supposed to 'say it all'"] (70). Appearance—"lying, hypocrisy, dissimulation, mask"—is thus inseparable from the manifestation of being which cannot be fixed and concluded (70).

While thus questioning the boundary between appearance and essence, mask and identity, truths and lies, Dinesen maintains that we all play a role in the play of life. This is a central point of the marionette comedy "Revenge of Truth," included in her tale "The Roads Round Pisa" (*Seven Gothic Tales*). We here hear of a witch who curses a

house by making all the lies told within it come true. When in the end the witch is asked what the truth really is, she answers:

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, and now that I have at last come into a marionette play, I will never go out of it again. But you, my fellow actors, keep the ideas of the author clear. Aye, drive them to their utmost consequences. (SGT 199)

What matters, in other words, is that we recognize the characteristic of truth as illusion and life as a play, and that we act accordingly, i.e. consciously and playfully. Recognizing the capricious forces of life without being overcome by them, but, on the contrary, appropriating them into her own scheme, the witch stands empowered to mock the facts of the logician. In this way the marionette comedy brings to mind Nietzsche's talk to his favored philosopher, bidding him to don a mask and protect both his humor and subtlety, while adding question marks after words and theories, unsettling the boundary between what is or not.<sup>131</sup>

The witch's bid to her fellow actors that they recognize the fictive identity of truth and that they act accordingly suggests the connection in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen between their critique of truth and their artistic-existential philosophy. In the

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<sup>131</sup> As we've seen, Nietzsche also suggests that those who fail to act as such a philosopher—"the Spinozas and Giordano Brunos"—lack awareness of their own masquerade (BGE 56).

following chapter we shall see how the critique of rationality and objectivity, central to the philosophy of Nietzsche and the fiction of Hamsun and Dinesen, inform their existentialism.

### **CHAPTER 3: GOING UNDER ... OR CROSSING OVER: THE IMPERATIVE OF THE EXISTENTIAL-ARTISTIC PROJECT**

There are two major modes of Hamsun's and Dinesen's critiques of modernity; a reactionary one looking back to an older time of peasants and lords, which I discussed in Chapter I, and a radical one aspiring beyond modernity to a higher form of existence, in line with Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Though the radical heroes and heroines of Hamsun and Dinesen may also be situated in the past, they point to the future in their reevaluation of morality, overturning the ideal truths and values of modern philosophy and Christianity, while affirming what has been repressed, e.g. the body, its nature and instincts. Further, they aspire toward self-enlargement. Thus they seek, like Nietzsche, to attain health and greatness. As we have seen, this is exactly what the aristocrat of former times represents. The reactionary turn to an older age of aristocrats and the radical vindication of Nietzschean heroes and heroines are, in other words, kindred responses to modernity. However, whereas the former nostalgically turns to the past, the latter points to the future.

Rejecting the rigidity of rules and norms, both Hamsun and Dinesen are unwilling—as is Nietzsche—to formulate an (utopian) alternative for the future. Searching for an alternative to modernity, they are therefore mainly concerned with the existential and artistic projects of life. “*We ourselves, we free spirits*, are nothing less than a ‘revaluation of all values,’” declares Nietzsche, “an *incarnate* declaration of war

and triumph over all the ancient conceptions of ‘true’ and ‘untrue’” (A 579).<sup>132</sup> In line with Nietzsche, Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s Nietzschean protagonists reevaluate morality according to their own artistic-existential projects to overcome the herd-morality of modern men, aspiring beyond modernity toward a greater relationship to life.

“Aspiring toward a greater relationship to life” sounds awfully vague, and, I would argue, that is indeed the main characteristic of a project that rejects fixedness. As a philosopher, Nietzsche can portray such a relationship philosophically and thus it can shine in its own world. However, whereas Nietzsche situates the *Übermensch* in an undefined future, Hamsun and Dinesen portray their radical heroes and heroines in contexts that are somewhat historical. In the following we will see what happens when a radical project is put into such a context. The works of Hamsun and Dinesen reveal the obstacles and difficulties an aspiring *Übermensch* in a historical context is bound to experience. On the one hand, the reader of their works might find it disillusioning to see how difficult it may be to reach beyond the status quo to attain a greater relationship to life. On the other hand, their works can thus assist us in preparing for the obstacles we today might encounter if we decide to perform a reevaluation of our lives in order to enhance them and our culture.

Nietzsche’s laughing dancing Yes-sayer Zarathustra is an example of a triumphant reevaluation. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) Nietzsche articulates, as Ahern writes,

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<sup>132</sup> Nietzsche planned to write a four volume *Revaluation of All Values* of which *The Antichrist* is written as the first, however, the plan was never realized. The question of morality and his own “revaluation” constitute nonetheless a predominant part of his writings.

the constructive side of his revaluation in terms of a new nobility that would fight the disease of modernity and affirm their new values based on a healthy will (152-54). According to Nietzsche's pathology of modernity discussed earlier, the truths of modern metaphysics and ethics are illusions determined by a sick will whose dominant instincts are those of life-preservation. "Sickness of will is distributed over Europe unequally," Nietzsche asserts (BGE 137), and our world is inhabited by "disgruntled, proud, repulsive creatures, unable to rid themselves of self-loathing, hatred of the earth and of all living things" (GM 253). The herds of modern men draw their creative energy from the power of *ressentiment*, through which everything antagonistic to life is being preserved. In other words, fundamental to this preservation is the instinctive hatred of anything essential to health, namely, an order of rank, greatness, and vitality.

Opposed to such self-preservation, Nietzsche extols self-enlargement. Whereas self-preservation is the manifestation of a sick will, growth, greatness, and vitality are the manifestations of a healthy will. Nauseated by the sickness of modernity and questioning, as we've seen, the value of "truths," Nietzsche underscores the necessity of the destruction of Western metaphysics, which has undermined the healthy instincts of growth and greatness. Such a destruction is therefore a responsible destruction because it is fought to eliminate sickness and to restore health.<sup>133</sup> Nietzsche's declaration of war and Zarathustra's call for a demolition of old values are, in other words, guided by a desire to

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<sup>133</sup> Emphasizing the constructive aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy and his desire to cure modernity, Ahern writes that "I think those who get to be 'irresponsible' via Nietzsche and those who despise his philosophy as nihilism fail to see the depth of responsibility he possessed" (143).

clear land for a healthy will. Only a healthy will can create new values and illusions, or perspectives on life, that strive to be faithful to the vitality and flux of life rather than suppress and fix life by applying absolute truths to determine what life is.<sup>134</sup>

### ZARATHUSTRA, PAN, AND DIONYSOS: REPRESENTATIONS OF NIETZSCHEAN PROTAGONISTS IN HAMSUN'S AND DINESEN'S TEXTS

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche suggests a modern alternative to the Greeks' greatness. In line with their tragedies, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of affirming the abyss of existence which allows for no essential truth and which reveals the terrible powers of nature. In contrast to the herd of modern men who escape and repress the abyss, the *Übermensch* Zarathustra calls for, affirms the abyss in exuberant health while he creates his own truths and values which are faithful to their identity as illusions and which do not escape the earth as transcendent truths. Thus he goes under, facing the abyss, in order to cross over, celebrating his own creation. In contrast to the self-preservation of the masses, he has the courage and the power of a healthy will to aspire for self-enlargement and thus he overcomes their slave morality.

In his speech "On Self-Overcoming," Zarathustra asserts the importance of the aspiring *Übermensch* to affirm his will to power as a will to enlarge our perspective on

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<sup>134</sup> In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche asserts the importance of attaining *great health* as a means to new goals. "The great health.—Being new, nameless, hard to understand, we premature births of an as yet unproven future need for a new goal also a new means—namely, a new health, stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious, and gayer than any previous health" (346). In *Ecce Homo* he further asserts that Zarathustra is himself a type whose "physiological presupposition ... is what I call the *great health*" (EH 298).

life, rather than preserve life by the means of metaphysics. Opposed to the obsession with truth—“the will to truth”—among those who today call themselves wise, Zarathustra bids his “brothers” to affirm their will as follows:

A will to the thinkability of all beings: this *I* call your will. You want to *make* all being thinkable, for you doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable. But it shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection. That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power—when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and intoxication. (225)

Zarathustra’s emphasis on making all things thinkable echoes Nietzsche’s advice to his favored philosopher that he apply multiple perspectives when approaching life, rejecting the narrowing of perspective taught by priests and scholars. In other words, his will to power is not a destructive, oppressive, or tyrannical power, but a will to affirm life in all its vitality and flux, including that which remains unthinkable to the adherents of a slave morality whose wills are sick and who repress life while escaping from it.

In contrast to the aphoristic style of Nietzsche’s other texts, we hear in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the words of the prophet-like truthsayer Zarathustra.<sup>135</sup> Zarathustra has come

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<sup>135</sup> Zarathustra appears as a prophet, but the concept must be used with some reservations when discussing Nietzsche. Nietzsche was himself critical of the concept, which he associates with Judaism and Christianity, and prophets who preach faith in the otherworldly. Discussing *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*

down from his mountain cave to the people in the towns and the villages to distribute his wisdom “until the wise among men find joy once again in their folly, and the poor in their riches” (122). Echoing Nietzsche’s critique of the repulsive creatures that populate modern Europe, Zarathustra explains that man has made his way “from worm to man,” but much in him “is still worm” (124). “Once you were apes,” says Zarathustra to his listeners, “and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape” (124). Zarathustra therefore wants man to overcome his all-too-humanness as a sick creature, a repulsive worm, or an undeveloped primate, and strive for the *Übermensch*: “*I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome*” (124).

What this implies, explains Zarathustra, is to *remain faithful to the earth*” and not to “believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hope ... Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body,” continues Zarathustra; the soul “wanted the body meager, ghastly, and starved. Thus she hoped to escape it and the earth” (125). Zarathustra, on the other hand, wants man to “lead back to the earth the virtue that flew away ... back to the body, back to life ... Let your spirit and your virtue serve the sense of the earth,” bids Zarathustra who predicts “a chosen people—and out of them, the

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he writes that “here no ‘prophet’ is speaking, none of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power whom people call founders of religions ... It is no fanatic that speaks here; this is not ‘preaching’; no *faith* is demanded here: from an infinite abundance of light and depth of happiness falls drop upon drop, word upon word” (219). Nietzsche refers instead to Zarathustra as a Dionysian, the type of great health, the most Yes-saying of all spirits (EH 295-309). In “A Critical Backward Glance” added to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, Nietzsche describes Zarathustra as a Dionysian monster, a soothsayer, and a laughing truthsayer (15).

overman” who will awaken from the “ignorance and error” of today, and with him “the earth shall yet become a site of recovery” (188-89).

Zarathustra knows that the overman, when he arrives to recover the earth, will inflict violence against the adherents of a slave morality. Addressing his disciples, he asserts that

with your values and words of good and evil you do violence when you value; and this is your hidden love and the splendor and trembling and overflowing of your soul ... And whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily, he must first be an annihilator and break values. (228)

Moreover, he who creates new values, must be prepared for “a more violent force and a new overcoming,” for no values are eternal (228). Life itself speaks to Zarathustra and tells him that “I am *that which must always overcome itself* ... I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends” (227). Therefore “good and evil that are not transitory, do not exist. Driven on by themselves, they must overcome themselves again and again” (228). Hence the process of positing new values—the revaluation of all values—must always be in a creative becoming that includes the annihilation of former values lest they grow stale.

While recognizing the violence against old norms the revaluation of values implies, Zarathustra commends the quality of being evil and does not take the remark that he has the “mocking grimace of a devil” in a bad way (359). “Man must become better and more evil,” asserts Zarathustra; “the greatest evil is necessary for the overman’s

best” (400). While rejecting the Christian understanding of good and evil as an escape from life that deems nature evil, Zarathustra thus commends “evil” tongue-in-cheek, knowing it will upset the priests. “Verily, you who are good and just, there is much about you that is laughable,” mocks Zarathustra, “and especially your fear of that which has hitherto been called devil” (256). Indeed, “you who are wise and knowing,” he mockingly concludes, “would flee from the burning sun of that wisdom in which the overman joyously bathes his nakedness ... I guess that you would call my overman—devil” (256).

Zarathustra commends the devil in the name of new and healthy values whose creation requires the destruction of the Christian slave morality. Addressing his potential “brothers in war” (158), he refrains from defining what these values will be, however, he asserts that they will be truer to life and faithful to the flux and becoming of life. He is himself a truthsayer who speaks to the lovers of truth and knowledge. Attacking “the unwise” whose valuations are “solemn and muffled up,” he praises the “lover of knowledge” whose “will to truth” agrees with Zarathustra’s “will to power,” for, as he commends, “your will and your valuations you have placed on the river of becoming” (225-27).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Commenting on Nietzsche’s sense of truth, Ahern, like Schacht, asserts that to Nietzsche it was the life-value of perspectives and illusions, or interpretations, that mattered. Moreover, the truth as Nietzsche saw it, continues Ahern, is “the brutal certitude that ‘there is only *one* world, and this is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning—A world thus constituted is the real world’ (WP 853) ... The early Hellenes confronted this phenomenon ... For Nietzsche, we moderns are a different story; our ‘spiritual’ ability to fictionalize the most terrifying faces of life has degenerated into *preserving* everything sick and weak” (134). As Nietzsche writes, those philosophers who have a powerful and

Moreover, maintaining that God is dead, Zarathustra emphasizes the importance of creating values that are not attached to the transcendent. “God died: now we want the overman to live,” says Zarathustra prophetically (399). In his prologue, Zarathustra explains that “once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth” (125). In conclusion he asserts that “God is a conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures should be limited by what is thinkable. Could you *think* a god?” (198). Rejecting the Christian escape from nature, Zarathustra thus forces the attention away from the transcendent toward the earth and values created by a healthy will which is faithful to the earth.

Finally, Zarathustra’s derides Christians’ faith in God as a cowardly escape from suffering while adhering to transcendent values. Not God, but man’s own “creation—that is the great redemption from suffering,” Zarathustra maintains (199). Yet, “suffering is needed,” for “to be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth-giver” (199). Attacking the Christian desire for redemption from suffering in heaven, while focusing on *this* life, Zarathustra embraces life’s pain and suffering through which man creates himself anew as his own redemption. Commending the strength of he who has the capacity to take the suffering

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healthy will—who “stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence” and who have thus attained the “highest state a philosopher can attain”—“perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability ... for their own sake, as the more powerful, more fruitful, *truer* sides of existence, in which its will finds clearer expression” (WP #1041, 536-37). “Error,” on the other hand, “is *cowardice*—every achievement of knowledge is a consequence of courage” (WP #1041, 536).

upon himself and to create values on his own, Zarathustra concludes that what he loves in such a man is that “he is an overture and a going under ... Brave is he who knows fear but *conquers* fear, who sees the abyss, but with *pride*” (399-400).

Seeking men who can thus prepare the earth for the arrival of the overman, Zarathustra addresses those higher men who recognize that there is much to despair about and to despise in man. He bids these higher men to overcome

the little people [who] all preach surrender and resignation and prudence  
and industry and consideration and the long etcetera of small virtues ...  
Overcome these masters of today, O my brothers—these small people,  
*they* are the overman’s greatest danger. (399-400)

Opposed to the slave morality mastered by the mob, Zarathustra underscores the value of independence and makes it clear that though he is pleased to find brothers-in-arm, he does not want a crowd of followers or believers. “Companions, the creator seeks, not corpses, not herds and believers. Fellow creators, the creator seeks—those who write new values on new tablets” (136). As a teacher of the overman, Zarathustra maintains that each must be a creator of his own values, and each must aspire to overcome himself and produce something higher out of himself. Hence he eventually bids his students farewell:

Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all  
denied me will I return to you. Verily, my brothers ... with a different love  
shall I then love you. And once again you shall become my friends and the  
children of a single hope ... And that is the great noon when man stands in

the middle of his way between beast and overman and celebrates his way to the evening as his highest hope: for it is the way to a new morning. Then will he who goes under bless himself for being one who goes over and beyond. (190-91)

Moreover, Zarathustra returns to his home in the mountains to escape the rabble of the mob that does not listen to him:

O solitude! O my home, solitude! ... For where you are, things are open and bright ... Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before me: here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from me how to speak. Down there, however, all speech is in vain ... down there everyone talks and no one listens. (296)

Finding only deaf ears in the city, Zarathustra retreats to the mountains where he can follow his own imperative in peace, affirming the thinkable which has not yet been considered thinkable, but repressed by priests and philosophers and the entire mob. Like Nietzsche, who is nauseated by the sickness of modernity, he seeks the fresh air and peace of the mountains to think and recreate values.<sup>137</sup> Thus he also secures the *pathos of*

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<sup>137</sup> After his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was published in 1872, Nietzsche lost the recognition of his colleagues at the University of Basel in Switzerland, where he had been employed as a professor of classical philology since 1869. He eventually resigned (due as well to his weak health) in 1879. Rather than being exposed to the ignorance and criticism he encountered in Germany, he lived for several years in exile from Germany, usually spending the winter in Nice and the summer at Sils-Maria in the Upper Engadine, the Alpine valley in Switzerland. In his semi-autobiographical text *Ecce Homo*, he tells us that "those who can breathe the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air. Otherwise there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it. The ice is near, the solitude tremendous—but how calmly all things lie in the light! How freely one breathes! ... Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains—seeking

*distance* which, as we've seen, Nietzsche sees as a prerequisite to attain nobility. Moreover, away from the city, life itself and even animals speak to him. Finally, seeing how the crowds in the city, with their slave morality, repress nature, he must return to the latter to affirm his faithfulness to the earth.

For these reasons Zarathustra considers solitude an imperative means to the overman's end. Moreover, considering the "great men" at the market place who insist on proof and persuasion, demanding a clear Yes or No, a threat against the pursuit of truth, Zarathustra bids the "lover of truth" to "flee into your solitude" lest these men poison his blood and endeavors to prepare the earth for the overman (164)

Do not be jealous of these unconditional, pressing men, you lover of truth!

Never yet has truth hung on the arm of the unconditional. On account of these sudden men, go back to your security: it is only in the marked place that one is assaulted with Yes? or No? Slow is the experience of all deep wells: long must they wait before they know *what* fell into their depth ...

Far from the market place and from fame happens all that is great: far from the market place and from fame the inventors of new values have always dwelt. (164)

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out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality" (EH 218). About *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he says that it "is not only the highest book there is, the book that is truly characterized by the air of the heights ... it is also the *deepest*, born out of the innermost wealth of truth" (EH 219). In *The Gay Science* he writes about himself and his favored philosophers that "we do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors—walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful" (GS 322).

Zarathustra thus defends solitude for everyone “to create over and beyond himself,” though he recognizes the despair that loneliness can produce (177). However, he warns against giving in to such feelings. Rather the lonely one must be able to stand strong against the bitterness and envy of those whom he must pass over, who, explains Zarathustra, “like to crucify those who invent their own virtue for themselves” (176). Yet, in contrast to hermits, one does not want to remain in solitude in the desert, and in contrast to priests, one does not want a congregation of followers. Just as Zarathustra time and again descends from his mountain cave, one wants to return and find brothers who have also overcome the all-too-human preservation of life defended by the sick and cowardly; who also affirm values that are faithful to the earth; who also create perspectives that strive to make everything thinkable; and who also affirm their own self-enlargement.

*Zarathustra* is a significant text when considering the Nietzscheanism of Hamsun and Dinesen. It is the only book by Nietzsche that Dinesen—who liked to describe herself as a Yes-sayer<sup>138</sup>—said she had read, and it is among the three texts by Nietzsche that were found in Hamsun’s library.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, *Zarathustra* played a dominant role in the early reception of Nietzsche at the turn of the century. It is here that Nietzsche introduces the concept of the *Übermensch*, whose fame and infamy in Scandinavia I have already mentioned, and, as Beyer notes, it made a great impression on the neo-romantic poets of

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<sup>138</sup> Thurman further notes the connection between this and other mottos Dinesen defended (466).

the 1890s (*Nietzsche og Norden* II: 49). Beyer mentions “Das trunkne Lied,” Zarathustra’s “Rundgesang,” and particularly Zarathustra’s “Nachtlied” as having had a great impact on Scandinavian literature at the turn of the century. The words of Zarathustra’s “Nachtlied” “kunne stå som motto for atskillig av nyromantikkens diktning” [“could stand as the motto for a good deal of the writing of neo-romanticism”], asserts Beyer (II: 49). It is, he explains, “den lyriske grunntonen, lyset som springer fram av mørket, evighetslengselen på mørk bunn, det dionysiske, rusen, ekstasen, forherligelsen av fjellviddene og havet” [“the lyrical tune, the light which shines forth from darkness, the longing for eternity beyond the abyss, the Dionysian, the intoxication, the ecstatic, the glorification of the mountains and the ocean”] which struck a chord with the Nordic poets (II: 49).

There are, as Beyer further asserts, elements of such a neo-romantic lyricism in Hamsun’s *Pan*, which I shall discuss further below (II: 99, 102). Moreover, Zarathustra’s heroic call for solitude and contempt for the city is echoed by the aristocrats portrayed by Hamsun and Dinesen. Lieutenant Holmsen in Hamsun’s *Children of the Age*, for instance, who abhors the modern trends and in particular the fashion of moving to the growing cities, seeks refuge in the peace and quiet of his land, nurturing, as Ferguson comments, his “pantheistic” love for nature (229). Likewise, the aristocrats in Dinesen’s “Copenhagen Season,” such as the Angels’ children, uphold their freedom in the

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<sup>139</sup> The book collection Hamsun left behind includes a Danish translation of Nietzsche’s Wagner pamphlet and Swedish translations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* from 1897 and *The Antichrist* from 1899.

countryside's open air, refusing to be tied down to a bourgeois lifestyle. The other protagonists in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen that we've encountered so far also express an affinity for nature. The aspiring journalist in Hamsun's *Hunger* is drawn to the forest or the harbor when life in the city becomes too difficult.<sup>140</sup> Likewise Nagel is drawn both to the forest and the sea, and is at times possessed by a feeling of ecstatic satisfaction out in the woods. Hamsun himself, in *On Overgrown Paths*, persists in his walks, seeking refuge in the woods, while meditating on the changing seasons.

The forest is also embraced as a place of solaces by the Prioress in Dinesen's tale "The Monkey."<sup>141</sup> However, in line with Dinesen's critique of Protestantism, her emphasis on female sexuality constitutes her particular version of Zarathustra's faithfulness to the earth. As the goddess of love, woman and monkey combined, the Prioress seduces the fanatic virgin Athena and delivers her to love. In "The Deluge at Norderney" we hear another story of how fanatic virginity is emancipated from its bonds. In her youth, Miss Malin had been a "fanatical virgin" (SGT 18). Brought up by a pious

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<sup>140</sup> Unable to find or pay for a place to spend the night in the city, he seeks peace in the forest, and is overwhelmed by "den evige sang ... den fjærne, toneløse summen som aldrig tier" ["the eternal song ... the distant, tone-less humming which never falls silent"] high above the earth (37). Later, without money, starving and distressed, he walks down to the harbor where no sad thought can reach him: "Det faldt mig i øieblikket ikke en trist tanke ind, jeg glemte min nød og følte mig beroliget ved synet av havnen som lå fredelig og skjøn i halvmørket" ["Not one sad thought was on my mind at that moment, I forgot my destitution and felt soothed by the sight of the harbor which laid there so peacefully and beautifully in the dusk"] (46).

<sup>141</sup> The Prioress has her own fir plantation at the convent. We learn that "the planting and upkeep of forests were indeed among her greatest interests in life ... There was nothing for your health, she said, like forest air. She herself was never able to pass a good night in town or amongst fields, but to lie down at night knowing that you had the trees around you for miles, their roots so deep in the earth, their crowns moving in the dark, she considered to be one of the delights of life" (SGT 117).

governess, she had, in fact, “ran amuck a little in her relation to the doctrine” of “female virtue” (SGT 17). However, at the age of fifty, she changed. Relieved by a great fortune and by transferring from the active service of life to that of a “passive state of a looker-on ... a weight fell of her; she flew up to a higher perch and cackled a little” (SGT 20). Thus turning slightly mad, she had found her “liberation,” imagining herself as the heroine of all her fantasies, running through “the spheres of the seven deadly sins with the ecstasy of a little boy who gallops through the great races of the world upon his rocking-horse” (SGT 21-22). Moreover, “this madness took ... the curious form of a firm faith in a past of colossal licentiousness. She believed herself to have been the grand courtesan of her time, if not the great whore of the Revelation” (SGT 21). Finally, in her new state of “mild madness and second youth,” Miss Malin had become “nearer to being a pretty woman than she had ever been before” (SGT 22). During the night of the deluge, Miss Malin finally receives, with passion, the embrace and kiss she had first denied herself and later fantasized about.

Miss Malin’s niece, the young Countess Calypso, who has sought refuge with Miss Malin, represents another version of sexual maturing. Raised as a boy by her uncle, Count Seraphina, she has had no notion of her own feminine worth. “Count Seraphina,” Miss Malin explains, “meditated much upon celestial matters. And ... he was convinced that no woman was ever allowed to enter heaven ... His idea of paradise was, then, a long row of lovely young boys, in transparent robes of white, walking two by two, singing his poems to his music ... The estate which he owned at Angelshorn in Mechlenburg he

endeavored to turn into such a heaven, a Von Platen waxwork elysium” (SGT 43). The Count, in other words, represents that kind of patriarchal and repressive Protestantism Dinesen criticizes. “A fanatical admirer of young masculine beauty and a misogynist,” as Thurman puts it, the Count “annihilates” Calypso when her own budding female body can no longer be disguised, by ignoring her and showing no interest in her (72).

Calypso eventually resolves to escape from her unhappy limbo at her uncle’s estate by cutting off her long hair and chopping off her breasts. This ghastly deed, however, turns out to be her rescue, for while stripping her clothes down to the waist in front of a mirror, she looks not only at her body for the first time, but at an old painting reflected in the mirror. The painting depicts a scene out of the life of nymphs, fauns and satyrs; “the god Dionysos himself, who was present, looked her, laughingly, straight into the eyes” (SGT 48). It is the realization that the nymphs, fauns and satyrs are “following, adoring, and embracing young girls of her own age, and of her own figure and face,” that redeems Calypso’s body; “that the whole thing was done in their honor and inspired by their charms” (SGT 48). As Thurman explains, “the erotic art of an earlier age awakens Calypso to her own beauty and sex, and to the terrible perversion of reality of which she has been the victim” (73). She escapes from her uncle to Miss Malin and with her (during the deluge at Norderney) she meets the young man Jonathan whom she marries the same night.

The passions awakened in Calypso and Jonathan during the night of the deluge, represent the natural expression of their instincts, in line with Zarathustra’s revaluation of

values, attaching his values to the earth and the body. Rejecting the “spirit of gravity,” Zarathustra admires the dancing girls he encounters one evening in a green meadow, seeing that here “Cupid and the girls danced together” (Z 220). Moreover, the girls inspire him to sing a song to life who answers him that she is “changeable and wild and a woman in every way, and not virtuous—even if you men call me profound, faithful, eternal, and mysterious” (Z 220).<sup>142</sup>

Whereas the passions of love are deeply felt in Hamsun’s novels,<sup>143</sup> sensual and sexual joys are most clearly defended in *Men livet lever* [*The Road Leads On*]. In this novel we learn about the love of “gammelmoderen” [“the old mother”] for the local Don Juan, the pharmacist.

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<sup>142</sup> Yet, as Hayman notes, though Nietzsche affirms the body, “eroticism is seldom admitted to his verse” (355). Commenting on Nietzsche’s ode to life as a woman, Hayman argues that here “the recent humiliation at the hands of Lou Salomé was making it a painful pleasure to work blunted declarations of love into the narrative” (355). Nietzsche, Salomé, and their mutual friend Paul Rée had what Hayman describes as a “triangular” relationship in 1882 until, finally, Salomé and Rée left Nietzsche behind (244-54). Indeed, when Zarathustra returns to the question of sexuality in Part IV of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he presents it merely as an accepted alternative to solitude for those who do not have it in them to choose the former. “If your fathers consorted with women, strong wines, and wild boars, what would it be if you wanted chastity of yourself?” asks Zarathustra (Z 404). “It would be folly!” he answers (Z 404). “Verily, it seems much to me if such a man is the husband of one or two or three women. And if he founded monasteries and wrote over the door, ‘The way to sainthood,’ I should yet say, What for? It is another folly” (Z 404). He concludes that “solitude is inadvisable for many” (Z 404). As Hayman concludes, “the occasional discussions of sexuality, such as the one that occurs in the fourth part, may seem uninhibited, but they are disingenuous” (355).

<sup>143</sup> See for instance Nagel’s love for the minister’s daughter Miss Dagny (*Mysteries*); Lieutenant Glahn’s obsession with Edvarda, daughter of the wealthy Mr. Mack at Sirilund (*Pan*); the miller Johannes’ love for Victoria, daughter of the village squire (*Victoria*); the telegraph operator Ove Rolandsen’s courting and conquering of Elise, daughter of the rich merchant Mr. Mack at Rosengård (*Sværmere* [*Swarming*]); Knut Pedersen’s love for the Captain’s wife, Mrs. Elisabeth Falkenberg (*Under høststjernen* [*Under the Autumn Star*] and *En vandrer spiller med sordin* [*A Wanderer Plays on Muted Strings*]); and the mail carrier Benoni’s love for Rosa, daughter of the local pastor (*Benoni and Rosa*).

As the widow at the estate now owned by her son Gordon Tideman, “the old mother” is actually not that old at all and quite young at heart. She is an independent woman with a good sense of humor who takes care of her own affairs and passions, paying no heed to gossip. She likes the joys of life from wine to sex and laughter, but she is also a master at taking care of the businesses of the house. Her son greatly relies on her. In other words, she has a strong will and joyfully affirms life as she wants to, in line with Zarathustra’s *Übermensch*. With the courage to assert her own values, she eventually marries the local pharmacist who is not only younger than she is, but who belongs to a lower social class. Superior to the conventions and norms of “correct” behavior of which the people around them preach, the two act as happy as children do together.

Affirming the joys of good wine and food, “the old mother” brings Zarathustra’s words to mind. For, despite his periods of solitude in his mountain cave, Zarathustra is no stranger to the sensuous joys of life, bidding, moreover, his desired brothers to “break, break the old tablets of the never gay!” maintaining that “eating and drinking well, O my brothers, is verily no vain art” (316). The significance of the sensuous joys of eating and drinking well is also affirmed, as we’ve seen, by the French chef Babette in Dinesen’s tale “Babette’s feast” where Babette creates a great feast for a puritan congregation in a small coastal town in Norway. The two pious sisters, with whom Babette is staying as she seeks refuge from the French revolution, are terrified at the sight of her cooking. Peeking into the kitchen, one of the sisters sees “a snake-like head” move (a tortoise) and she is convinced that the house will be hosting “a witches sabbath” (40). However, like

Zarathustra, neither Dinesen nor Babette shy away from affirming the work of the Devil, and through her wine and cooking Babette brings the ignorant guests into an elevated sense of intoxication.<sup>144</sup> In this state, the members of the congregation leave their slave morality behind and forget about their grieves and grudges. Feeling an overflowing stream of joy and blessing run through them, they overcome their pettiness and forgive one another the minor sins with which they have been so obsessed.

Rejecting the authority of a Christian God and a puritan ethics, Zarathustra mockingly defends the devil and asserts that “my foot is a cloven foot; with it I trample and trot over sticks and stones, crisscross, and I am happy as the devil while running so fast” (Z 304). Miss Malin also has a “little cloven hoof” hidden beneath her skirt, “daintily gilded, like that of Esmeralda’s goat itself” (SGT 22). With her cloven hoof she

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<sup>144</sup> In a letter from Kenya, dated April 3, 1926, Dinesen writes about Lucifer that she understands the concept to mean “sandhet, eller Søgen efter Sandhed, Stræben imod Lys, Kritik ... I Modsætning til at slaa sig til Ro ... Tilfredshed og Kritikløshed i Paradiset” [“truth, or striving for truth, the endeavor toward light, criticism ... As opposed to settling ... Contentment and lack of criticism in paradise”] (*Breve fra Afrika* II: 31). Opposed to the Lutheran herd morality, Dinesen thus embraces the devil as a truth-seeker and rebel. However, she rejects the Christian devil as symptomatic of a medieval fear of life that makes people huddle together. In a letter to her mother, Ingeborg Dinesen, also from Kenya, dated August 22, 1926, Dinesen thus writes, while criticizing the morality of Sigrud Undset’s novel *Kristin Lavransdatter*—“Sigrud Undsets afskyelige Livssyn” [Sigrud Undset’s *despicable* view of life]—that “jeg tror at til syvende og sidst er det Djævelsfrygten, eller en eller anden Helvedes Frygt, som endnu sidder hende i Blodet, fra den norske Middelalder; jeg synes sjælden, jeg har stødt paa nogen som stod i et saadant Forhold af Rædsel til alle Livets Foreteelser; Rædsel for Kærligheden eller Lidenskaben under nogen Form, Rædsel for enhver Slags Oplevelse, og den frygtelige Rædsel for Mørket og Døden. Man synes tilsidst at hendes Mennesker aandelig talt kryber sammen som Folk under et skrækkeligt Uvej” [“I think on the whole it is fear of the Devil; or some other fear of hell that is still in her blood, inherited from the Norwegian Middle Ages. I think I have seldom come across anyone who has such a horror of all the phenomena of life; horror of any form of love or passion, horror of every kind of experience, and the frightful horror of darkness and death. In the end one feels that spiritually speaking her characters huddle together like people in a terrible storm”] (*Breve fra Afrika* II: 59-60). *Kristin Lavransdatter* is a trilogy, which follows Kristin from childhood to maturity, focusing on her relationship with God. It is set in the middle ages. Undset was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for the trilogy in 1928.

has overcome the repression of her body and realized her sexual desires. Though with no cloven hoof, Lieutenant Glahn in Hamsun's novel *Pan* likewise appears as a devilish satyr who rejects Puritanism and affirms his passionate love for the earth. On his powder horn is the figure of Pan.

#### **GLAHN: AN ASPIRING DISCIPLE OF ZARATHUSTRA**

*Pan* is a short novel about lieutenant Glahn who for one summer, from early spring to fall, lives as a stranger in a small fishing community in the far north of Norway. He lives in a cabin on the edge of a forest, and uses the settlement only to buy necessary supplies and powder for his gun, content in the freedom of his solitude.<sup>145</sup> At night he lies alone, talking to his dog, listening to the sounds of the birds calling in the forest. Now and then a burst of ecstasy wells up in him when he feels himself as one with the nature around him.

McFarlane suggests we see Glahn as “a child of Nature, ill at ease in society, a modern Werther with a dog for companionship instead of an Ossian, a soul that seeks its fulfillment in the forest and in solitude” (“Whisper of the Blood” 586). He concludes, however, that “it is only in a very limited sense that one can describe Glahn as a child of nature ... [Glahn] is a highly complex, introspective reversion to childhood; his fate is not the loss of inborn innocence but the precipitate of his own dæmonic, even pandæmonic,

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<sup>145</sup> As Nettum writes, “Glahn virkeliggjør Nagels drøm om ‘en Hytte i Skogen’—ikke som jorddyrker, men som jeger” [“Glahn carries out Nagel’s dream about ‘a cabin in the forest’—not as a farmer, but as a hunter”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 220). Nagel expresses this dream in a marriage proposal to Miss Martha

nature ... Glahn is not 'naive' ... but he obeys his 'senitmentalist' urge to *seek* Nature, renouncing the world of culture and attempting to find reconciliation with the great solitude" (588). Finally, concludes McFarlane, "*Pan* is first and foremost a love story, a story of 'mind-perverted, will-perverted, ego-perverted love'" (589).<sup>146</sup>

McFarlane is not alone in focusing on the intricate love affairs in *Pan* as the central theme of the novel.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, except for his hunting and roaming the forest, Glahn seems primarily preoccupied with women. He is in love with Edvarda, the daughter of the local fishing magnate, Herr Mack at Sirilund; has an affair with Eva, who he thinks is the blacksmith's daughter but who later appears to be the blacksmith's wife, and who seems willing to give him everything; and also sleeps with Henriette, the shepherdess, a young girl of about seventeen. Yet, a reading that focuses primarily on Glahn's love affairs threatens to reduce *Pan*, as Nettum confesses in his reading which has these as its focus (*Konflikt og visjon* 265). Nettum seeks to counter this threat by focusing on their existential implications. However, Nettum also gives us another clue, which can further enlighten our reading of *Pan* though Nettum himself leaves it unexplored. The clue regards Glahn's affinity for the mountains. As Nettum comments, when Glahn is drawn to the mountains he might be following either Moses or Zarathustra (256). The novel's "suggestive" and "dithyrambic" style is another connection Nettum makes to

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Gude, apparently intoxicated by the idea of two outsiders escaping from the humbug of civilization (*Mysteries* 208-09).

<sup>146</sup> McFarlane is here referring to Landquist's discussion of Hamsun.

<sup>147</sup> See for instance the articles by Rolf Vige and Rolf Nyboe Nettum.

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (257). Nettum's references to Zarathustra are worth investigating.

Henning Sehmsdorf, on the other hand, has investigated the connections between Hamsun's *Pan* and Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in his article "Knut Hamsun's *Pan*. Myth and symbol." Commenting on the sexual magnetism of Glahn, Sehmsdorf argues that

Glahn himself is very much a Pan figure ... In facial expression Glahn reminds us of a phase in Pan's development when he changed from a goat with human traits into a man with animal features. Glahn lacks, of course, the pointed ears and small horns which the ancient image usually (though not always) retained, but his eyes have the direct, sensuous expression of an animal ... The animal quality in Glahn's personality is the source of his personal magnetism and attractiveness in the eyes of Edvarda, Eva and Henriette. (364-65)<sup>148</sup>

Glahn's way of life in the forest also suggests mythical associations to Pan, and his cabin is "reminiscent of the god's mountain cave, *et loddent Hi*, hung with skins and bird wings" (365).<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Sehmsdorf quotes Edvarda's comment on Glahn's "animal look" to support his point. "Du har dyreblikk" ["You have the look of an animal in your eyes"], says Edvarda, presumably referring to the observation of a friend (*Pan* 31-32).

<sup>149</sup> "Et loddent hi" describes a lair, insulated with furs.

According to Sehmsdorf, Nietzsche offered the most influential modern reinterpretation of Dionysos and his companion, Pan, the satyr, during the nineteenth-century revival of the Pan tradition (353). In contrast to the sentimental shepherd of late Hellenism, Nietzsche's Pan, as Sehmsdorf comments, is the expression of Dionysian frenzy rooted in the profound experience of self in relation to cosmic reality, nature worship, and heightened sensibility (354).<sup>150</sup> Seeing these aspects as dominant in *Pan*, Sehmsdorf points out the "tragic but ecstatically affirmative view of life" and the "unconscious and 'nameless intuition of our blood relationship with universal nature'" which Glahn represents (356). Thus considering the similarities between Glahn and Nietzsche's Pan significant, Sehmsdorf concludes that the symbol of Pan in Hamsun's book is most likely an example of Nietzsche's Pan or Satyr, portrayed in *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>151</sup>

However, Glahn also resembles Zarathustra in his ecstatic affirmation of the earth, and Zarathustra, with his cloven foot, also resembles a satyr (Pan). Life itself speaks to

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<sup>150</sup> Discussing the Dionysian satyr in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes that "the satyr and the idyllic shepherd of later times have both been products of a desire for naturalness and simplicity. But how firmly the Greek shaped his wood sprite, and how self-consciously and mawkishly the modern dallies with his tender, fluting shepherd! For the Greek the satyr expressed nature in a rude, uncultivated state ... He was an enthusiastic reveler, filled with transport by the approach of the god; a compassionate companion re-enacting the sufferings of the god; a prophet of wisdom born out of nature's womb; a symbol of the sexual omnipotence of nature, which the Greek was accustomed to view with reverent wonder. The satyr was sublime and divine—so he must have looked to the traumatically wounded vision of Dionysiac man. Our tricked-out, contrived shepherd would have offended him, but his eyes rested with sublime satisfaction on the open, undistorted limnings of nature" (BT 52-52).

<sup>151</sup> Sehmsdorf considers it most likely that Hamsun read Brandes's essay "En Afhandling om aristokratisk Radikalisme" ["On Aristocratic Radicalism"] which was published in the Danish journal *Tilskueren* in August 1889. Here he would have "found an exposition of the most important of Nietzsche's ideas, including the concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysian," Sehmsdorf explains (355).

Zarathustra, as do birds and animals. Likewise, Glahn seems to be on familiar terms with nature. He speaks about the forest as his friend and gives anthropomorphic qualities to birds and animals—even to the grass.<sup>152</sup> Out in the forest at night, he lies on the ground, listening and watching, sharing with birds and beasts the joy of the approaching sun. Thus he affirms a faithfulness to the earth in line with Zarathustra.

Further, like Zarathustra, who escapes the city and the masses of people who do not have ears for his sayings, Glahn has escaped the city and his duties as a lieutenant and avoids any relation with the people at the settlement. Edvarda, however, draws him to Sirilund, to dinners and card playing at Mack's house, and to other parties and outings. But he acts badly in social situations. Invited over to the Macks, he seems out of place and topples his glass over (17). During an outing to an island he annoys the other guests with his pushing presence, begging them to look at his book of fishing flies (37). He shocks them with his lack of manners and sudden whims. On their way back from the island, he throws Edvarda's shoe into the water (38). Moreover, his conversation is either awkward or he intimidates people with his directness.

Glahn appears both defensive and aggressive during these social events while seeming increasingly desperate and frustrated. His jealousy and the intricacies of his relationships with women haunt him. At times, Edvarda seems to want no one but Glahn,

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<sup>152</sup> To Edvarda Glahn explains that “stundom ser jeg på græsset og græsset ser kanskje på mig igjen, hvad vet vi? Jeg ser på et enkelt græsblad, det skjælver litt, og det synes jeg er noget” [“from time to time I look at the grass and the grass might be looking at me, what do we know? I look at a single leaf, it shivers a bit, and I think that's something”] (23). Later he kisses the grass intimately: “Jeg stanset, la

at other times, she plays around with him, flirting with other men, such as the local doctor and a Finnish Baron—a friend of her father who comes to visit. Eva, on the other hand, willingly gives herself to him, but he does not feel the same passion for her as for Edvarda. After one of Edvarda's social events, a great ball, he escapes into the forest and exclaims:

Første dag i skogen. Jeg er glad og mat, alle dyr nærmet sig mig og beså mig, på løvtræne sat biller og oljebilleme krøp på veien. Godt møte! Tænkte jeg.

[First day in the forest. I am happy and feeble, all the animals approached me and looked at me. Beetles were sitting on the leaves of the trees and on the road they were crawling.] (54)

Earlier he has confided to the reader that “min eneste ven var skogen og den store ensomhet” [“my only friend was the forest and the great loneliness”] (19). In line with Zarathustra, Glahn feels soothed by the solitude he finds in nature, escaping the futile palaver of the people.

Yet, time and again, Glahn returns to the women. According to Sehmsdorf, Glahn's desire for women is rooted in his love for nature. In other words, Glahn's faithfulness to the earth is not entirely faithful to Zarathustra, but takes a detour via women. As Sehmsdorf explains, “it is not at all surprising that for civilized, urbanized

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mig på knæ og slikket av ydmyhet og håp nogen græsstrå i veikanten” [“I stopped, sat down on my knees and, filled with humbleness and love, licked some of the leaves on the edge of the road”] (41).

man instinct and life-force are most often represented as sexual. At a time when man largely has lost direct contact with nature and lives in an artificial environment, the sexual experience provides the most immediate access to primordial creative power” (368). At one point, Glahn has a vision of Pan in a crouching position, sipping from his belly (*Pan* 19-20). Sehmsdorf interprets Glahn’s Pan-vision as carrying “foreboding overtones of a perverse, self-centered sexuality. It suggests an erotic narcissism where lover and loved are the same person, the same body” (369).<sup>153</sup> Indeed, haunted by jealousy, Glahn is unable to achieve a sexual relationship with Edvarda, who is eventually engaged to marry the Finnish Baron. Hence he leaves the coastal settlement in frustration and despair. Later we learn of how he was killed by a shot that he appears to have orchestrated himself, while unable to get over his wounded feelings of love. Thus as Sehmsdorf concludes, Glahn not only appears as Pan,

image of sexuality and lord of the forest world; he also becomes Pan’s  
victim, expression of the human self tormented by the dictates of instinct  
and blind desire nullifying his individuality and consciousness of self; and

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<sup>153</sup> “Glahn unconsciously projects his erotic response to the awakening season into the universe and finds it mirrored there,” continues Sehmsdorf (369). “His own narcissism thus takes on a sinister cosmic dimension; it becomes all the more frightening and monstrous because, in his vision, it embraces all of creation” (369). Discussing *Pan* as an erotic text in the light of Georges Bataille’s philosophy, Kari Wessely, on the other hand, focuses on the connections between pleasure and death, and interprets Pan drinking from his belly as a symbol of “den samtidigt njutningslystna og självförbrännande kraft som är förbunden med pangestaltens dionysiska sida” [“the power related to the Dionysian aspect of the Pan figure which is both a desire for pleasure while it is also a self-consuming power”] (235). Moreover, Wessely reveals the connections between vitality, destruction, and transgression in *Pan*. She concludes that “i *Pan* gestaltar både erotiken som brunst och som begär en strävan efter den högsta livsintensitet, det absoluta ögonblick vars yttersta konsekvens är döden” [“in *Pan* the erotic becomes, both as heat and

he becomes Dionysian Pan, bewitched by the approach of the creator-god, celebrating his life-giving power in ecstasy and suffering his death. (386)

In other words, we cannot consider Glahn as a companion of Zarathustra, at best we can see him as a disciple or a follower. He represents a love for the earth in line with Zarathustra, but he fails in the long run to live according to Zarathustra's gospel, affirming the earth and new values that are faithful to the earth. Frustrated by his love for Edvarda, he prefers death to a revaluation of values.

Focusing on *The Birth of Tragedy* as the key to his discussion, Sehmsdorf, on the other hand, explains Glahn's death in terms of a failure to "find the inner balance to the power of Dionysos" with the principles of Apollo, the healer (383). "Rather than giving objective (Apollonian) shape to his experience ... he is swallowed up by the unconscious (Dionysian) force of the instinctual" (384). Johan Dragvoll, on the other hand, suggests we read Glahn as a "schopenhauersk figur" ["Schopenhauerian figure"] to understand why Glahn ends up as he does (21-22).<sup>154</sup> Hamsun was indeed inspired by Schopenhauer, as was Nietzsche.<sup>155</sup> Though Nietzsche was critical to some of his ideas and later attacked his philosophy explicitly, he supports his own arguments in *The Birth of Tragedy* by

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as desire, a longing to reach the highest intensity of life, that absolute moment whose extreme consequence is death"] (244).

<sup>154</sup> Nettum also notes the connections between Hamsun and Schopenhauer, arguing that Glahn's frustration is rooted in the idea that "kjærligheten er lidelse" ["love is suffering"], a conception that goes back to Schopenhauer, "seksual- og kvinnehateren" ["the enemy of sexuality and women"] (*Konflikt og visjon* 250).

<sup>155</sup> According to Kittang, Schopenhauer was "den einaste filosofen Hamsun verkeleg las, i unge som i eldre dagar" ["the only philosopher Hamsun really read in his younger as well as his older days"] (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 312).

referring to Schopenhauer's philosophy. Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer maintained that the entire world is the manifestation of a powerful will. However, whereas Nietzsche asserts the joyful affirmation of the will to power, Schopenhauer argued that life is suffering because the will is never satisfied. Rather than focusing on life's vitality and man's creative affirmation of life as the potentials of the will, he was concerned to find ways of escaping it.

While interpreting Glahn as a Schopenhauerian figure, Dragvoll's discussion proves helpful as an explanation to why Glahn fails to be a Nietzschean. Yet, it is Dragvoll's point that Glahn's life is portrayed as a failure to live according to Schopenhauer's goal, suggesting that his will was nonetheless too strong in the end. In other words, it might nonetheless be Nietzsche who best explains Glahn's destiny.

Dragvoll begins his article by presenting Schopenhauer's philosophy. Concerned to escape the will, as Dragvoll notes, Schopenhauer did prescribe a way for man to deny and escape the will. Schopenhauer pictured a ladder with three steps to climb: the esthetic, the ethical, and the ascetic. Through an absorption in art, man could peek behind the veil of Maya—an expression from eastern philosophy that he borrowed—and face the nothingness behind. Esthetic contemplation thus provides an escape from the will, however the release is only momentarily. Immersion in compassion, letting go of egotism, results in a more lasting form of release. The highest form of release, however, is attained through asceticism. By denying the will completely, the ascetic approaches the nothingness behind in a close encounter.

According to Dragvoll, Glahn goes through all of these stages, but in reverse. When Glahn first comes to the small community, he is detached and indifferent to life around him, like the ascetic. He falls down from this level when he encounters Edvarda. She disturbs his peace and triggers his will—his love and compassion for her and all of nature. Thus he enters the ethical level. Finally he falls down from this level too and leaves Edvarda. However, when he writes the book two years later “for sin fornøielses skyld” [“for the sake of his own pleasure”]—though he confesses to have forgotten quite a bit about it—he eventually becomes absorbed in his contemplation of that particular summer, i.e. he enters the esthetic level, to which his lyrical language attests (*Pan* 5).

Dragvoll’s argument is convincing. As he concludes, *Pan* shows us that if Schopenhauer’s philosophy is difficult to comprehend, it is even harder to live by (24). However, the ending to the novel is, as Dragvoll confesses, confusing and it disturbs his Schopenhauerian interpretation (24-25). An epilog is added to Glahn’s story, entitled “Glahn’s death,” told by the man who is apparently responsible for his death. He met Glahn as a fellow hunter in India, but his friendship with Glahn soon turned to jealousy as they went hunting for both the same animals and women. From what we learn from this man’s brief narrative, Glahn’s restless lifestyle in India appears indeed, as Dragvoll notes, as a logical conclusion from his earlier decline down Schopenhauer’s ladder (24). However, his death remains a mystery: did a jealous companion kill him? Or was he killed by a shot fired in defense? Was it perhaps an arranged suicide where his companion was nonetheless the murderer? And if it was a suicide, his death went against

Schopenhauer's philosophy. For, as Dragvoll points out, Schopenhauer asserts that a suicide is the expression of "en meget sterk livsvilje, nettopp fordi man da ønsker å gjøre noe radikalt med livet sitt" ["a very strong will to life, exactly because one thus desire to do something radical with one's life"] (25).

Attempting an answer to the question, Dragvoll suggests that Hamsun solves Schopenhauer's definition of the suicide "ved å la helten få dø en ubestemmelig død" ["by letting his hero die an indefinable death"] (25). Dragvoll can thus rescue his Schopenhauerian interpretation of Glahn. However, Glahn's will to upset his companion, intensifying his jealousy by sleeping with his girlfriend and by aiming a shot just above his ear, calling him a coward when his companion doesn't shoot back at him, is hard to miss (*Pan* 109-12). Indeed, as the narrator of "Glahn's death" confesses, it was Glahn's persistent desire to annoy him that finally caused him to pull the trigger and kill Glahn (*Pan* 112).

If Glahn's staged suicide was the result of his strong will—if it is his will that gets the last word of the novel—it seems a Nietzschean interpretation is preferable. Indeed, commenting on Glahn's escapes to nature, turning his back on people, Nettum shows how Glahn's love for nature is not caused by a release from the will, but by his insistent "trang til å reetablere sin naturkontakt ... Gjennom en nesten rituell påkallelse prøver han å mane den umælende natur til live" ["urge to reestablish his bond with nature ... In a nearly ritual incantation he attempts to call forth the speechless nature to life"] (*Konflikt og visjon* 256). Likewise Nietzsche emphasizes the active will that is present in the

encounter with life behind the veil of Maya. Referring to Schopenhauer in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche agrees with him that the veil of Maya surrounds man and that man experiences a tremendous transport when the veil of Maya is torn apart (BT 22-23). However, according to Nietzsche, this is experienced not through asceticism or an ethical life. It happens in Attic tragedy because of the Dionysian chorus, asserts Nietzsche, who in his high estimation of art as far superior to asceticism therefore disagrees with Schopenhauer's esthetics (BT 41). Moreover, it happens among primitive people, "either through the influence of those narcotic potions of which all primitive races speak in their hymns, or through the powerful approach of spring, which penetrates with joy the whole frame of nature" (BT 22).

Nietzsche and Schopenhauer thus differ in that Nietzsche focuses on the Dionysian power behind the veil of Maya whereas Schopenhauer longs for the nothingness behind it. Moreover, Dionysos represents the suffering and chaotic power of life—"the double nature of a cruel, savage daemon and a mild, gentle ruler" (BT 66). Titans dismembered him as a child, explains Nietzsche, but the promise of his rebirth later gave hope of "eventual reintegration" (BT 67). As the god of death and rebirth, Dionysos thus symbolizes the chaos of the abyss as Nietzsche describes it. Hence, Dionysos can actually explain Glahn's death as a will not simply to do something radical with his life by ending it, but in order to return to life—to experience reintegration.

If Glahn's death is a suicide committed in order to be reborn, his rebirth fails to take place in *Pan*. Zarathustra commends the man who is an overture and a going under,

who overcomes the small virtues, and creates new values that are faithful to the earth and all thinkable being. Glahn may have come far in overcoming the small virtues and narrow ethics of people around him, but we will never know if he was actually able to cross over by returning to life and successfully upholding his revaluation of values. Moreover, he would also have had to overcome his own jealousy and narcissism that reversed his revaluation significantly. In the light of Dragvoll's article, it seems unlikely that he will succeed an overcoming of himself, though Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy suggests it as a possibility.

#### **MASTER LEONIDAS: ZARATHUSTRA'S BROTHER?**

Master Leonidas Allori in Dinesen's tale "The Cloak" (*Last Tales*) represents a more successful attempt to cross over than Glahn, thus he is closer to becoming a companion of Zarathustra. In "The Cloak" the elements of love and jealousy, Dionysian faithfulness to the earth and sexual desires, play a central role, as they do in Hamsun's *Pan*. The tale focuses on the great old sculptor and revolutionary, Leonidas Allori who is arrested and condemned to death for treason. Imprisoned, Leonidas gives a speech on faithfulness to his student Angelo Santasilia. Interpreting this speech, Langbaum focuses on the "Oedipal situation," referring to the relationship between Angelo, Allori's most beloved disciple whom he calls his son, and Allori's wife, Lucrezia (206-08). According to Langbaum, Leonidas' sermon on faithfulness to Angelo "sets forth the paradox of the

moral life, which is lived between opposite imperatives,” i.e. faithfulness to his mentor versus faithfulness to his love (208).

Langbaum’s interpretation confines Leonidas’ speech whose core, I argue, goes deeper than the concerns of a love triangle. In the light of Nietzsche’s philosophy, Leonidas’ speech appears as a testimony to his Nietzschean determination to live according to Zarathustra’s imperative. Indeed, the central theme of his sermon is his love for the earth, reaching full momentum in his closing line: “I know that in my heart I have always been faithful to this earth and to this life” (LT 35).

Moreover, Leonidas resembles the spirit who has completed the three steps Zarathustra prescribes in his speech “On the three Metamorphoses.”

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child ... like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert. In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert ... [However,] to create new values—that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion ... Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred “Yes.” (139)

Leonidas has no need to run into the desert; he has already gone through all the steps. As an artist, he represents the childlike power to create anew. As the leader of a group of revolutionaries he represents the lion's freedom. In fact, like Zarathustra, whose home and peace is in the mountains, Leonidas is an "experienced mountaineer" (LT 38). Moreover, like Pan, he is strong, athletic, and magnetic. As he says of himself, he is "of peasant stock, and our soil to us has been a stern, bountiful nurse. My muscles and sinews are but firmer and harder than when I was a youth, my hair is as luxurious as it was then, my sight is not in the least impaired" (LT 34). His students call him "the Lion of the Mountains" (LT 27).

Awaiting his execution in prison, Leonidas is granted permission to take leave of his wife on the condition that his disciple Angelo takes his place in prison while he is away. If Leonidas should not return, Angelo would also have to take Leonidas' place at the execution. It is before Leonidas leaves Angelo to go to his wife one last time that he gives his speech on faithfulness to Angelo, speaking not only of his own faithfulness to the earth, but also of "God's infinite faithfulness" toward him (LT 35). Saluting "this physical world around us, these four elements—earth, water, air and fire," as well as his own body; "my marrow-filled bones, my flowing, never-pausing blood, and my five glorious senses," as "divinely true," Leonidas asserts, in line with Zarathustra, his gratefulness to what has been given to him out of the elements (LT 35). One last time, he continues, he wants to

observe the rich play of light of the sunset, and after that the moon's divine clarity, and the ancient constellations of the stars round her. I shall hear the song of running water and taste its freshness, breathe the sweetness and bitterness of trees and grass in the darkness and feel the soil and the stones under the soles of my feet. What a night awaits me! All gifts given to me I shall gather together into my embrace, to give them back again in profound understanding, and with thanks. (LT 35)

Again according to Langbaum, Leonidas' sermon "can be understood as both a reprimand to Angelo and a justification of his unfaithfulness," for "the son must obey and revere his father, yet he must psychologically overthrow him and biologically replace him" (208). However, the essence of Leonidas' speech is, I maintain, his celebration of the earth and his earthly love. Moreover, though he, unlike Zarathustra, affirms a "God," this is a highly earthly God and not the God of ascetic Christianity that Zarathustra rejects. Rather, like Lieutenant Glahn's vision of Pan, the God of Master Leonidas represents his affirmation of the earth, in line with Zarathustra. However, unlike Zarathustra, Leonidas, like Glahn, affirms the earth through his love for women.

Leonidas desires to consummate the love he feels for the earth through his wife, Lucrezia. According to Leonidas, God gave man woman so that he "might embrace and become one with the earth, the sea, the air and the fire" (LT 36). Sehmsdorf's interpretation of Glahn's sexual desires as a modern version of a Dionysian love for

nature, can thus also explain Leonidas' love for his wife.<sup>156</sup> Further, Leonidas explains to his disciple Angelo that Lucrezia “has been to me all glorious works of art of the world, all of them in one single woman's body. Within her embrace at night my strength to create in the daytime was restored” (LT 37). In other words, Leonidas' wife has not only allowed him to become one with the earth, her love has fueled his life as an artist. The two are combined in his faithfulness to the earth; his life as a lover, receiving from nature, and his work as an artist, giving back to nature.

However, Leonidas' disciple Angelo can not understand this kind of love. Reflecting on what a woman is, he concludes that “*all my creative power ... if things had gone as she wished,*” i.e. if he had received the love of Lucrezia which he desired and which she also wanted to give to him, “*would have been used up in the task of creating her, and of keeping her alive. Never, never again would I have produced a great work of art*” (LT 39-40). Angelo believes that had his love for Lucrezia been consummated, he would from that day on have had to be on his knees for her—all the time there for her as her lover—and that her love for him would thus have drained all his artistic energy. Hence, he is unable to affirm, or even recognize, the essential connection between his love for life—the earth and the woman—and his creative art. Thus he has no true art to give.

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<sup>156</sup> According to Langbaum, Dinesen had confided to him that “The Cloak” was meant to take place in the Kingdom of Naples in the revolutionary 1830s (206). Glahn's summer in the north of Norway is the summer of 1855.

Angelo's lack of understanding of earthly love is symptomatic of his status as a disciple and son. He is not a companion of either Leonidas or Zarathustra. Angelo looks up to Leonidas as his father and Master; he "had loved no human being as he had loved Leonidas Allori; no other human being had he at any time whole-heartedly admired," in fact, "he felt that he had been created by the hands of his master" (LT 28).<sup>157</sup> Even his love for Lucrezia proceeds, as Langbaum notes, from his love for Leonidas who had pointed out her beauties to him (207). Leonidas' words on faithfulness strike Angelo with a blow and he is finally overcome by his sense of guilt. However, "he was not really thinking of Lucrezia, for to him there was in the world no other human being than the father whom he had betrayed" (LT 40). As discussed above, Zarathustra repeatedly maintains that he wants no disciples, only brothers and fellow companions. The creative act has to be an individual and independent act. Angelo has, however, not matured into a brother of Leonidas, but remains his disciple. Hence, his art relies on his Master's guidance and presence, on his own he cannot create. "*With him—with him, I was a great artist!*" he exclaims in despair, facing the death of his Master (LT 40). Now, that the

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<sup>157</sup> I therefore question Pahuus' interpretation of Leonidas' relationship with Angelo, arguing that the former entrusts the latter with the role of being his true follower. According to Pahuus, Leonidas "forstår, at Angelo er tro mod tilværelsens inderste og største magter: hengivenheden, kunsten og kærligheden" [understands that Angelo is faithful to the innermost and greatest powers of life: devotion, art, and love"] (102). Pahuus thus fails to see the joke Leonidas plays on Angelo, borrowing his cloak while Angelo takes Leonidas' place in prison; the cloak that Angelo had told Lucrezia that he would wear on the same night while throwing pebbles on her window to announce that he was there to be with her. Angelo and Lucrezia had made these plans earlier while, the narrator suggests, Leonidas had been able to overhear them talking (LT 31).

Master is gone, he concludes that “*I am no artist, and I shall never create a glorious statue*” (LT 40).

Moreover, whereas Leonidas affirms the divinity of the elements and God’s faithfulness to him, Angelo is still not sure about the greatness of the earth. At one moment he conceives “the universe as perfect in beauty and harmony,” however, he lacks the confidence Leonidas has to affirm this idea, for in order to hold fast to it, he has to keep “apart from his fellows in a sort of antagonism” (LT 33). In order to attain this understanding in the first place, “he had traveled afoot the long way to the Duke of Miranda’s villa to see a recently unearthed Greek statue of the god Dionysus. Still without really knowing it, he had wished and resolved to have a powerful work of art confirm his conviction of the divinity of the world” (LT 33). In other words, while lacking the confidence of his Master—bolstering Leonidas’ powerful affirmation and celebration of life—Angelo falls short and does not become a companion of either Leonidas or Zarathustra, at least not in this tale.<sup>158</sup> It seems no one really does, for Leonidas does not have any true companion who understands life and affirms it like he does. He remains to his death the unique “great old master,” surrounded by disciples; his pupils who lack the courage and independence to create on their own and who remain attached to Leonidas as their “spiritual father, archangel and immortal” (LT 27).

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<sup>158</sup> Angelo returns in the next two stories in *Last Tales*, “Night Walk” and “Of Secret Thoughts and of Heaven.” In the first of these, Angelo descends spiritually into hell, where he learns in a surrealistic nightmare experience that he is Judas. In the second tale he has become a famous sculptor and the husband of Lucrezia. In this tale it seems Angelo has crossed over after going down into hell, asserting his own independence.

Lieutenant Glahn is also incapable of attaining any true understanding of his relationship to nature from others. Thrilled like a child to have a listener, Edvarda, who listens to him go on about his relationship with nature, he forgets himself in a long exposition about how to tell the time by looking at signs in nature; how he feels so free and at peace in the forest; and how he observes the traces of birds, a tiny animal on a leaf, a blue fly, a singular straw of grass, etc. (*Pan* 22-23).<sup>159</sup> But Edvarda cannot understand and her face turns blank; she becomes “enfoldig å se på” [“countrified to look at”] (*Pan* 23). Like Nietzsche, who is incomprehensible to those who are not among the strong spirits that can understand him, both Glahn and Leonidas are essentially inscrutable. Hence, neither Glahn nor Leonidas have any fellow companions with whom to share their experiences. On the contrary, they are on difficult terms with the prevailing norms of the communities in which they live, Leonidas because of his rebellious politics and love for his Campania, Glahn because of his unconventional lifestyle and love for Edvarda. Thus they are pushed away from social participation. In Glahn’s case, the conflicts are aggravated by his own jealousy and plotting of his death. As a result of their love and convictions they both die.

Zarathustra recommends solitude as a means to affirm one’s own values, but solitude attains a more ambiguous quality in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen where it

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<sup>159</sup> Keeping in mind Zarathustra’s emphasis on the child as the model for the new creator, Glahn’s child-like appearance is interesting. Nettum notes how Glahn is bound to appear as a child to the people around him because he affirms life in a way most people, “stivnende” [“stiff”], do not (*Konflikt og visjon* 263).

seems less desirable. The desperation of loneliness is especially evident in the case of Glahn, for though they both lack companions, Leonidas has at least gathered a group of disciples. As Marstrander notes, Glahn resorts to extreme actions to be recognized by others. “Det er denne trangen til å oppfattes, til ikke å styrtes tilbake i sin ensomhet” [“It is this desire to be recognized, not to be thrown back into his loneliness”] which causes Glahn to throw Edvarda’s shoe in the water during the outing to the island and spit the Baron in his ear during a later party hosted by Edvarda (38).<sup>160</sup>

While Marstrander points out a significant difference between Hamsun’s outsider and Zarathustra’s overman, his conclusion that the Hamsun-outsider’s situation is desperate and that there is “intet styrkende eller trøstende livssyn, ingen sak eller idé å vie sitt liv til” [“no strengthening or comforting view of life, no cause or idea to be dedicated to”] in the lives of Hamsun’s outsider-heroes, is disputable (40). Moreover, Marstrander’s biographical explanation, explaining the Hamsun-outsider as a representation of Hamsun’s own aspirations to become a great man and recognized author, confines his reading and reduces the potential of Hamsun’s heroes to zero.<sup>161</sup>

Underscoring the historical context to explain why Glahn fails to become a strong and healthy Pan-like man of the forest, Nettum comments that “det moderne

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<sup>160</sup> The last incident happens after Edvarda has directed Glahn to the kitchen, insisting that it is a more appropriate place for him to be at since Eva too is in the kitchen. It is when the Baron approaches Glahn shortly after, arguing that Edvarda seems at this moment quite in love with him, that Glahn spits him in his ear (*Pan* 82-83).

<sup>161</sup> Marstrander focuses for the most part on Nagel in *Mysteries* while making frequent references to Glahn in *Pan*. His attempt to categorize the rest of Hamsun’s *oeuvre* on his last two pages as parallel examples of the isolated outsider is offensive in its carelessness (64-65).

nervemennesket Glahn kan aldri forsvinne i ‘Skogmennesket’” [“Glahn as a man with a modern nervous system can never become one with ‘the forest man’”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 270). Nietzsche’s philosophy further reveals where Hamsun’s heroes fall short to become like the *Übermensch*, however, it also highlights the potential of their revaluations. The starving journalist in *Hunger*, the obstinate Nagel in *Mysteries*, and the recluse hunter Glahn in *Pan* tend to intimidate people with aggressive attacks against the status quo and thus a potential recognition of their revaluations becomes an even remoter goal. Yet, they have at least taken steps in the direction of Zarathustra. This is also evident in the cases I shall discuss in the following of the fabulous lover of life and wanderer August in the trilogy on his adventures, and in the case of Knut Hamsun himself—the traitor in *On Overgrown Paths*.

#### THE NIETZSCHEAN STEP-CHILD

While breaking with the norms of their social surroundings, both Glahn and Leonidas belong among the step-children in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen. Characteristic for the step-children is that their relationship to their environment is marked by a sense of conflict and opposition, as it is in the cases of Glahn and Leonidas, and in the case of Babette who horrifies the pious sisters with her culinary art. Likewise, the hallucination-ridden journalist in *Hunger*, who desires to write about the crimes of the future and the freedom of the will, disconcerts the editor he contacts who comments that

“De er så altfor hæftig” [“You are too intense”] and who therefore begs him to “være litt besindigere” [“be a bit more sensible”] in his writing (66).

Moreover, the step-children in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen reject conventional ethics, fixed truths and identities. With high aspirations for themselves and their self-enlargement, affirming their own values while aspiring to live life in great style, they threaten the status quo of their environments. The actor Kasparson in Dinesen’s “The Deluge at Norderney” who befriends the above mentioned Miss Malin (he is the one who gets to kiss her) clearly represents a direct threat to the status quo. In order to play the role of the Cardinal, for whom he used to be a servant, he—the bastard son of the Duke of Orléans and thus a step-son of society—has killed him.<sup>162</sup> Like Nagel in Hamsun’s *Mysteries*, Kasparson thus reveals a radical understanding of the justification of a crime. Scornful of the mob and their average “great men,” Nagel exclaims that “den store terrorist er størst, dimensionen, den uhørte donkraft som veier kloder op” [“the great terrorist is the greatest, the magnitude, the unheard of jack which rocks globes”] (40). Deriding, as we’ve seen, the masses of “middelshøie borgere i tre etages hytter” [“citizens of average size in three story cottages”], Nagel dreams about “en utviklet forbrytelse, en fremragende synd ... ikke den latterlige og borgerlige abc-vildfarelse, nei den sjældne og hårreisende utskielse, den delikate ryggeløshet, kongesynden, fuld av helvedes rå herlighet” [“a carefully planned crime, a remarkable sin ... not the ridiculous

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<sup>162</sup> Other examples of step-sons in the works of Dinesen include Jens, the illegitimate son of a prostitute, in “The Dreaming Child” (WT), and the poet and the king in “Converse at Night in Copenhagen” (LT).

bourgeois abc-blunder, no; but the rare and appalling debauchery, the delicate depravation, the royal sin, replete with hell's raw magnificence"] (53). What is striking with Kasparson, on the other hand, is that he shows no regret for having killed the Cardinal when he unveils his mask, for he is an actor, and an actor requires a part to play: "And why did I kill my master? ... I told you: I am an actor. Shall not an actor have a rôle?" (SGT 74). Thus Kasparson, like Nagel, affirms a sense of ethics that threatens the status quo of society's norms, defending (in principle in line with Zarathustra, though perhaps not in deed) the violence they commit against social norms, in order to overcome them and create new ones.

Kasparson escape society's power of jurisdiction by assuming a role. Nagel similarly resorts to wearing masks, pretending to be someone else. He at various times claims to be an agronomist, a collector of antiques, and a man of fortune, but all of this seems devious, as does his name (his lady friend Kamma, who comes to visit on his birthday, calls him Simonsen). Some times, he confesses, he calls himself Rochefort; "jeg slår mig på knappen og kalder mig Rochefort" ["I pat my button and call myself Rochefort"] (126). Further, he claims to be a "kvæn" ["Finn"] from "Finmarken" ["Finnmark"] in the north of Norway, a person of Finnish ancestry, suggesting that he has supernatural powers (48).<sup>163</sup> While acting in disguise to survive as social outsiders,

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<sup>163</sup> Nettum notes that Nagel alludes to his "overnaturlige evner" ["supernatural powers"] by alluding to his heritage (*Konflikt og visjon* 121). Further, "som 'kven' er han ikke bare bærer av den naturmystikk og den fantasikraft som man fra gammelt av har tillagt samer og finner, han er også en outsider, ikke i sosial, men i psykologisk forstand" ["as a 'Finn' he is not only a carrier of the natural mysticism of

crossing the boundaries of what social conventions say is right or wrong, Nagel and Kasparson are, however, also threatened by the risk to remain loners.

### **MASKS AS EVASIVE PERSONA**

Though Dinesen's heroes and heroines appear more confident in their solitude than Hamsun's heroes who at times seem quite overcome by their sense of being lonely outsiders, Dinesen does show their desire to attain companions. Hence, when Hamsun and Dinesen, like Nietzsche, emphasize the significance of wearing a mask as a tool for their heroes and heroines both to shape themselves à la the *Übermensch*, but also to protect their revaluations, Dinesen reveals, like Hamsun, the costs mask imply in terms of alienation and solitude.

Nietzsche prefers to remain incomprehensible to those who do not have it in them to become his brothers, and he advises, as we've seen, his favored philosopher to don a mask while unsettling the truths of his contemporaries. Rather than degrade himself to be understandable to the masses, he prefers to roam their minds, comprehensible only to his potential friends and brothers.

Everything profound loves the mask ... There are occurrences of so delicate a description that one does well to bury them and make them unrecognizable with a piece of coarseness ... there is not only deceit behind a mask—there is so much goodness in cunning ... a hidden man,

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nature and fantastical power which one from the old days has attached to the Sami people and Finns, he

who instinctively uses speech for silence and concealment and is inexhaustible in evading communication, *wants* a mask of him to roam the heads and hearts of his friends in his stead. (BGE 69)

To avoid coarseness and roam the minds of their contemporaries, only to be understood by kindred spirits, the heroes and heroines in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen follow Nietzsche's point and assume different roles under various masks. The masks thus assist them in surviving as Nietzschean protagonists or step-children to society.

However, a mask is not only something one wears because one is profound, it is something that other people impose upon one because they cannot understand one's profundity. While asserting that every profound spirit needs a mask, Nietzsche adds that

around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing, thanks to the constantly false, that is to say *shallow* interpretation of every word he speaks, every step he takes, every sign of life he gives. (BGE 70)

Hence, despite its potentiality for self-increase, wearing a mask also implies the risk of being misunderstood, including by those whom one wants to be understood.

Role-play confuses the boundaries between reality and fiction while it allows the actor to transgress the limits of his or her self, aspiring toward the creation of the overman or the overwoman, beyond the all-too-human mediocrity of people. However, being in the split position of, on the one hand, wanting to create beyond the all-too-human, and, on the other hand, desiring true companions, the actor's mask becomes

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is also an outsider, not in a social way, but psychologically" ] (*Konflikt og visjon* 121).

problematic. It facilitates the project of creating oneself and one's own values beyond the status quo, while protecting the aspiring hero(ine)—and (s)he must of course survive if (s)he is to attain any companions—but at the same time it also alienates the hero(ine) from his or her surroundings, causing them to be perceived with suspicion and rejection, or at best amazement and bewilderment, nonetheless, creating a gulf between the hero(ine) and his or her audience. In the following we shall see how these conflicts are played out in the lives of Hamsun's and Dinesen's heroes and heroines who apply masks when styling their own overcoming and reevaluation.

#### **HAMSUN'S FANTASTIC HERO AUGUST: ASPIRING TO CROSS OVER**

Like the role-play of Nagel and Kasparson, the role-play of August, the player and world sailor in Hamsun's wanderer-trilogy (1927-1933), assists him in remaining an outsider to the conventional norms of society while he aspires to roam their minds. We meet him first in *Landstrykere* [*Wayfarers*] as he arrives one day in the fishing settlement of Polden, far up north in Norway.

En vidfarende ung mand kom hjem til bygden, August hette han, en forældreløs. Han var egentlig fra et andet distrikt, men opvokset her, nu hadde han blandt meget andet været sjøgut i nogen år og gjestet mange land, det var under og mirakels hvad han kunde fortælle fra sit liv.

[A widely traveled young man returned to his home, August was his name, an orphan. He was actually from another district, but grew up here. Now

he had, among several other things, been a sailor-boy for some years and visited several countries. The stories he could tell from his life were wonderfully miraculous.] (10)

August takes great advantage of his unknown past, coming up with the most fantastic tales to the local Polden people. That his teeth are of gold, the result of an accident at sea, heightens his fantastic aura, which he adds to by wearing red scarves and golden rings and playing the accordion. Where he has learnt to play the accordion is another mystery. Alluding to the country where he supposedly learned the craft, “han talte om træer med sølvblade og om mannaregn i dammer, om skibe med tolv master og om mennesker som var grønne i ansigtet og blev fire hundrede år” [“he spoke about trees with silver leaves and about pools of manna rain, about ships with twelve masts and about people whose faces were green and who became four hundred years old”] (208). Further, he claims that he once played for the king of the kingdom far away by India, “Bakindien,”<sup>164</sup> King Caphavaripeilinglog, for which he received chests filled with riches, what kind of riches he is unwilling to let anyone know. But he shows them the keys to the chests which, he claims, are still in the capital of “Bakindien” (34).

August thus pretends to be a man of hidden fortunes, and he begins to trade in leather (13). At one point he claims to have walked in gold, where the rivers of Pretoria and Columbia meet, in a country where cannibalism is still normal (209-11). He has great ideas for various projects in which he wants to invest his money, and he enjoys playing

the rich man, generously giving gifts away, such as his rings (to women with whom he has brief—and unsuccessful—encounters, but also to his closest friend Edvart), a house (to Kristofer in Polden, a local fellow to whom he owes nothing), and even his money papers (actually lottery bills that suddenly turn into a great fortune). He gives these important papers to Pauline, his friend Edvart's sister, for her to look after them and take from them whatever she may need. In fact, even when he does not have the means to give, August wants to, and usually finds a way to do so also. When he lets Kristofer have the house without paying him back, for instance, he is himself nearing one of his lowest points, financially speaking. When at one of his lowest points, he gives his shirt away to his best friend Edvart, though Edvart has no money to give him—and August badly needs some money—because, August says, “letsindig og rundhåndet igjen: Du trenger den bedre end som jeg” [“magnanimous and generous again: You need it more than I do”] (33).

August gets his hands into everything, working for a while for the fishing industry as a skipper, drying fish, likening himself to Napoleon when bragging about his mastery of the business (54-55). He also trades in cigars, jewelry, and other treats from Russia, and likes to speak with a Russian accent, arguing that it improves his profit: “Så tror de mere på mig at de gjør en god handel” [“Then they're easier to convince that they're making a good deal”] (87). He instigates the draining of a swamp to clear more farming land in Polden, and when the work is finished he recounts—to the awe of his listeners—a

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<sup>164</sup> “Bakindien” refers to the Asian peninsula including Burma, Thailand, etc.

place in Australia where they had also drained swamps, but in such a scale that it could not even be imagined by the people in Polden (301). August thus inspires the desire to work and to expand farming and trade in Polden by his fantastic enterprises.

In the sequel, *August*, August, who's been out and about traveling again, returns from America, unrecognizable with his new teeth; white teeth. People gather around him and want him to tell them about his new adventures: "Vi vet ikke hvad som er sandt eller løgn, du vet det kanske ikke altid selv, men du er ialfald et levende avisblad og mere til, du er næring for vort drømmeliv" ["We don't know what is truth or lie, perhaps you don't always know it yourself, but at least you're a living newspaper and more than that, you are nourishment for our dream life"] (25). August, who personally admits that, every now and then, he tells something which is not quite as it is (30), can this time tell the Polden people that he has served as a missionary (25), and he has apparently also done business in Peru, sharing hundreds of thousands of cattle with the President (59).

Again August becomes "Poldens nyskaper og virksomme ånd" ["Polden's mastermind and active spirit"], taking the initiative to open a post office and a bank, building more houses, bringing more people to Polden (79). He plans to start up a factory, begins to trade in fir trees, and sows tobacco plants on his land. The latter plans are by no means successful and August eventually becomes the target of suspicion and violence from the townspeople who now, during times of financial depression, blame him for the modern changes and accuse him of being a criminal. Being a step-child and creator of

new values is not an easy task, and the book concludes with August's departure from Polden.

Instigating new developments, August appears in some sense as a spokesman of modern development and technology. However, in line with Hamsun's critique of modernity, August dislikes any kind of herd mentality among people, i.e. a capitalistic mass society would not please his palate. As Rottem notes in *Knut Hamsuns Landstrykere*, "August er på ingen måte en realistisk tegnet kapitalist" ["August is by no means a realistically portrayed capitalist"] (51). Moreover, August's "ekspansjonslyst og oppfinnertrang" ["desire for expansion and urge for inventions"] is basically fueled by his "eventyrlighet" ["adventurousness"] (51-52). Despite his fascination with progress and development and everything new, he is, in other words, not a typical representative of modernity. Moreover, his wandering lifestyle secures him from being identified with the roots of capitalistic and materialistic modernity.

August's fascination for modern inventions is, in other words, rather a product of his desire to always move on, never stagnating in old values. His interest in various projects is usually short-lived. In line with Zarathustra's emphasis on the transitoriness of values, seeing that life is in a constant becoming, it is his joy in *building* houses, not the houses in themselves, that inspires him to build more houses in Polden. The finished houses never receive the same attention as the construction of it in itself. "Det blev et hus mere i Polden, sa August fuldstændig likeglad med sine bortkastede penger" ["So we got

another house in Polden, said August, completely indifferent about his wasted money”] (*August* 279).

I therefore maintain that August by no means represents the modern capitalistic materialist. On the contrary, his faithful attachment to the earth proves the opposite. As Ferguson notes, August became a folk-hero of sorts among his Norwegian audience, responding to his “fabulous, life-loving side” (296). Even Marstrander, who otherwise derides Hamsun’s heroes as victims of pride and despair, praises August, arguing that Hamsun’s trilogy on August represents “den eneste større diktning i hans vidstrakte forfatterskap hvor grunntonen er befriende forsonet og menneskelig forløst” [“the only great work in his extensive *oeuvre* where the keynote is relievingly conciliating and humanly redeemed”] (12). While writing this trilogy, Hamsun “følte seg ett med tilværelsen” [“felt at one with existence”], concludes Marstrander (12).

Calling attention to August’s affinity for the earth, Hamsun goes on at length when he portrays August as he plants the sacred seeds of his tobacco plants. August is in grave silence, the reader learns, and has taken his hat off, giving the impression of a religious ritual (*August* 233). In the final part of the trilogy, *Men Livet lever* [*The Road Leads On*], he seems to roam the forest continuously. This is, however, also related to his visits to the young woman Cornelia with whom he is in love, but who shows no romantic interest in him, while intermittently engaged to two young fellows, Benjamin and Henrik. Nonetheless, being in nature, especially by the ocean, “hans egentlige hjem” [“his true home”], transports August, and he euphorically exclaims that “maken til denne verdens

herlighet kan ikke optænkes en gang til på et andet sted, for eksempel i himlen” [“the like of this world’s brilliance can not be invented another time at another place, for instance in heaven”] (*Road Leads On* 299). Moreover, whereas the other townspeople are afraid of or at least suspicious about the gypsy people, August is attracted to their familiarity with nature and animals. He sees this familiarity in Åse, who is half gypsy and half Sami, and in the gypsy Alexander. August is curious about their knowledge and reveals a great interest in learning from them.

August has become an older man in *Road Leads On*, but, despite his age, he has by no means lost his skills as an actor or a fabricator of fantastic stories and lies. This time he settles in Segelfoss, a larger town a bit south of Polden, working at the estate of Gordon Tidemand (who eventually becomes the town’s consul) as “Altmuligmand” [“jack of all trades”]. He is secretive about his past, claims to come from “alverden” [“all over the world”], most recently from “Letland” [“Latvia”] in the Baltic, and he goes by the name “Altmulig” [“handy-man”] (16). He acts as a “profet og en seer” [“prophet and a seer”] which includes giving advice to Tidemand about the paths of the herring schools (37). The latter finds “altmuligmanden litt for mystisk” [“the handy-man a bit too mysterious”], but he follows his advice and catches the fish (37). Eventually the doctor’s wife, who is originally from Polden, reveals his identity, but “Altmulig” dislikes to be identified as August from Polden and begs her to keep it a secret (45).

What August does enjoy is the play of life and the game of cards. We’ve seen above how Zarathustra celebrates the child’s game in creating anew, applauding the

ability to laugh, kicking away the “spirit of gravity,” being “brave, unconcerned, mocking, violent” (Z 153). In a similar playful spirit, August affirms the unconcerned play of life. “Ventet nogen at spil og spekulation skulde være August fremmed og dybt imot? Våge og vinde, risikere og tape, sætte ind, spille—” [“Did someone think that play and speculation would be foreign to August, — that he would be deeply against it? Dare and win, risk and lose, gamble, play—”] that’s when he’s in his element, like a child (47). But he is also the adviser and key assistant—not to forget an influential inspiration of grand ideas and plans for Segelfoss—to Tidemand, and the confidant of “the old mother,” as well as the doctor’s wife. He assists Tidemand in his construction of a new cabin in the mountains, including a road to get there and a garage for Tidemand’s new car. Eventually he begins his own business, raising sheep, but that becomes his final tragedy. Frightened by the sound of a hunter’s gunshots in the mountains, the sheep run down and push him over a cliff to his certain death.

It is in the final book about August that his role—the traveler and adventurer, player and actor, lover of life who overflows with creativity—gets its final touches, shaping him into an aspiring follower of Zarathustra’s sayings. As we’ve seen above, Zarathustra asserts the importance of “going under,” facing the abyss of the transitoriness of life with no God or absolute values, in order to overcome the all-too-human preservation of life and create beyond. Wandering in the mountains, August seems to encounter the abyss as he faces life’s unfathomable emptiness.

Hvis denne stilhet hadde en mening så var det denne: Jeg er tomheten! Av alle ting i verden er jeg tomheten! Den kjendes som det å være inde i noget, en vælde, en umulighet som ingen er eier av og ingen har sendt, men det er en vildelse. Jeg er tomheten!

[If this quietness had any meaning, then it was this: I am the emptiness! Of all things in the world, I am the emptiness! It feels like being inside something, a power, an impossibility that no one owns and no one has sent, but it is a delirium. I am the emptiness!] (299)

Certainly, August's encounter with the abyss is ambiguous. On the one hand, he refers to it in terms of emptiness, on the other hand, as something impossible. In other words, as in the case of Glahn's encounters with that which is hidden by the veil of Maya, it seems unclear whether August has a Schopenhauerian experience of the nothingness or a Nietzschean experience of the powerful chaos of destruction and creation beneath the veil. If it is the latter and if August were to act as one of Zarathustra's companions, the experience would fuel his own endeavors to create new values on new tablets beyond the herd mentality of people around him. And, as we've seen in the above, August does set up new tablets of values, unsettling the humdrum of the people both at Polden and in Segelfoss. Further, it is his will to live that is bolstered by his experience of the abyss. He begins to hum and praises the world and the path he has chosen: "han skal et sted hen" ["he is going somewhere"] (299). Even the storm which suddenly builds up can not disturb his joy: "meget artig og trøisomt for en gangs skyld å være i fjeld under uveir,

han hadde i så mange år oplevet det på havet” [“rather amusing and fun to for once be in the mountains during stormy weather, he had for so many years experienced it at sea”] (300).

Nonetheless, if August is successful as a Nietzschean in terms of his encounter with the abyss, he fails, like Glahn, to attain any true companions, though he is quite congenial compared to Glahn. When criticized by the people in Polden for his activities, August replies to Pauline, the local store-keeper, that

jeg [har] gjort mange store arbeider her og lært dokker mange ting, men jeg har ingen tak fåt og dokker har ikke villet ta efter. Det ser ut for at Polden endda ikke er noget landskap for en mand som mig å virke i. Men du kan være sikker på, Pauline, at det blir jeg som får ret tilslut, for hele verden går den veien som jeg har vist dokker.

[I [have] done many great works here and have taught you many things, but I have not gotten any thanks for it and you have not wanted to follow me on my path. It seems that Polden is still not a place for a man like me to work in. But you can be sure of this, Pauline, that I will get the last word, for the entire world is heading in the direction I have shown you.]

*(August 288)*

In other words, time is not yet ready for August who thus sees himself, like Nietzsche, as a man of tomorrow.

Hence, August clings to life and persists in his activities through the entire trilogy, trying to convince people about their significance. When he encounters his death on his way home from another visit in the mountains, he is therefore not only unprepared, but unwilling to face it. In contrast to Dinesen's great master of art, Leonidas Allori, who courageously approaches his death to return to the earth the gifts of the earth, August is terrified when he realizes that his last day has arrived. "The earth—my own well-loved Campania—will take my honest body in her honest arms and will make it one with herself," explains Leonidas to his disciple Angelo (LT 34). When August, on the other hand, sees a herd of sheep approaching, frightened by the sound of a hunter's shots, threatening to take him with him over the cliff, into the abyss, he loses any sense of dignity. Desperate he tries to stop them, waving with his cane. "Da August ser at alt er tapt griper han en sau i den lange ulden, kanske for å ha den å falde på, han holder den op for sig, men den spræller sig løs. Så føres han utfor" ["When August realizes that all is lost, he grabs on to the long wool of a sheep, maybe to have it to fall on, he holds it up to himself, but then it wriggles loose. Then August plunges into the abyss"] (315). August gets not only an undignified death, but a rather humiliating grave: "Et hav av sau blev sjømandens grav, står det i visen om August" ["An ocean of sheep became the sailor's grave, as the song about August says"] (315). Thus ends the story of August.

### **GOING UNDER OR CROSSING OVER?**

In the continuation of his emphasis on a powerful will, Zarathustra talks, in his speech “On Free Death,” about dying at the right moment, having the courage to affirm death freely. His doctrine is: “Die at the right time!” (183). Death should be a “festival,” explains Zarathustra;

a spur and a promise to survivors. He that consummates his life dies his death victoriously, surrounded by those who hope and promise ... He who has a goal and an heir will want death at the right time for his goal and heir ... And everybody who wants fame must take leave of honor betimes and practice the difficult art of leaving at the right time. (183-84)

Moreover, continues Zarathustra, “in your dying, your spirit and virtue should still glow like a sunset around the earth: else your dying has turned out badly. Thus I want to die myself that you, my friends, may love the earth more for my sake; and to earth I want to return that I may find rest in her who gave birth to me” (185). “Now you, my friends,” concludes Zarathustra, “are the heirs of my goal; to you I throw my golden ball” (186).

Leonidas has the courage and the will to follow Zarathustra’s teaching, celebrating the earth in his death as a way to return to life the gifts he has enjoyed. Moreover, though Angelo fails to appear as Leonidas’ companion, he has been a devout disciple who Leonidas can pass his goal on to, reminding him about “the divine law of proportion, the golden section” (LT 36). August, on the other hand, does not die freely,

and he has, moreover, neither companions nor disciples to pass the golden goal of his ambitions and aspirations on to. Though he seems content with the long life he has had, reflecting that “han har strævet meget, virket” [“he has struggled hard, worked”], and that he therefore deserves to be tired and perhaps take a nap, he is unwilling to let go of life and asserts that there is “intet under at mennesket nødig vil dø” [“no wonder man does not want to die”] (*Road Leads On* 299). Moreover, though August is elevated by his encounter with the abyss while up in the mountains, he appears, compared to Leonidas, the lion and champion of the mountains, a bit like one of his own sheep. Just before he encounters the abyss, he reflects that “egentlig hørte han ikke til heroppe. Når han så sig omkring var han i en fremmed verden med en overdådighed av tinder og skar overalt, et frådseri av gråt fjeld” [“actually, he did not belong up here. When he looked around he was in a foreign world with a profusion of peaks and passes, a revel of gray mountain”] (299). Nietzsche asserts that the abyss is a terrible sight, but his Dionysian hero has the courage to go under and face the abyss. August, on the other hand, is not quite sure about what he is encountering—is it emptiness or chaos? In other words, he lacks both the insight of Nietzsche’s Dionysian man and the courage to resolutely approach the abyss. Instead he resorts to his imagination: “da han ingenlunde var uten fantasi hadde han vel et øieblik da han ikke visste riktig av sig” [“as he was by no means without any imagination, he probably had a moment where he wasn’t quite sure what to think”] (299). The author thus suggests that August interprets his experience as a figment of his

imagination, resorting to his fantasy when logic fails, making the experience less intimidating for him.

Hamsun's hero in *Mysteries*, Nagel, also appears as a less courageous follower of Zarathustra though his revaluations of truths and values show potential. Scornful of the townspeople's humbug and their petty ways of thinking and behaving, he seeks, like Glahn, the forest. As Nagel explains, "man blir kjed av humbugen engang og gidder ikke røre ved den mere. Man går tilskogs og legger sig under åpen himmel, der er større rum, mere plass for det fremmede menneske og de flyvende fugler" ["One becomes bored with the humbug and cannot stand being around it any longer. One walks into the forest and lies down under the open sky. There is more room here, more space for the strange man and the flying birds"] (232). However, Nagel gets neither followers nor companions to join him into the golden space of the forest, and he remains a lonely, at times despairing, step-child in opposition to the townspeople.

Moreover, Nagel is increasingly disillusioned with the people around him. He has from the beginning been toying around with suicidal thoughts, carrying a vial of prussic acid, but he confesses that he finds it difficult to gather the courage to actually kill himself: "jeg ... har ikke mot til å bruke den" ["I don't have the courage to take it"] (34). Eventually he drinks the content of the vial, but the prussic acid has been replaced by water by "the Midget" without Nagel knowing about it. This proves, however, to be quite fortunate for Nagel, who, after he has emptied the vial, exclaims: "Herregud, det måtte ikke ske netop nu! Nei måtte det vel ... Han var ikke beredt endnu, det var tusen

ting han måtte ha gjort forinden og hans hjærne skinner og flammer av alt det han skulde ha gjort” [“Oh, my God, it can’t happen now! No, it can’t ... He wasn’t ready yet, there were a thousand things he had to do before he could be ready and his brain is ablaze with all the things he should have done”] (238-39). He prays that he will live through the night, or at least for an hour, he tries to vomit to get the poison out again: “Nei han vilde ikke dø, ikke inat, ikke imorgen heller, han vilde aldrig dø, han vilde leve” [“No, he didn’t want to die, not tonight, not tomorrow either, he wanted never to die, he wanted to live”] (239).

Terrified that his attempt to commit suicide by drinking poison from his vial might actually succeed, Nagel invokes not his earlier proclaimed heroes, Caiaphas and Pilate, but God. Ten times he calls out for God, praying that he will be spared the night over (238-40). In other words, when he’s really scared, he calls for the townspeople’s God, though he at other times denies a God.<sup>165</sup> Nagel survives the night, but he is haunted by the anxiety of death approaching. He claims to have seen a vision of a woman wearing a cross around her neck, a certain death signal to him, despite the doctor’s reassurance that it is all a matter of “nervøsitet og overtro” [“nervousness and superstition”] (262). “Angsten vilde ikke forlate ham, denne dumpe og hemmelige fornemmelse av at han befandt sig i nærheten av en fare, en ulykke, slapp ham ikke” [“The anxiety would not let go of him, this blunt and secret sentiment that a danger was lurking by, an accident, did

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<sup>165</sup> To Miss Dagny’s request that he be honest with her, Nagel answers that “hvis jeg hadde en *Gud* ... så vilde jeg sværge ved den Gud at jeg mener opriktig alt hvad jeg har sagt Dem” [“if I had a *God*... I would swear by that God that I mean everything I say to you from the bottom of my heart” (134).

not let go”] (268). He desperately searches for his iron ring that he threw into the sea before his first attempted suicide drinking the prussic acid, maintaining that the ring has magical powers to protect him. Unable to find the ring, and remembering the arrangements he has taken related to his planned suicide, including a farewell letter to his sister, he is overwhelmed by despair and finally drowns himself in the sea.

According to Nettum, Nagel’s first suicide attempt is guided by a desire to “tre inn i den store natursammenheng” [“enter the great interconnectedness of nature”] as “en oppvåkning—eller en gjenfødelse” [“an awakening—or a rebirth”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 177). However, his grand attempt fails, hence, “selvmordsforsøket ender i antiklimaks ... Nagels forsøk på å ta livet av seg ender i farse” [“the suicide attempt results in anti-climax ... Nagel’s attempt to kill himself becomes a farce”] (178). Moreover, he reduces himself to the humbug of the townspeople to the extent of invoking their God. His second and successful attempt to kill himself is therefore committed under the conviction that everything is “humbug,” even himself (179). Thus he goes under without crossing over, reduced to the all-too-human humbug he derides.

Nagel remains in a no-man’s-land until the end of his days, lonely without anyone to share his existential aspirations to affirm life beyond the humbug and pettiness of the townspeople. He receives the gifts of the earth and works at a revaluation of truths and values, affirming a range of perspectives and a faithfulness to nature, but he has no one to pass his goal on to. Rather than convincing his listeners about the significance of his experiences and perspectives, he shocks them with his tales and behavior, thus pushing

them even farther away from him. According to Marstrander, Nagel thus reveals the typical feeling of Hamsun's protagonists: "sårbarhet overfor medmennesker" ["vulnerability towards his fellow beings"] and "avmakt og behovet for forsvar mot den" ["the feeling of powerlessness and the need for defense against it"] (33). Though this rings true, Marstrander's claim that Nagel's critique of the townspeople is directed by his defensive attitude against other people fails to recognize the significance of Nagel's critique as a fundamental critique of modernity. According to Marstrander, it is when Nagel has tried everything else; "bønnfalt og brølt, men funnet verden døv for sitt budskap" ["implored and roared, but found the world deaf for his message"], that he begins to doubt the world and attack all the humbug that surrounds him (35). However, as we've seen, Nagel scorns the world's pettiness and humbug from beginning to end.

The reason why Nagel's death cannot be the festival Zarathustra defends, is rather that he still hasn't found anyone to whom he can throw his golden ball and who can participate in the festival of his death. According to Lorentzen, it is because Nagel is incapable of integrating his experiences in nature with a social life that he disintegrates and perishes.<sup>166</sup> Further, he lacks the courage to face death victoriously. Hence he does not die at the right moment, nor does he face death freely.

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<sup>166</sup> Moreover, according to Lorentzen, it is because Nagel is incapable of integrating the different aspects of his life that he becomes a hysteric; "et evig talende hysteri hvor kroppen utslettes av talen, før han til slutt taler sin egen kropp og eksistens til total taushet" ["a perpetually speaking hysteria where the body is obliterated by speech until he in the end speaks his own body and existence to a complete silence"] (91).

In line with Zarathustra's praise of those who know how to go under in order to cross over, a going-down and coming-up movement plays a central role in Dinesen's philosophy. According to Peter Hjorth S. Bjerring, "ned-op-bevægelsen er det mest elementære og fundamentale billede på livet, dets paradoksalt sammensatte karakter ... udfordrende afhændet fra Karen Blixen til ... os ..." ["the down-and-up-movement is the most elementary and fundamental view of life, its paradoxically complex character ... the challenging exposition from Isak Dinesen to ... us ..."] (180). Bjerring's remark on Dinesen's challenging insistence on going down and up—going under to cross over—is crucial. It distinguishes her protagonists from Hamsun's, in particular Nagel and Glahn, who finally go under voluntarily without coming up again.

Celebrating man's capacity to be an overture and a crossing over, Zarathustra extols, as we've seen, man's own creation of values as his redemption. In his speech "On Redemption" Zarathustra explains that "to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption" (251). Hamsun's heroes, on the other hand, often seem to seek refuge in the former, crying bitterly in resignation that thus it was. According to Nettum, the hero in *Hunger* "vil dø stående" ["wants to die standing], and, though starving to death, he pretends to be unaffected and thus sells his vest to give away money to a beggar (*Konflikt og visjon* 73). However, while relating to God as if he were himself Job, he reveals a despondent and passive understanding of his fate.<sup>167</sup> At times he

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<sup>167</sup> Nettum comments on the Job-motif in *Hunger*, discussing what it tells us about the journalist's experiences of God (*Konflikt og visjon* 64-65). Nettum concludes that it "forteller om en erfaring på det barnlig-impulsive plan som har sammenheng med forestillingen om 'gud' som en farsskikkelse" ["tells

opposes his “father,” God, in “trass” [“obstinacy”] and “blasfemi” [“blasphemy”], as “en likeverdlig motstander av ‘gud’” [“an equal opponent to ‘god’”], but at other times he goes down on his knees to thank him (70).

The *Hunger*-hero’s relationship to God is symptomatic of his lack of power and courage, revealing, I maintain, a sense of fate that sees life more as thus “it was” than “thus I willed it.” Likewise, as Nettum notes, “Nagel føler seg som et offer for noe han ikke er herre over, en fatalitet—‘Gud’” [“Nagel feels like a victim of something which he cannot control, a calamity—‘God’”] (*ibid.* 174). Though he is inspired by his solitude in the forest to affirm other values and perspectives on life than those of the small-town people—values which he desires to communicate to people—he eventually fails to affirm these, while he gives into a fatalistic understanding of his destiny, bitter about the people around him, feeling doomed to be misunderstood.

Compared to the *Hunger*-protagonist’s Job-like relationship to God and Nagel’s despondent attitude to God, invoking, in despair, the God of the townspeople who he otherwise dismisses, Kasparson in Dinesen’s tale “The Deluge at Norderney,” has a quite different and more self-confident relationship to God.

“Do you know,” he said, “do you know why I look to, why I cleave to, God? Why I cannot do without him? Because he is the only being toward whom I need not, I cannot, I must not, feel pity. Looking at all the other

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us about an experience on the childish-impulsive level which relates to the image of ‘god’ as a father figure”] (71).

creatures of this life I am tortured, I am devoured by pity, and I am bent  
and crushed under the weight of their sorrows. (SGT 76)

Kasparson feels eaten up by the pity for the all-too-human creatures that surround him. His sense of God gives him a chance to think of someone higher, someone who can be his companion, seeing that he himself has overcome his all-too-humanness and created his own redemption through his artistic-existential project, attaining a great role, acting as the Cardinal whom he has killed.<sup>168</sup>

The affirmation of life by Dinesen's protagonists comes closer, I maintain, to Nietzsche's and Zarathustra's, seeing their proud, courageous, and stoic will to affirm life through joys and pains, life and death. Both the Cardinal/Kasparson and Miss Malin approach the very likely possibility of death with stoic ease. During "a deluge which assumed the character of a terrible, grim joke," they offer, together with Calypso, Miss Malin's niece, and Jonathan Mærsk, a young man, their boat to a family of peasants, while taking the family's place in a threatened hayloft (SGT 4). The tale concludes with the water rising in the loft and we never learn if they were rescued or not. Miss Malin and Kasparson, however, assert their courage in the possible encounter with death. With her dress wet from the water rising, Miss Malin gets up, wearing "on her shoulders that death's-head by which druggists label their poison bottles," looks at Kasparson with

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<sup>168</sup> Aiken cleverly comments that "Dinesen rewrites Nietzsche on the death of god" in "The Deluge at Norderney" where Kasparson kills the Cardinal to attain his role (290n16).

radiant eyes and bids him kiss her (SGT 78). Then she recalls what she, as a young girl, had said about birds in cages.

How dreadful that people shut up birds in cages ... If I could so live and so serve the world that after me there should never again be any birds in cages, they should all be free— (SGT 79)

Miss Malin wanted freedom for the birds to fly as they would like; now she herself has attained the power to fly freely away. Her sexual desire satisfied, she is free to return to the earth, flying away from the chains of social conventions.

#### **DINESEN'S HEROINE PELLEGRINA: GOING DOWN AND UP**

Though there are, I would argue, a few women in Hamsun's novels that we can read as Nietzschean heroines, such as "the old mother" in *The Road Leads On* and Marianne in the *Segelfoss* novels, to whom I shall return later, the step-children in his books are mainly male.<sup>169</sup> In Dinesen's tales, on the other hand, the step-daughter is

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<sup>169</sup> Other examples of the step-child in Hamsun's texts than those I have discussed, include the neurasthenic refugee from the city Knut Pedersen in the trilogy on his wandering life as a migrating peasant worker (*Under Høststjærnen* [*Under the Autumn Star*], *En Vandrør spiller med Sordin* [*A Wanderer Plays on Muted String*], and *Den siste Glæde* [*The Last Joy*]), the castrate Oliver in *Konerne ved Vandposten* [*Women at the Pump*], and Abel Brodersen in *Ringens Sluttet* [*The Ring is Closed*], who turns his back on bourgeois society in aristocratic disdain. Even in *Markens Grøde* [*The Growth of the Soil*], the novel for which Hamsun was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1920, and which is generally read as his vision of the ideal farmer who has returned to the roots of life in opposition to modern society, the step-child has a central part, played by the wandering sheriff Geissler. According to Ferguson, Hamsun, in *The Growth of the Soil*, "attempted to show society as he wished it were; unchanging, strong and sure, a solid farm-based culture that succeeding generations affirmed without real question or doubt, one that effortlessly withstood the challenge of town and industry" (249). Yet, as Ferguson also notes, sheriff Geissler, who also plays an important role in the novel, shares certain characteristics with other enigmatic characters in Hamsun's work (Ferguson refers to the lighthouse-keeper Schøning in *Benoni* and the telegraph operator Bårdsen in the *Segelfoss* novels). "These characters have in common a slight sense of mystery about them," writes Ferguson, noting, moreover, Geissler's "powers to astonish and

represented in large numbers by, for instance, Miss Malin in “The Deluge at Norderney” (SGT), Babette in “Babette’s Feast” (AD), and the opera-singer Pellegrina in “The Dreamers” (SGT) and “Echoes” (LT) who will be discussed in the following.<sup>170</sup>

Like Miss Malin, the opera-singer Pellegrina, whom we first encounter in “The Dreamers” (*Seven Gothic Tales*) and later in “Echoes” (*Last Tales*), has the ability to fly away at the moment she desires, not to be confined by any constraints she dislikes. Eventually, as we shall see, she also affirms her death in a heroic manner. However, first she performs a mock death. In “The Dreamers” we learn how Pellegrina Leoni, the greatest opera singer of her time, determines to let the world know she has died after she has lost her voice in a fire. Recognizing the end of her career as an opera singer, she begins instead a career of wandering, assuming a different name and character in each place. She is a great artist still, but an artist in life, playing roles as she used to on the stage and giving happiness through these roles, refusing to be tied down to a single identity. Moreover, assuming different roles, as Olalla the whore, Madame Lola the revolutionary, and the saintly humanitarian Rosalba, she preserves her ability to take off whenever she desires.

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delight in an enigmatic way ... possible on account of his long absences from the scenes of his activities” (251-52). I maintain that Geissler not only has a sense of “mystery” about him and that he has the power to “astonish and delight,” but that he essentially represents a disruption of the “ideal” life of the settled farmer which Hamsun, contrary to Ferguson’s interpretation, by no means sees as “unchanging, strong, and sure.” Nor is Hamsun a spokesman for a narrow-minded affirmation that excludes questioning. On the contrary, as we’ve seen, questions and doubt permeate the projects of his protagonists.

Compared to the role-play in Hamsun's work—represented by August's fantastic fabrications, Nagel's dubious claims, and the *Hunger*-hero's compulsive lying—the theatrical act is more substantial in Dinesen's tales, fulfilling its potential as a sophisticated art. Styling herself into the becoming of various characters, Pellegrina brings to mind Nietzsche's point that one must give "style" to one's character, which he explains in *The Gay Science*. "*One thing is needful,*" asserts Nietzsche:

To "give style" to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye ... Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. (GS 232)

While particularly obvious in the case of Pellegrina, this sense of styling one's self as a work of art actually elucidates the use of masks by all of Hamsun's and Dinesen's protagonists who reject the idea of a fixed identity while they—faithful to the flux of life—shape themselves as art. Moreover, as we have seen and shall see with Pellegrina, masks are used not only to style oneself, but to remain an elusive persona.

Men fall madly in love with Pellegrina in her various roles, but when the time comes for consequences, and she feels her mask threatened, she disappears and assumes

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<sup>170</sup> Other examples include the fearless girl Alkmene in "Alkmene" (WT); the gypsy woman Simkie, widow at the town's mill, in "The Caryatids, an unfinished tale" (LT); and the young actress Malli in "The Tempest" (AD).

another role elsewhere. Lincoln, who loved Pellegrina as Olalla who he met in Italy, later recalls how she escaped from his hunt for her:

she did what I had always feared that she might do: she spread out her wings and flew away. Below the round white moon she made one great movement, throwing herself away from us all, and the wind caught her and spread out her clothes. I have said already that on her flight from me up the hill she had looked like some big bird which runs to catch the wind and get on the wing. Now again she behaved 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 lift herself up with the wind, then, running straight across the road, with all her might she threw herself from the earth clear into the abyss, and disappeared from our sight. (SGT 327)

I shall return to the other incident of Pellegrina's "flying" to which Lincoln refers later. For now it suffices to see that Pellegrina, in contrast to August, is able to maintain her mask, while embodying the qualities of a bird who can fly away freely.

Discussing Dinesen's philosophy of the mask, Johannesson argues that it expresses "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" (68). It is, continues Johannesson, "a Romantic philosophy of art and life because it places a very high value on illusion and dreams, maintaining that reality is mean and inferior ... A deep

and fundamental skepticism lies at the basis of this view of art and life,” concludes Johannesson, for it suggests “that the mask is a value conferred by the imagination on reality ... Only through the application of the mask, or several of them, does life become exciting and meaningful, only then does one thing become more important than any other” (79-80).

Though I agree with Johannesson’s conclusion that the mask reveals a fundamental skepticism, I disagree with his emphasis on its Romantic identity, asserting that life itself is mean and inferior. On the contrary, Pellegrina, like Zarathustra, celebrates the earthly gifts of life. As Olalla we learn that “she had a great love for Italy, and much knowledge of good food and wine. At times she would dress up, as gay as a rainbow in cashmeres and plumes ... Then a stronger or more graceful dancer was not to be found” (SGT 284). Moreover,

she was extraordinarily alive to all impressions ... But at the same time there never seemed to be to her much difference between joy and pain, or between sad and pleasant things. They were all equally welcome to her, as if in her heart she knew them to be the same ... She was very keen to please, and would take much trouble about it, though not as a servant who becomes rigid by his fear of displeasing, but like somebody very rich, heaping benefactions upon you out of a horn of plenty. Like a tame lioness, strong of tooth and claw, insinuating herself into your favor ... There was nothing black or sad in her nearness, and the dark shades of

care, regret, ambition, or fear ... had been exiled from her presence. (SGT 285-87)

The skepticism expressed in Dinesen's use of masks is clearly not a skepticism that finds life mean, but rather the skepticism Nietzsche presents which asserts that there are no essential truths, but that one must employ a range of perspectives in order to increase our understanding and affirmation of life.<sup>171</sup> As Selboe explains, discussing Dinesen's "maskefilosofi" ["philosophy of the mask"], the mask represents the idea that the appearance of life is always an interpretation (70). "Maskens forhold til ansigtet er analogt med (kunst)framtrædelsens forhold til væren" ["The relationship between the mask and the face is analogous to the relationship between (art's) appearance and being"] (70). Further, as Schacht asserts in "Nietzsche's kind of philosophy" while discussing Nietzsche's perspectivism and his rejection of absolute truth, Nietzsche avails himself of multiple perspectives so that he may develop and sharpen his "eyes" towards a growing

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<sup>171</sup> Against blind convictions, Nietzsche favors skepticism: "I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply: 'Let us try it!'" (GS 115). However, he derides "the sceptic, that delicate creature, [who] is all too easily frightened; his conscience is schooled to wince at every No, indeed at a hard decisive Yes" (BGE 136). This is the skepticism of modern nihilism, which Nietzsche attacks as "the arrogant disdain for philosophy" and the growing "fear" against "the frontiers of knowledge" that he sees around him in modern Europe (BGE 130). Hence, while scorning the "sedative and soporific ... gentle, gracious, lulling poppy scepticism"—harrying a "nihiline" and diseased Europe suffering from "sickness of will"—he underscores that his favored philosopher is "not a sceptic" (BGE 136). It is Nietzsche's point that beyond the sick skepticism and nihilism of modern men is the powerful will that sets its own "objectives." Hence, he "welcome[s] an *objective* spirit," for he feels "sick to death of everything subjective and its accursed ipsissimosity" (BGE 133). Nietzsche praises "the objective man" as "the man who no longer scolds or curses as the pessimist does" (BGE 134). "The objective man," explains Nietzsche, is a "measuring instrument," not "an end" in himself, who goes "out to welcome everything and every experience" (BGE 135). In other words, the objective man is he whose interpretations are never closed, while he himself is always open to new interpretations. "The objective man"—whose "thoughts are roaming"—sustains the quest for "knowledge" (BGE 134).

and deepening comprehension (159). He insists to “leave open the possibility of other interpretations” (158), and “he tries to keep us from settling into any one line of thinking that would become a rut and lead us to neglect others that are no less germane to matters under consideration” (159). Applying different perspectives as a “dancer” not to be “frozen” within any one of them, Nietzsche thus always keeps the possibility open of both broadening and sharpening his view, concludes Schacht (165).<sup>172</sup> This is clearly a skepticism that is quite different from the nihilism to which Johannesson alludes.

Moreover, Pellegrina’s—or Olalla’s—Zarathustra-like affirmation of the gifts of the earth enamors her suitor, Lincoln. On his way to Genoa, searching for Olalla who leaves him when he asks her to marry him and come with him to England, Lincoln meets, at Hotel of Andermatt, “two nicely dressed and well-mannered young gentlemen,” Friedrich Hohenemser (or the Pilot, as Lincoln names him since he reminds him of a dog) and the Swedish Baron Guildenstern (SGT 292). Talking together they realize that they have all encountered the same woman under various names; Lincoln met Olalla, the Pilot met Madame Lola, the Baron met Madame Rosalba.

Pilot met Madame Lola in Lucerne, where she was working as a revolutionary. She greatly impressed him by her courage and charm, but, as in Lincoln’s case, she left him behind when he started to lay too many claims on her life. The Baron first heard about Madame Rosalba from a friend as “a saint of the first magnitude” about whom, he recalls, there was also some sense of death (SGT 305). The Baron later met her while she

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<sup>172</sup> See my Chapter II for Nietzsche’s use of the dance as a metaphor for his philosophy.

was residing at a château, paying frequent visits to the poor and the sick, assisting them in any way she could. The Baron is immediately attracted to her and desires to consummate his love with her, and is therefore annoyed by her superior detachment to his endeavors. Moreover, the Baron reflects that one thing was strange about her religion. Brought up a Lutheran himself, he asserts that “I know the difference between saintliness and sin” (SGT 308). With her, on the other hand, the Baron reflects, “it was difficult to know which was which. She preached theology with as much voluptuousness as if the table of the Lord was the one real treat to a gourmet, and when we talked about love she would make it look like a pastime in a kindergarten” (SGT 308). The Baron did not like this characteristic of Madame Rosalba, which we can recognize as her revaluation of values in line with Zarathustra; it made him think of her as a “holy witch and wanton saint” (SGT 309). He claims, moreover, to have seen the “brand of the witch” upon Madame Rosalba in a deep scar that ran “from her left ear to her collar bone ... like a little white snake” (SGT 312).

It is Madame Rosalba’s scar that makes the men realize that they have been talking about the same woman. And by a fantastic coincidence, they all see her pass by them in the hotel. She must have seen them too, for in great distress, the waiter tells them a moment later, she has abruptly left the hotel in a coach, despite the stormy weather. The three men get a hold of a coach for themselves and begin their hunt for her. It is at this point that the other incident of her appearing as a bird who flies away, referred to by

Lincoln above, occurs. Her coach left behind, she runs out into the mountains. Catching up with her, Lincoln sees how

the wind whirled her clothes about. Sometimes it filled them and stretched them out, so that she looked like an angry owl on a branch, her wings spread out. At other times it screwed them up all around her, so that on her long legs she was like a crane when it runs along the ground to catch the wind and get on the wing. (SGT 319)

Finally she crosses the precipice.

Pellegrina seems “quite without life” when the men rescue her out of the abyss, but she remains alive to give her final thanks to life (SGT 328). The three men are at this point joined by a fourth; a Jew who they have all noticed together with Pellegrina acting under her various names. As it turns out, the old Jew, Marcus, knew her as a friend and promoter when she was still a great opera singer. Indeed, it was he whom Pellegrina commissioned to take care of the arrangements, announcing her death, that is, as Pellegrina. Marcus explains to the men that they have killed her now, by trying to determine her identity (SGT 331).

What Marcus further explains to the three men elucidates Pellegrina’s Zarathustra-like affirmation of life. First of all, she has always had a great appetite for life. “She was like a man who has been given an elephant gun and is asked to shoot little birds,” says Marcus, “or like a great bird, an albatross, asked to hop and twitter with the little birds within an aviary ... she was badly hurt and disappointed because the world

was not a much greater place than it is” (SGT 336). After the fire, continues Marcus, she tried to kill herself with a full dose of opium, but “she had too much life in her” (SGT 341).

Marcus’ story brings us back to the suicide attempt, after which Pellegrina ponders her identity; how she has been too selfish and too hung up in what might happen to Pellegrina. Her conclusion is that the accident and the loss of her voice are not cruel things at all and need not be either (SGT 343). Relieved from the illusion of being bound to one essential identity, she determines instead that she “will be always many persons from now on. Never again will I have my heart and my whole life bound up with one woman, to suffer so much” (SGT 345). Thurman interprets this line as a tragic line spoken by “a woman whose experience of loss has convinced her that it is unsafe to be ‘one woman again, to suffer so much’” (439-40). Yet the line is not spoken by someone so utterly wounded that she is only concerned about protecting herself from life. On the contrary, it is the line spoken by a woman who realizes the loss of being attached to the illusion of one identity, wanting, on the other hand, to affirm life beyond that. Thus she echoes Nietzsche’s critique of the illusion of a central “being” behind one’s action. Affirming, moreover, like Zarathustra, the abyss—the lack of essential truths or absolute identities—she embraces the freedom it gives her to live life joyfully in multiple fashions. She advises Marcus to follow her way, seeing the joys it will bring him:

Be many people. Give up this game of being one and of being always  
 Marcus Coccoza. You have worried too much about Marcus Coccoza, so

that you have been really his slave and his prisoner ... I should like you to be easy, your little heart to be light again ... I feel Marcus ... that all people in the world ought to be, each of them, more than one, and they would all, yes, all of them, be more easy at heart. They would have a little fun. (SGT 345-46)

Zarathustra comes down from his mountain cave to convince wise men that there is joy in life. In the spirit of Zarathustra, Pellegrina has followed this imperative, rejecting the dreary norms of society's wise men, while living in the element of joy.

Finally, half dead after the fall into the precipice, Pellegrina plays, for a final time, the role as Pellegrina, the opera singer, housing within herself a "storm of woe and triumph" (SGT 352). Having affirmed the earth in its multiple riches and potentialities, she is ready to face death freely. In fact, she even attains a follower in Pilot who, Lincoln tells us, "followed her advice, and took to being more than one person ... [He] was happier after he had begun to follow the plan of Pellegrina, for a secret in his life was an asset to him as well as to Fridolin," his second name and role (348).

Discussing "The Dreamers," Langbaum, like Thurman, emphasizes the losses in Pellegrina's life and reads her death as "tragic" (109). According to Langbaum, Pellegrina as Olalla, Madame Lola, and Madame Rosalba lives a life of "no hope, she does not look before or after, but rides the currents of life with the passivity and indifference of a natural force" (97). I object to Langbaum's pessimistic interpretation, while maintaining that Pellegrina, after the accident, affirms life and creates it as she

wants to in celebration of the earth. Moreover, whereas Langbaum argues that Pellegrina is left free “to be an amoral natural force,” I argue that she—while faithful to the earth and its procreative forces—erects new tablets of values, as Zarathustra bids his listeners to do, in a constant becoming, affirming the potential of her own self (100). While continuously discarding aged sides of herself, thus avoiding fixedness, Pellegrina is faithful to the flux of life, while affirming values that are faithful to the earth and the procreative forces of nature, specifically in her case as sexuality. I therefore also reject Bjerg’s conclusion, asserting that “Pellegrina ... fik ikke lov at leve sin skæbne ud, nu hævner hun sig ved at leve skæbneløst” [“Pellegrina ... was not allowed to fulfill her destiny, now she takes her revenge by living without any destiny”] (97). Against Bjerg, I argue that Pellegrina fulfills her life by affirming the multifaceted life—or destiny—she has the capacity to create, living life as an actress who makes life into art. She is by no means amoral, but super-moral, annihilating old norms while affirming new values.<sup>173</sup>

Recognizing Pellegrina’s generosity, how she overflows with life, it is evident that she has no desire for revenge. As Sara Stambaugh asserts, there is no “vengeance” in

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<sup>173</sup> In a letter of December 19, 1944, to Johannes Rosendahl, a lecturer and College Principal, who was also a member of the Danish resistance movement, Dinesen objects against his separation between the “good” and the “beautiful.” “Jeg har tænkt, og undret mig, meget over, at De ser paa den ‘Æstetiske’ Livsanskuelse som *billigere* end den etiske. Jeg selv skulde mene, at det var det sidste man kunde sige om den. Efter min egen Erfaring kan man af og til slippe uventet billigt fra det i Livet, men aldri i Kunsten ... Det gælder her, synes jeg, mindre en Konflikt mellem det gode og det skønne end en Konflikt mellem Nuet og Tiden i det lange Løb, det er en Fordring om Overblik, og Evne til at se paa langt Sigt” [“I have pondered and wondered why you consider the ‘aesthetic’ perspective on life as *cheaper* than the ethical. I personally find that to be the last one can say about it. According to my experience one can often get away with things surprisingly easy in life, but never in art ... In my opinion this is not a conflict between the good and the beautiful but a conflict between the present and the future, it is a demand to look at

Pellegrina, though her experiences could easily evoke such a spirit (103). Bjerring describes Pellegrina, like Babette, as one of Dinesen's love goddesses—Venus and Lucifer combined—who shows no revenge, but, on the contrary, delivers others to a greater appreciation of the joys of life (157). Likewise, Stambaugh asserts that Dinesen, while rejecting Protestant Christianity, nevertheless “propounded a gospel of love ... announced in Pellegrina's charity to her male persecutors” (112).<sup>174</sup> In response to her suitors' attempts to entrap her, Pellegrina holds on to her “Dionysian view of life” and her sexual freedom (106). Hence, “in each encounter ... Pellegrina returns good for evil, as even the vicious Swedish Don Juan is forced to admit, because she has retained the love for the poor and unhappy of the world which was Pellegrina's key passion” (103).<sup>175</sup> Indeed, that Pellegrina, like Leonidas, affirms a gospel of love, while she is free from the defensive-aggressive attitude of Hamsun's *Hunger*-hero, Nagel, and Glahn, is a clue to why she, like Leonidas, gets a follower whereas they do not.

We saw that August also enjoys giving away. However, whereas August's generosity is often related to his desire to appear as a great man of fortune, Pellegrina's generous giving is more clearly defined as a product of her embodied earthly richness. As

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things with a larger perspective” (KB I: 399). In other words, an artistic approach to life does not imply a rejection of ethics, but an affirmation of life that considers it in a larger perspective.

<sup>174</sup> Referring to Pellegrina's persecutors, Stambaugh is alluding to all the men who try to trap Pellegrina in a cage, i.e., all her suitors.

<sup>175</sup> Stambaugh argues that the Baron was out to rape Pellegrina (105). Indeed, he confesses to the other men at the hotel in Genoa that he had considered her a “rival” and that he had wanted to find out if she was a “white swan” who could “count the names of her lovers with the beads of her rosary, or ... some perverse old maid” (SGT 307-08).

Lincoln notes, her giving was not a result of pretension, but came from “somebody very rich, heaping benefactions upon you out of a horn of plenty” (SGT 285). Pellegrina’s gift-giving nature is entirely in line with Zarathustra who, in his speech “On the Gift-Giving Nature,” bids his disciples “to become sacrifices and gifts yourselves” and to “force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love” (Z 186-87). That Pellegrina comes very close to being a magnanimous companion of Zarathustra becomes even clearer in “Echoes,” a follow-up tale on Pellegrina, published in *Last Tales*, filling in a gap of time in “The Dreamers.”<sup>176</sup> Here she presents herself as “a messenger sent out on a long journey, to tell people that there is hope in the world” (LT 161). She is a lonely wanderer among the pity of human beings which is, as she sighs, “forever sucking the marrow out of my bones” (LT 189). Yet, her “element” is nonetheless “joy” (LT 158).

On her wanderings, Pellegrina is guided to a church in a small mountain village and there she hears her voice, which she lost in the fire, in the young boy Emanuele. Emanuele thus brings back to her the memory of her past which she has been free from, because in line with Zarathustra’s emphasis on the “innocence and forgetting” required to create anew, and which the child represents (Z 139), Pellegrina has “forgotten ... what it is like to remember things” (LT 158).<sup>177</sup> Amazed by what she has found in the boy,

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<sup>176</sup> The events of the tale take place during the period after Pellegrina, as “Olalla,” has run away from Lincoln in Rome.

<sup>177</sup> In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche further asserts the healthy strength of oblivion and upholds “the power of oblivion” as a “plastic curative power”—“an active screening device”—which may

Pellegrina offers herself to the boy as his mentor to unite their voices and souls, a work of giving she greatly enjoys. “All obsessed by her longing to give, she behaved to the child who was to receive like a lioness to her cub” (LT 175). Moreover, she feels her power strengthened, “for up here in the mountains time itself, like the air, was of a richer substance than in the lowlands, and the more of it she gave away the more she had” (LT 174).

Pellegrina comes to think of Emanuele not as a son, but as “her young brother,” and her “lover” to be in three years when his voice will have become the one she once had (LT 176). Thus she longs for the day when the relationship of mentor and student will be over and they will be true companions. She worries, however, noticing the boy’s self-centeredness, that Emanuele is not sincere in his dedication to the art of singing, and that “he would have welcomed any call from outside with equal frankness and candor, and would innocently have expected a fanfare to await him in whatever field he entered” (LT 177).

Indeed, what Pellegrina eventually receives from the boy is fear and hate, for the boy is terrified at the thought of Pellegrina sucking out his blood. Noticing the boy’s fear of physical pain (and feeling annoyed with it, being so strong herself, and requiring

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“introduce a little quiet into our consciousness so as to make room for the nobler functions and functionaries of our organism which do the governing and planning” (173, 189). However, in, e.g., *Human, all too Human* (21) and *On Truth and Lie* (45), Nietzsche also argues that it is only through “forgetfulness” that man has become a slave to “truth” and “language,” oblivious to their historical and arbitrary contingencies as set up by man. Hence, in *The Genealogy of Morals* he also asserts that he who has the powerful “faculty of oblivion” also has created for himself “an opposite power, that of

strength from her future companion), Pellegrina, during one of their song lessons, pricks three of his fingertips with a needle, wipes the three drops of blood off on her small handkerchief, and then lifts the handkerchief to her lips (LT 180). The boy later, running away from her, shouts at her: “You are a witch. You are a vampire. You are wanting to drink my blood ... You have got gold, diamonds, the flute with silver keys. You have sold your soul for them to the Devil” (LT 185). Pellegrina, in jest, answers back that “whatever my friend the Devil has got from me, he has got as a present,” but the boy cannot understand, and repeats his accusation that she is a witch who “will live till she is three thousand years” (LT 185). While reminding herself that “one can take many liberties with God which one cannot take with men,” she understands Emanuele’s fear (LT 190). He was, after all, thinking—in line with the fear and cowardice of the all-too-human mediocrity—that she wanted to suck all his blood out of him, whereas she—out of generosity—wanted simply to mate her soul with his. “You ought to have known, Emanuele, that I should not have brought the drops of your blood to my mouth if it had not been that I was longing to give all my own blood to you,” she cries to the boy (LT 188). Her conclusion is that Emanuele has a “coward’s soul” (LT 187). Like Zarathustra, Pellegrina thus grieves over the people around her who lack the capacity to realize the magnificence of her glad tidings. Hence, like Zarathustra, she takes her leave from the townspeople to wander on in loneliness, at least for a while.

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remembering, by whose aid, in certain cases, oblivion may be suspended;” a “memory of the will” as “a continuing to will what has once been willed” (189-90).

### THE COST OF MASKS

Emanuele sees Pellegrina as a witch, like the Baron who, dismayed with Madame Rosalba's voluptuousness, described her scar as the brand of a witch. Instead of assisting her in reaching out to Emanuele, Pellegrina's use of masks—expanded by the Baron's and Emanuele's accusations—thus alienates her from her potential brother. This is also the case for the other heroes and heroines who mask themselves, as discussed above. While inciting attraction from the people around them through either fantastic storytelling or skillful acting or both—used as instruments to oppose and cross over the status quo—they also alienate themselves from their surroundings, moving outside of the communal norms and bonds. Hence, as we have seen, they are intermittently perceived as either a witch (Pellegrina and Babette) or a criminal (August and Leonidas). We saw above that Miss Malin is considered slightly deranged, and she also, we learn, has the appearance of a witch (SGT 22). Likewise Nagel in Hamsun's *Mysterier* is perceived as an eccentric madman.

As Nettum points out in his discussion of Nagel's "maskespill" ["role-play"], Nagel's appropriation of masks is the result of conflicting desires to, on the one hand, communicate his insights and, on the other hand, to protect what he has to communicate (*Konflikt og Visjon* 113). Nagel wears masks to suggest "den mysteriøse verden bakom" ["the mysterious world behind"] the surface of appearances, explains Nettum, however, those he seeks to convince about this "mysterious world behind," such as Miss Dagny, the minister's daughter, with whom he is desperately in love, can only see the mask.

Hun ser bare masken: Nagels “Metode” kommer i forgrunnen på hensiktens bekostning ... tvertimot gjør han avstanden mellom dem større når han bruker sin metode.

[She sees only the mask: Nagel’s “Method” comes in the foreground at the cost of his intention ... contrary to his intention, he makes the distance between them larger when he uses his method.] (154)

Nagel wears a mask to protect and suggest his own subversive perspectives on life and the values of nature that he has found in the forest, beyond the humbug of the townspeople. As McFarlane explains, Nagel’s

defence is to contrive complicated plans of bluff and double-bluff, to screen his own secret mental life by deliberate mystification whenever he has reason to believe himself observed; others shall see his foolings not his feelings. To reveal one’s inner soul to others without full control over the manner and the occasion of its revealing is, for him, to invite defeat in the game of love and life; some of the unconventional behaviour, much of the lying and deceit, most of the posing are thus deliberate distractions, a series of feint moves to baffle the hostile observer. (“Whisper of the Blood” 572-73)

The danger is that not only the hostile observer, but everyone—including Miss Dagny—will fail to see through his mask.

Thus both Hamsun's and Dinesen's heroes and heroines—step-children to society—are pushed away from the communities in which they live while affirming their reevaluation of life, critical of the status quo.<sup>178</sup> Like Zarathustra, they embrace the value of loneliness as recuperation from the lack of understanding they receive from the people around them. However, in the cases of Lieutenant Glahn and Nagel, where feelings of discouragement at times appear overwhelming, solitude becomes, it seems, more of an end than just a means. Pellegrina, who can at moments feel depressed by the recognition that she has no companions, only needy human beings who want to suck out the marrow of her bones, also embraces her solitude in order not to be dragged down into their all-too-humanness (LT 163). Knowing that people tend so easily “to suffer so deeply, and to fear,” she grieves over their incapability to live in the element of joy, while asserting her own right to affirm joy in solitude (LT 188-89). However, she always returns to the communities of people, like Zarathustra, who off and on comes down from his mountain cave, because his “impatient love overflows in rivers” and his wisdom causes him “pain with its fullness” (Z 195-96).

Yet, it is true, not just for Dinesen's heroes and heroines, but also for Hamsun's, that they use their masks the way Zarathustra uses his solitude as a means to protect the source of their overflowing generosity. Pellegrina uses her different roles to give out of

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<sup>178</sup> As Danish critic Klaus Otto Kapel wrote in a letter to Dinesen, the negative criticism she encountered in Denmark was caused by the Danish people's fear of what she had to say, because “De viser os den pris, vi har måttet betale og stadig betaler for velfærdsstaten” [“you show us the price we've had to pay and still are paying for the welfare state”] (KB II: 412).

her own abundance to people around her, and even Nagel—while intermittently assuming the title of an agronomist, a collector of antiques, and a violinist—uses his role-play to give to people around him.<sup>179</sup> Thus the step-children of Hamsun and Dinesen use their masks strategically and their masks serve several of their purposes. In fact, their strategic uses of masks even include their appropriation of the identities imposed on them by the people around them. This is particularly true in terms of their appropriation of their supposed madness as a mask that protects and dignifies their projects.

### **MADNESS AS A LITERARY DEVICE**

Using madness and disease as literary devices, Hamsun and Dinesen follow a long tradition that can be traced back to antiquity. Myths and legends appearing in Homer, the Bible, and ancient Greek drama, contain primordial symbolizations of delusions, mania, and other bizarre forms of thought and behavior. In his Introduction to *Dionysus in literature: essays on literary madness*, Branimir M. Rieger discusses three ways in which literary madness has been approached (5-13). First there is the category in which authors' creativity is discussed in terms of their madness. Rieger calls this the "mad" writer theory, advocated first by Plato and other classical writers, claiming that creative writers are "mad," full of "divine frenzy" and driven by irrational, uncontrollable forces,

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<sup>179</sup> Nagel presents himself as a gardener to work in the garden of the doctor's wife, Mrs. Stenersen, whose marriage with the doctor (whom Nagel dislikes) is not entirely happy, recognizing how worried she feels when left alone by the doctor who is frequently out on house calls. Further, he pays a ridiculously large amount of money to the poor old woman Miss Martha Gude for a chair that is about to fall apart, presenting himself as a collector of antiques. At one point he also entertains at the local bazaar with his

interpreted as the primary reasons for their creativity. Then there is the category in which critics deal with the “mad” characters or mad behavior of characters in literary texts. Finally, there is the critical method by which psychological terms from the field of medical madness are applied to discuss literary madness.

My discussion falls within the second category, focusing on the “mad” characters in Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s texts. Elaborating on this category, Rieger notes at least three ways in which “‘mad’ characters can operate in a literary milieu” (7).

First, a character can become mad, like an Ophelia, Lady Macbeth [and] King Lear ... Second, non-conformist characters can rebel against a restrictive society by either appearing to be mad or actually going mad, like Edgar’s faked madness in *King Lear* ... Third, characters can also experience a kind of anomie in which society seems intent on crushing their personalities, which results in the separation from the human community, as experienced by the woman narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* ... Anomie, or sociological madness, depicts characters estranged from society’s “sane,” “normal” or “rational” behaviors ... Frequently, a writer utilizes this literary madness to satirize the society which has produced the “mad” individual ... Besides the paralyzed character who suffers an anomie madness, like

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exceptional violin play that transports the audience, presenting himself as a former much talked about violin player.

Gregor Samsa or the Underground Man, “mad” characters can take more active steps as rebels or non-conformists to oppose society’s constraints ... existing outside of the mainstream, either by choice, necessity, force or illness. (7-8)

Rieger’s summary presentation of the ways mad characters can operate in literary texts clarifies my own project of considering the mad characters in the texts of Hamsun and Dinesen. Their madness can be interpreted as a mask they wear in opposition to society, either by appropriating society’s diagnosis of their madness or by creating it themselves. Thus their madness is a sign of their non-conformist projects, rebelling against the restrictions of modern society, satirizing the conventions of social institutions to define sanity and rationality.

Further, Hamsun and Dinesen use madness as an insignia of unique insights, presenting madness as either the path to these insights or the result of having attained them. Considering this aspect of their use of madness, my discussion expands into the first category Rieger lists in which the artist’s madness is seen as a representation of his divine frenzy that inspires his creativity. As Rieger notes, in this category madness and genius tend to be connected (6). With the modification that the artists portrayed by Hamsun and Dinesen are artists of themselves, and that the genius and irrationality of their madness is better understood in terms of insight and a revaluation of truth, their madness belongs to Rieger’s first category.

Nietzsche combines the two categories in his use of madness, and therefore a presentation of madness as a literary device in his texts will clarify my discussion of the uses Hamsun and Dinesen make of madness. We have seen above that Zarathustra, in opposition to the all-too-human, asserts that God is dead. However, it is not Zarathustra whom Nietzsche first lets proclaim this as a fact, but a madman at a marketplace, recounted in Book III of *The Gay Science* (#125, 181-82). It is significant that Nietzsche has a madman declare one of Zarathustra's most central existential points; that God is a conjecture and that man must create his own values to overcome the herd-morality. It underscores Zarathustra's, and Nietzsche's, opposition to the ethical norms that rule modern society; their non-conformist revaluation of values. Further, it implies the insight of which madness can be an insignia; the realization that there is no God and that all values are transitory.

Regarding madness as a tool to rebel against restrictive social conventions, Nietzsche recites an ode to madness in *Daybreak*. Here he asserts the "significance of madness in the history of morality" to cast off the spell of old customs and superstition (13). Indeed, he concludes that "all superior men who were irresistibly drawn to throw off the yoke of any kind of morality and to frame new laws had, *if they were not actually mad*, no alternative but to make themselves or pretend to be mad" (14). Further, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes the madman as one among "impatient spirits" in whom "a veritable delight in madness erupts because madness has such a cheerful tempo" (131). Against the slowness of "common sense" and "rationality," madness erupts in

“the most select spirits ... the explorers of *truth* above all,” who object to the “rule,” aspiring to overcome the restrictions of conventional morality (130-31).

Madness can thus also be the path to insight. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche explains that he who is among the “seekers for knowledge” knows that to “‘overcome’ this time in himself” he must “presuppose a position *outside* morality, some point beyond good and evil to which one has to rise, climb, or fly” (342-43). Wanting to go “out there, up there, may be a minor madness,” continues Nietzsche, but in this way one may become a “human being of such a beyond” that one has attained “freedom from everything ‘European,’” i.e. “the sum of imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood” (342-43). While in this way attaining a higher perspective on life and freedom from restrictive norms through madness, madness becomes symbolic of the path to insight.

Finally, madness can be emblematic of insight itself, for according to Nietzsche, the weight of “true certainty” can cause insanity. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche thus asks: “Is Hamlet *understood*? Not doubt, *certainty* is what drives one insane” (246). Further, he explains that the “Dionysiac man might be said to resemble Hamlet: both have looked deeply into the true nature of things” (BT 51). In other words, looking deeply into “the true nature of things” can result in insanity, as it did in the case of Hamlet. However, whereas Hamlet succumbed to madness, the “Dionysiac man,” i.e., he who faces the abyss of life’s pain and transitoriness while celebrating the earth, overcomes it. Hence the intoxicated frenzy characteristic of Dionysian insight—which Nietzsche upholds against

the tepid knowledge of philosophers—is a sign of great strength that can *bear* “certainty.” “What do all our efforts to date avail when we hold them against the colored splendor of that old master—ancient humanity?” asks Nietzsche (GS 197). Defending the ancients’ view of life, their Dionysian festivals and tragedies, as opposed to the scientific take on life by modern rational man, Nietzsche commends the ancients who understood truth differently, “for the insane could be accepted formerly as its mouthpiece” (GS 196-97).

While saluting the ancients for seeing the insane as a mouthpiece for truth, they are also characterized by Nietzsche as a culture of “superabundance of health” (A 632). Opposed to the sickness of modern society and its petty standards for diagnosing insanity, the ancients’ recognition of the insights of the insane proves their health. While thus rejecting contemporary conventions for diagnosing madness, Nietzsche turns the diagnosis around and employs it to diagnose society’s sickness. Taking the church as his example, he argues that

to *make* sick is the true, secret purpose of the whole system of redemptive procedures constructed by the church. And the church itself—is it not the catholic madhouse as the ultimate ideal? The earth altogether as a madhouse? (A 632)

Nietzsche personally struggled with fickle health, insomnia, weak eyesight, and an obsession with his diet. Yet while deriding the sickness of society, he takes great pains to tell us that there is nothing wrong with him and that his sickness, on the contrary, is an

advantage to him. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche elaborates on the advantages of sickness.

Like the madness of the ancients, his sickness symbolizes the insight he attains.

I am very conscious of the advantages that my fickle health gives me over all robust squares. A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* keep from transposing his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy. We philosophers ... are not thinking frogs ... we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain ... Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us; we simply can do no other. And as for sickness: are we not almost tempted to ask whether we would get along without it? Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit ... I doubt that such pain makes us “better;” but I know that it makes us more *profound*. (GS 35-36)

Further, in his semi-autobiographical book *Ecce Homo*, he tells us that

in the midst of the torments that go with an uninterrupted three-day migraine, accompanied by laborious vomiting of phlegm, I possessed a dialectician’s clarity *par excellence* ... all pathological disturbances of the intellect, even that half-numb state that follows fever, have remained entirely foreign to me to this day. (EH 222-23)

Nietzsche goes on to emphasize the positive values of his ailments, asserting that “my sickness also gave me the right to change all my habits completely,” particularly in terms of “thinking” and “all bookwormishness” (EH 287). Not having to listen to others, his self awoke and, he concludes, he returned to himself in “a supreme kind of recovery” (EH 288).

In the following we shall see how both Hamsun and Dinesen employ madness and sickness in line with Nietzsche to support their non-conformist projects. Like Nietzsche, they utilize madness to satirize conventions of social institutions on how to define sanity and rationality, and to signal insight, including their own.

### CREATIVE USE OF MADNESS BY HAMSUN AND DINESEN

Hamsun relies on a rather indefinable sense of madness to denote the insight and aspirations of several of his heroes. As we’ve seen, his typical hero is an outsider, acting erratically and irrationally, and thus he frequently appears as a madman. This is how we encounter him in, for instance, *Hunger*—the erratic, irrational, and hallucination-ridden journalist, in *Mysterier*—the nervous and lovesick Nagel, a “male hysteric,”<sup>180</sup> in *Pan*—

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<sup>180</sup> Marstrander argues that “i *Mysterier* tar jeg-drykelsen hysteriske former” [“in *Mysterier* the worship of the self takes on hysteric proportions”] (30), and Lorentzen discusses Nagel as “en mannlig hysteriker” [“a male hysteric”] in his chapter on Hamsun in *Mannlighetens muligheter* [*The options of masculinity*] (33-93). Employing terms from the fields of psychoanalysis and sociology, Lorentzen’s discussion falls within Rieger’s third category. Lorentzen diagnoses Nagel as a male hysteric, explaining that because he finds no body, no voice, no social integration with his mystical experience of being in and with nature, i.e. while transcending the confinements of language, social norms, and logic, he dies in a no-man’s-land. “Nagels situasjon er nemlig at han alltid forblir er vitne til den etiske relasjonen mellom menneskene, på tross av at han erfarer en naturerotisk transcendens. Han er ikke i stand til å overføre erfaringen fra naturens rom til det sosiale rom. Til det blir avstanden for stor for Nagel. Det sosiale rom er for preget av den patriarkalske makt med store menn, faderskikkelser, som førende symboler. Denne

the recluse and suicidal Lieutenant who is madly in love, and in *Under the Autumn Star*—the wandering refugee from the city, the writer Knut Pedersen, who insists that he suffers from neurasthenia. Countered with fear and suspicion by those who do their utmost to protect the status quo, they are all rejected and judged as mad. Hamsun's use of madness thus shows us how arbitrarily society imposes the diagnosis in order to keep its own definitions of sanity and rationality intact, i.e. to protect status quo. However, Hamsun's madmen are rebels who appropriate the judgment of others that they are "mad" while they aspire to assert themselves beyond social conventions and the standards of sane and rational behavior.

In his role-play Nagel revels, as we've seen, in fantastic tales and dreams, while deriding the townspeople's ethics. On her visit, Kamma sarcastically concludes that it is perhaps not so strange that "folk sier De er gal" ["people say you are crazy"], for "her går De og spiller komedie og forbauser indbyggerne med mærkelige påfund" ["here you go about playing comedy, surprising the townspeople with your strange contrivances"] (146). Thus Kamma supports the norms of the townspeople and their conventions for defining sanity and rationality.

Further, according to Kamma, Nagel has been diagnosed as mad by a certain Doctor Nissen (143). However, Nagel does not seem oppressed by the diagnosis. In fact,

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makt er det Nagel forsøker å forsvare seg mot gjennom hysteriet" ["Nagel's situation is such that he remains a witness to the ethical relations between people, despite his experience of a nature-erotic transcendence. He is not capable of transferring the experience from the natural space to the social space. The distance is too large for Nagel. The social space is too much characterized by a patriarchal power of

rather than dismissing his madness, he embellishes the diagnosis with his absurd acts and tales, recounting his dreams and nightmares, visions and hallucinations. Thus he appropriates the diagnosis in opposition to the townspeople, rebelling against their restrictive norms for behavior. The way he dresses in “en avstikkende gul dragt og med en vid fløiels lue” [“a loud yellow suit and an outsized corduroy cap”] further assists him in playing out the diagnosis of his madness (2).

Nagel knows that his role as a stranger with the appearance of eccentricity produces a sense of expectation from the townspeople that he will entertain them. Invited to a dinner party at the doctor and his wife’s house, he says to Miss Dagny on the night before that he knows “dette selskap imorgen kvæld blev bestemt fordi Dere allesammen trodde at jeg var en uregelmæssig herre som man kunde vente sig endel rare ting av” [“this party tomorrow night was planned because you all thought of me as an unusual guy from whom one might expect some peculiar things”] (63). Miss Dagny does not deny his argument, for, as she confesses, life is quite boring in the small town.<sup>181</sup> And indeed, during the party, he is asked to tell more about his thoughts and opinions, about, for instance, Gladstone. “Få ham til å fortælle hvad han har ment. Det er så morsomt” [“Make him tell us what he meant. It is so much fun”], says Miss Dagny eagerly (68).

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great men, father figures, as governing symbols. It is this power that Nagel attempts to escape through hysteria”] (91).

<sup>181</sup> “Jeg har ikke mange fornøielser og jeg tar med begge hænder imot de få jeg finder” [“I don’t have that many diversions and I receive with both hands those which I may find”], explains Miss Dagny,- “slik har jeg været vant til å leve like siden vi kom hit” [“thus I have been used to live since we got here”] (99).

Nagel first laughs off the request, but then replies that “det er en anden sak hvis jeg munterer selskapet med det” [“it is a different matter if I can entertain the party with it”] (68). He thus remains committed to “sin rolle” [“his role”] as an eccentric and peculiar fellow (69).

Nagel is, however, not simply committed to his role in order to please the party, but in order to direct some of his blows against his favorite enemies. Acting out his role at the party, he seizes the opportunity to satirize Gladstone, deriding his obsession with numbers, truth, and justice. Playing the role as a crazy clown for his audience, he tells them, for instance, about how he once—annoyed with Gladstone’s delight in correct calculations—argued against him that seventeen times twenty-three is not three hundred and ninety-one but three hundred and ninety-seven, though he knew very well that it was ninety-one. Yet he argued as he did, Nagel explains, simply to oppose this man who makes it his business to always be in the right. “Det er en røst i mig som kræver: Reis dig, reis dig mot denne fot-i-hose-ret!” [“Something in me cries: Speak up against this arrogant righteousness!”] (70).

Later during the party, the other guests beg him to tell them about one of his dreams. He seems reluctant, hurt, and offended that his story about Gladstone was not understood,<sup>182</sup> but Miss Andresen, one of the guests, is persistent: “Vel, men så noget

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<sup>182</sup> Nagel smiles enigmatically when the doctor discards his talk as nonsense, arguing that “jeg gjør ikke meget regning på å bli forstått heri” [“I don’t expect anyone to understand much of what I’m trying to say here”], and then he continues to talk about Gladstone (70). However, after another guest at the party, Reinert, the magistrate’s deputy, has repeatedly derided his talk, Nagel shuts up and sits there in silence

andet. Vi ber Dem allesammen” [“Well, but then something else. We beg you, all of us”] (76). Nagel is still reluctant. However, when he learns that he will have the opportunity to walk Miss Dagny home, he livens up again and is back in his element. Hence when the doctor’s wife asks him if he by any chance knows any magic, he goes on and on about his magic iron ring which, if he were to lose it one night at ten o’clock, he would have to find again before midnight; if not, something bad would happen to him (78).

Playing the violin one night, suddenly, out of the blue, during the town’s bazaar, he casts himself as a magician:

Dette lille bredskuldrede mandfolk som dukket op i en skrikende gul påklædning midt nede i salen slog alle med forbauselse. Og hvad spilte han? ... et spil med en rå og svulmende tone, som trængte alle steder hen. Han la hodet helt på siden, alt så næsten mystisk ut, hans pludselige fremtræden utenfor programmet og midt nede i salen hvor det var temmelig mørkt, hans avstikkende ydre, denne vilde fingerfærdighet som forvirret alle mennesker og bragte dem forestillingen om en trollmand. Han holdt ved i flere minutter og stadig sat publikum urørlig på sin plass. [This short, broad-shouldered man who appeared in a glaring yellow suit in the middle of the auditorium surprised everyone. What was he playing? ... a play with a raw and swelling sound that penetrated everything. He

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browsing through an album. When Miss Andersen begs him to tell another story, he seems startled, even afraid (75).

inclined his head to one side, looked almost mystical. The sudden unscheduled performance in the middle of the dark, emptying auditorium, his conspicuous look, and his histrionic finger movement dazzled the audience, giving them the feeling that a magician was performing. He played for several minutes and they listened without a murmur.] (203)

Maintaining his role as a magician and his familiarity with the fantastic, Nagel is sarcastic about the doctor's insistence on brushing off supernatural experiences as madness. Suggesting that he has had a nightly encounter with a man in his room who vanished into nothingness as soon as he touched him, Nagel derides the doctor who would simply define such an experience as the product of nervousness.

Det der, sier han, det er jo bare nervøsitet det, sier han. Å Gud, for en komedie! Godt. Men dette er altså nervøsitet, det, sier han. For lægens hjærne er det en ting av de og de dimensioner, så mange tommer i høiden og så mange tommer i bredden, noget man kan lægge i næven, god, tyk nervøsitet ... Men tænk Dem hvilken firkantethet og hvilken bondelogik å trænge ind med sine dimensioner og sin chinin på et område hvor ikke engang de fine og vise sjæle har kunnet forklare sig tingen.

[This is nothing but a case of nervousness, he says. My God, what a comedy! Just nerves?! Anyway, according to the doctor it is simply a product of nervousness. For the doctor's brain it is thus a thing of fixed dimensions, so many inches high and so many inches broad, something

you can hold in your fist, a lump of well-known nervousness ... But what a bumpkin he is, and what a cloddish brain he has to force himself with his limited frame of reference and his quinine into an area of science whose infinite mystery has humbled the most brilliant minds.] (132)

Nagel asserts that “det foregår så mangt mellom himmel og jord, sælsomme, deilige ting uten like og riktig uforklarlige forutanelser” [“there are so many strange things between heaven and earth, beautiful, inexplicable things, presentiments that can’t be explained”] (131). The doctor, however, is blind to the magnitude of these things, which he discards as a product of madness or nervousness.

Like Nagel, the starving journalist in Hamsun’s *Hunger* defends the aspects of life that escape the man of reason, but which he experiences while ridden by hallucinations. In fact, he seems to choose to be hungry in order to access these dimensions through madness. When he is in an acute state of hunger his mind feels “let og fraværende” [“light and detached”] (17). Food, on the other hand, disagrees with him and disturbs his mind.<sup>183</sup> He prefers the state of “febersk lystighet” [“feverish joy”] in which all his pains are subdued through hunger and he feels “behagelig tom” [“pleasantly empty”] (47-48). Moreover, “sultens glade vanvid” [“the sheer madness of hunger”] allows his thoughts to be “uten tøiler” [“without restraint”] (55). Parallel to Nietzsche’s ode to his sickness

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<sup>183</sup> Hallucinating about food, he reproaches himself: “Syner og drømme! Jeg sa til mig selv at om jeg fik mat nu vilde mit hode bli forstyrret igjen, jeg vilde få den samme feber i hjærnen og mange vanvittige påfund å kjæmpe med. Jeg tålte ikke mat, jeg var ikke således indrettet; det var en besynderlighed ved mig, en særegenhet” [“Apparitions and dreams! I said to myself that if I had any food now my mind

as a means to attain clarity of mind and profound insights, the journalist in Hamsun's *Hunger* nurtures his hunger as a means to arrive at a unique kind of detached clarity and freely moving thoughts through fever and hallucinations.

Miss Malin in Dinesen's tale "The Deluge at Norderney" also defends madness as an access to a higher perspective on life, as opposed to the narrow perspective of men of reason. We have already seen how her joy and freedom depended on her inclusion of a "little madness" in her being (SGT 21). In fact, Miss Malin, we are told, seemed to be "mad by her own choice," out of "some caprice of hers," and, continues the narrator, "if Miss Malin had now been given the choice of returning to her former reasonable state, and had been capable of realizing the meaning of the offer, she might have declined it on the ground that you have in reality more fun out of life when a little off your head" (SGT 17). Miss Malin's insistence on having fun is no trivial purpose at all, considering Nietzsche's assertion in his preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* that he wants to teach people how to laugh (BT 15), and Zarathustra's bid to men that they learn how to "laugh and be elevated at the same time" (Z 153).<sup>184</sup> "Life is hard to bear; but do not act so tenderly!"

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would be disturbed again. I would get that fever again and many insane caprices to fight. I am allergic to food, food disagrees with me; this is one of my odd characteristics, a peculiarity" ] (34).

<sup>184</sup> Likewise Dinesen, who, as we've seen, derided the Danish people's lack of a sense of fun, always insisted on including a joke in her tale. In an interview with Eugene Walter in 1956, published in *Paris Review*, she explains that "I do often intend a comic sense, I love a joke, I love the humorous. I often think that what we most need now is a great humorist" (56-58). In choosing the name "Isak" for herself, Dinesen had chosen, as her scholars make sure to point out, a name whose Hebrew meaning is "laughter." According to Langbaum, "in taking the pseudonym Isak—which means laughter—she must have remembered Sarah, who laughed when she bore Isaac because she thought it a fine jest of the Lord's to give her, after a lifetime of barrenness, a child in her old age" (55). Langbaum considers Dinesen's debut her late-born child, published when she was forty-nine. He concludes that Dinesen's "laughter is the laughter of rebirth—of wonder at the power of the divine imagination that, having given

bids Zarathustra (Z 153). The point is, he explains, that “courage wants to laugh ... brave, unconcerned, mocking violent—thus wisdom wants us: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior” (Z 152-53). “We love life,” he continues, “not because we are used to living but because we are used to loving. There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness” (Z 153). Thus Zarathustra affirms his love for life and the butterflies and soap bubbles and all that makes him laugh, while he rejects the grave and serious spirit. “Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter,” he concludes; “Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!” (Z 152-53).

That Miss Malin’s laughter is in line with Nietzsche’s is further suggested by her resemblance to a Dionysian satyr with her little cloven hoof beneath her skirts (SGT 22). Her appearance thus also suggests that her madness is the Dionysian madness Nietzsche talks about; the frenzy and intoxication that arises from the powerful encounter with the abyss of existence. Indeed, we learn that Miss Malin knows how to “dive down into any abyss of corruption with the grace of a crested grebe,” while “she herself carried the weight of hers with the skill of an athlete” (SGT 21-22). Like a true Dionysian, Miss Malin has the power to face the abyss and she overcomes it in joy. Her madness suggests her insight into the abyss, her laughter the power she has to overcome it.

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her happiness in so unexpected a place as Africa, took it all away and then allowed her to recover what she had lost through imagination” (55-56). In “reconceiving ‘Isak Dinesen,’” Aiken, on the other hand, describes Dinesen’s writing as “a certain ‘feminine’ critical practice: a capricious art that would elude paternally conceived *ercentes* ... And if, from a patriarchal perspective, such capriciousness makes women Medusas, Dinesen would seem to share Cixous’s view that the Medusa is terrible only to those immured within phallogocentric confinements: women who look beyond those walls may rediscover her as a figure of joyous liberation” (25).

Finally, Miss Malin's appropriation of madness is a compliment to her mask, supporting her desire to move beyond the humdrum of the everyday all-too-human. Hence, "her laughter of liberation" is nurtured by her "madness," and her madness assists her in achieving her bird-like quality of flying away from the conventional norms of correct behavior that chain human beings to act according to rigid rules and norms (SGT 21).

As we've seen, Miss Malin is a fan of masquerades. Arguing that the Lord has a "penchant" for this art, she maintains "that our trials are really blessings in disguise" (SGT 24). Nagel seems less convinced that the end will be good. In fact, towards the end of *Mysteries* he expresses regret about the masquerade he has played for the townspeople: "Jeg har skilt mig godt fra mit arbeide, jeg har git jær et snes overmåte rike samtaleæmner av gangen og gjort livet uordentlig for jær, jeg har lagt den ene urolige scene efter den andre ind i jærs skikkelige blindtarmtilværelse" ["I have left my work behind, I have given you a score of extremely rich topics to discuss and turned your life into a disorder. I have contributed with a range of unsettling acts to your square appendix existence"], but what, he seems to wonder, has he received in return? (267). "I er falske allesammen" ["You are all false"], complains Nagel (266). It is the cost of the mask as social alienation, which explains Nagel's despair. Nagel is later remembered as "en mærkelig og eiendommelig charlatan som gjorde en masse påfaldende ting" ["a strange and remarkable charlatan who did a lot of striking things"] (2). Though his appropriation of others' judgment of his madness might have served his own derision of their standards,

the mask he thus wore to defend his insights only assured him the recognition as someone unconventional. He himself as a carrier of great insights was not understood. Hence he finally gave in to despair and drowned himself. As we shall see in the following, Hamsun shows less of Nagel's despair and more of Miss Malin's humor in *On Overgrown Paths* where he casts himself in the main role as an old fellow, happy to play the game as a mad man, while insisting on his own truths.

#### **HAMSUN ENACTING NIETZSCHE'S MADMAN**

Hamsun casts himself as the madman in *On Overgrown Paths*, thus adding himself to the list of rebels and outsiders in his work. This time the rebel is Knut Hamsun as a traitor to Norway's government during World War II who supported Hitler's regime. While rejecting, as we've seen, the accusations he faced after the war, Hamsun writes *On Overgrown Paths* as an autobiographical account of the post-war proceedings against him. Moreover, he objects to his unjust treatment and asserts his mental health. On the other hand, he enacts the role as a madman on the stage for the Norwegian people. In the following I shall take a closer look at how Hamsun is diagnosed and pushed away from society as a madman who does not fulfill the criteria for a normal, rational, and sane person, but also how he appropriates the diagnosis for his own purposes.

During the winter of 1945-46 Hamsun was sent to Blindern Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo to be examined by Dr. Gabriel Langfeldt and Dr. Ørnulf Ødegaard at the request of the Attorney General. Their assignment was to ascertain Hamsun's competence to stand

trial for treason. On February 5, 1946, the doctors concluded their examination, diagnosing Hamsun as a person of “varig svekkede sjelsevner” [“permanently impaired mental faculties”]. Advised by the experts, the Attorney General decided not to continue procedures on criminal charges, thus sparing the country the embarrassment of putting Hamsun, the former national hero, in the dock. Instead, the proceedings were reduced to the lesser charge of membership of the Norwegian Nazi party, for which Hamsun was sentenced to pay 425,000 Norwegian “kroner.”<sup>185</sup>

Though Doctor Langfeldt has asserted that his psychiatric diagnosis of Hamsun does not preclude great artistic achievement,<sup>186</sup> the diagnosis nonetheless came to serve as a comfortable myth for Hamsun’s post-war readers, traumatized by their conflict over how to reconcile their admiration for his literature with their resentment for his politics.<sup>187</sup> Hamsun was quite aware of the desirability of having himself declared insane, contending

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<sup>185</sup> Though this was a financially ruinous price to pay for Hamsun, he was, as Ferguson notes, “leniently treated” when compared with Ezra Pound and Louis Ferdinand Céline who also faced legal accusations after the war for their support of the fascist governments (410). Pound was sentenced to thirteen years in an American Military Asylum, and Céline spent eighteen months in jail. Hamsun, on the other hand, appealed to the High Court and, though the High Court re-confirmed the verdict against Hamsun, the sentence was reduced to 325,000 NOK. Hamsun’s fortune had been assessed by the Crown at 500,000 NOK. Since Hamsun’s wife was sentenced to pay 150,000 NOK, there was a discrepancy between the compensation claimed by the Crown (575,000) and the estimate of his fortune. Hamsun’s point about the discrepancy was granted by the High Court and the sentence reduced.

<sup>186</sup> In *Den rettspsykiatriske erklæring om Knut Hamsun*, published in 1978, responding to Thorkild Hansen’s book on the process against Hamsun after the war, the doctors assert—against objections from readers wondering how a mentally impaired person could possibly have written *On Overgrown Paths*—that: “Det er imidlertid en vel kjent sak at innarbeidede evner og tilvante virksomhet kan være vel bevart, selv om det foreligger en betydelig sjelelig svekkelse” [“It is, however, a matter of fact that learned skills and occupation can be well preserved, even though a significant mental impairment has occurred”] (10).

that he was locked up in a mental institution not so much to find out whether or not he was insane, but to confirm *that* he was insane (*On Overgrown Paths* 83). Thus he writes to the Attorney General, complaining about his confinement to the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo:

Grunden til denne indlægning er en gåte for flere end mig. Anstaltens officielle titel er “for nervøse og sindslidende,” men jeg var hverken nervøs eller sindslidende. Jeg var en gammel mand og jeg var døv, men jeg var frisk og sund da jeg blev rykket ut av mit normale liv og mit arbejde og indesperret.

[The reason for my imprisonment at the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo is a puzzle to more than just me. The official name of the institution is “for the nervous and mentally ill,” but I was plagued by neither nervousness nor mental illness. I was an old man and I was deaf, but I was sound and spry when I was wrenched out of my normal life and my work and imprisoned.]

(36)

True, he continues, the district physician had warned him that he had “litt høit blodtryk” [“a little high blood pressure”], but, “skulde blodtryk påkalde indlægning til mentalundersøkelse?” [“does blood pressure demand confinement for a mental

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<sup>187</sup> Relying on Hamsun’s “senility” to embrace Hamsun’s prose is, among others, Hans Keller, who in a newspaper review in 1975 admits that he has thus found a way to reconcile “his love for Hamsun and his belief in his genius” with Hamsun’s political position (qtd. in Ferguson 324).

examination?”] (36). Thus Hamsun defends his sanity in order that the injustice of a brutal police state may be recognized by his readers.<sup>188</sup>

During the battles and the bombings of the war, Hamsun spent a lot of his time at home playing solitaire upstairs in his room. He was nearly blind and quite deaf; a fact that he exploits in his last memoir to emphasize the brutality of the authorities opposed to his innocence. He portrays himself as a frail old man, stumbling around, suffering from dizzy spells. He claims—despite news received from fellow citizens—to have remained ignorant about significant political matters during the war, such as the many atrocities of Hitler’s Nazi Germany. Thus he denies any accountability for the crimes of Nazism.

However, Hamsun, master of irony and contradiction, is not content to remain within the parameters of logic. On the one hand, he explicitly asserts his sanity and objects to the authorities’ treatment of him, but, on the other hand, he appropriates the doctors’ diagnosis, and, tongue-in-cheek, plays the role as the madman. Knowing that the doctors’ diagnosis was agreeable to Norway’s court and countrymen embittered by his support of Hitler’s Nazi Germany, Hamsun sarcastically plays out the diagnosis against his opponents. Hamsun is not apologizing or denying his political position by acting as a madman. On the contrary, he is laughing straight in the face of those who rely on his “madness” as an excuse for his political statements. Hamsun’s appropriation of the

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<sup>188</sup> Hamsun is here alluding to his imprisonment during the proceedings. After he was arrested, he spent the first couple of months at the Grimstad Hospital during the summer of 1945 (June 14-September 2), after which he was moved to a retirement home in Landvik. Hamsun conveys the impression that he was effectively a prisoner for three years (1945-48), whereas he was in fact a free man after his release from

doctors' diagnosis indicates the cleverness of a trickster madman, while it serves his critique of their norms and values.

Ridiculing the doctors and their diagnosis, Hamsun has a lot of fun with his ailing condition: “Å mine varig svækkede sjelsevner som gjør mig så dum!” [“Oh my permanently impaired mental faculties which make me so stupid!”], mocks Hamsun, “naturligvis er jeg åreforkalket, men det gjør mig ikke noget det heller, vedkommer mig ikke” [“Of course, I have hardening of the arteries, but how could that bother me?”] (102-03). “Jeg har forresten å be om unnskyldning for min afasi” [“Please do excuse my aphasia”], he pleads tongue-in-cheek, “som gjør at mine ord, det uttrykk jeg måtte velge i fleng, har lett for å overskride min mening, ja også underskride den” [“which makes my words, or whatever expression I hit on, transcend my meaning, or even undermine it”] (83). “Denne plagsomme syke, den er forresten gammel og fin og heter afasi” [“This troublesome ailment is actually old and honorable and is called aphasia”], explains Hamsun; “den store Swift i England var verre av afasi end jeg” [“the great Swift in England had aphasia worse than I”] (24). In this irreverent spirit, scorning the doctors' painstaking efforts to determine his mental frailty, Hamsun undermines the doctors' psychiatric science.

Hamsun chuckles when he thinks of how easy it would be to simulate insanity and fool the doctors, simply by cleverly relying on his mind's complexity:

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Langfeldt's clinic in February 1946. It was his own choice to return to Landvik as a paying guest afterwards.

Jeg sitter her frisk og sund og jukser mig selv med vilje. Det må mindst være schizofreni ... Det er en forsømmelse av mig at jeg ikke har dreiet psykiatrikerne denne lille knappen før, så vilde jeg ha fått et fint navn på den.

[Here I sit, sound and sry, and knowingly trick myself. It must at least be schizophrenia ... How neglectful of me not to have performed that little game for the psychiatrists; they certainly would have had a fine word for it.] (44)

Hence Hamsun mockingly toys with the madman's mask, performing as "schizophrenic," "aphasic," "senile," and "mentally impaired," only to subvert the doctors' psychiatry and assert his own superiority.

Moreover, seeing that his aphasia makes him unaccountable for his words according to the doctors' standards, Hamsun has attained a voice beyond the command of their psychiatry. His words are not governed by their logic, and neither is his mind. In this way, he suggests his own privileged access to truths that transcend the doctors' petty science. In fact, while appropriating a voice beyond their idea of a healthy mind, Hamsun attains an unassailable mouthpiece for a continued vindication of his political views that he knows are unpalatable to his contemporaries.

Considering himself beyond any rational self, Hamsun follows in the footsteps of Nietzsche who also underscores that his ailments by no means prevent his clear thinking, on the contrary, and who also sees madness as a

mouthpiece for his subversive insights. In 1889 Nietzsche collapsed into a state of mental paralysis in which he lived the last eleven years of his life while institutionalized in mental hospitals. Though psychologists and historians so far have not been able to agree upon the cause of Nietzsche's mental collapse (syphilis or brain disease inherited from his father being the two most common explanations), it has—like the diagnosis of Hamsun's "impaired mental faculties"—allowed readers uncomfortable with his hyperbolic ideas to reject them as the babble of a crazy mind.

In her book *To Nietzsche*, Claudia Crawford takes issue with those who thus dismiss Nietzsche in terms of his sickness, contending that Nietzsche actually simulated his madness as the culmination of his Dionysian philosophy.<sup>189</sup> Indeed Nietzsche's close friend Franz Overbeck declared that "I cannot escape the horrible suspicion that ... his madness is simulated" (qtd. in Crawford 94). Crawford demonstrates how Nietzsche's so-called "madness" affords no single diagnosis, but appears, on the contrary, as a hodgepodge of symptoms of various ailments described by Henry Maudsley in his book *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (1874), of which Nietzsche had an 1875 German

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<sup>189</sup> Ronald Hayman also suggests that Nietzsche chose to go insane, suggesting that it symbolizes his critique of language and truth. Arguing that the idea that he was suffering from syphilis or *dementia paralytica* is unwarranted, Hayman concludes that "with his headaches, his vomiting and his madness, he was, more directly than any other thinker, living out the consequences of losing faith in a system of belief which is now generally discredited. The relevance of his life is all the greater if the causes of his final breakdown were not organic. It would seem that there is an element of choice in all breakdowns, just as there is a histrionic element in all displays of madness" (11). Hayman also refers to how Overbeck felt that Nietzsche was simulating his madness, and to how Peter Gast, another friend of Nietzsche, seemed convinced there was no real madness going on (341).

translation in his library. Perhaps, argues Crawford, Nietzsche staged his own “madness,” acting as a riddle, to project his truths into the future when time would be ready to unravel his mask and hear his voice.

I contend that Hamsun, unwilling to abide by the standards of his contemporary countrymen, lawyers, logicians, and psychiatrists, also entertained the assumption of his “madness” as an insignia setting him apart from the rest of society.<sup>190</sup> Like Nietzsche, who described himself as someone who would be “born posthumously,”<sup>191</sup> he maintained that he was speaking “for den enkelte som kanske kommer til å læse efter os” [“for those who might read after us”] (36). Without necessarily buying into Crawford’s hypothesis that Nietzsche staged his madness, the idea of someone doing so for certain reason (i.e. to defend his or her contentions), gives us a focused lens through which we can consider and perhaps better understand how and why Hamsun so playfully appropriates the diagnosis of his madness. Performing tongue-in-cheek as a madman whose cloak could guard his truths, Hamsun, I contend, reenacts Nietzsche’s riddle. Like Nietzsche, Hamsun

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<sup>190</sup> Hamsun maintained not only that he suffered from neurasthenia, but had been, as Nilson notes, rather obsessed with his insanities from an early age (*En ørn i uvær* 180-81). In January 1926 Hamsun went into a full-scale psychoanalysis, as one of the first people in Norway to do so, and he continued to meet with his analyst, Johannes Irgens Strømme, until June the same year, then the next year from January to March. The Danish author Johs. V. Jensen, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1944, suggests that Hamsun feigned insanity. In his essay collection *Den ny verden* [*The new World*] (1907), he writes about Hamsun that “for at rage frem pyntede han sig med Særhed, for at bevise sit Geni fingerede han Vanvid. En lang Tid gav han den som Overmenneske i Stil med Nietzsches fuleste Forfalskere” [“in order to tower he dressed up in his strangeness, in order to prove his genius he feigned insanity. For a long time he did this as an overman in line with Nietzsche’s most cunning counterfeiters”] (qtd. in Beyer II 94).

<sup>191</sup> On Nietzsche as born “posthumously” see for instance the “Preface” to *The Antichrist* (568), *Twilight of the Idols* (24), *The Gay Science* (321), and *Ecce Homo* (303).

appropriates madness as a mouthpiece for his higher truths, transcending his contemporaries' narrow thinking. His "madness" becomes a badge of his genius.

#### **SYPHILIS AS INITIATION: DINESEN'S ALLIANCE WITH NIETZSCHE**

"... and pearls are like poets' tales: disease turned into loveliness" ("The Diver," AD, 11).

Disease is a recurrent theme in Dinesen's stories and syphilis plays a significant role for her, for she was herself afflicted with the disease. Dinesen returned from Africa in 1915 suffering from a case of syphilis; but from 1919 none of her doctors were able to detect any sign of the disease. She suffered, however, throughout her life, under increasing pains due to the original treatment of her syphilis. Linda Donelson, a medical doctor and the author of *Out of Isak Dinesen in Africa, The Untold Story* (1995), examines Dinesen's medical history in her Appendix "On Isak Dinesen's Medical History." Donelson suggests that the most probable reason for Dinesen's pains and suffering in her later years is first of all her history of taking an arsenic tonic for years in Africa and secondly her use of amphetamines, which she took liberally in her later years (354-55).

Dinesen, however, was unwilling to let her pains take the upper hand and affirmed them instead as a disease that sat her apart from others. As Thurman notes, "millions of unfortunates contracted syphilis, but among them were her father, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, the demonic heroes and fallen angels of Romanticism—many of the artists who, like the

young Tanne Dinesen, aspired to be like Lucifer” (285). By affirming her pains as the result of syphilis, Dinesen proudly embraced a myth that aligned her to a range of great men. Thurman notes that “various critics, friends, and even relatives of Karen Blixen [Isak Dinesen] have supposed a relationship between her eccentricities and the disease, implying that to some degree because of it she must have been a little ‘mad’” (283). Indeed, Dinesen nurtured this image herself by insisting that she was suffering from syphilis. In other words, regardless of the doctors’ assertions that they could find no signs of syphilis, Dinesen continued to pride herself on the disease, honoring the disease as symbolic of the genius and the art of the genius. Henriksen tells us in his portrait of Dinesen that she was “fond of comparing herself to the composer Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*,” who in turn was modeled at least in part on Nietzsche (335). The genius-composer Leverkühn attains syphilis and makes a pact with the devil, that in exchange for his soul he will be able to create great work. Likewise Dinesen explained to her friend Thorkild Bjørnvig that when she was afflicted with syphilis, “da lovede jeg Djævelen min Sjæl, og han lovede mig til Gengæld, at alt hvad jeg herefter oplevede skulde blive til Historier” [“then I promised the Devil my soul, and in return he promised me that everything I was going to experience hereafter would be turned into tales”] (*Pagten* 50).

Bjerring sees Dinesen’s appropriation of syphilis as the seal of her genius and the logical result of her celebration of Venus, goddess of love and sexuality, rebelling against Protestantism, its repressive ethics and fear of sexuality.

Når Venus og hvad der hører hendes domæne til, tidligt afgjorde den unge Karen Blixens skæbne og liv fremover, er det egentlig ganske logisk, at netop en Blixen—også på dette område—svarer igen ikke blot vet at tage sit “kors” på sig og—om muligt—elske sin skæbne, men faktisk driver den veneriske kendsgerning ut i dens yderste konsekvens. Nemlig anvendelsen af Venus som det centrale symbol og tegn. Hendes “kors” i livet omskabes under processen, indtil den endelige stjerne—og superstar’en—kan stråle ... Sygdommens afmagt søges omskabt, tranformeret til “immunitetens almagt,” i Blixens version ikke uden kritik af den kynisme, flagrende “kærlighedsforhold” oftest ledsages af.

[When Venus and that which belongs to her domain, early determined young Isak Dinesen’s destiny and her life onwards, it makes sense that she—as she was a Dinesen—also in this area of life answers not simply by taking on her “cross” and—if possible—love her destiny, but to actually drive the venereal fact out to its utmost consequences by appropriating Venus as her central symbol and sign. Her “cross” in life is transformed in the process, until the final star—and superstar—shines through ... The impotence of the disease is recreated, transformed to the “omnipotence of immunity,” in Dinesen’s version not without criticism against the cynicism which often accompanies drifting “love affairs.”] (118-19)

While deriding the puritan fear of sexuality and extramarital affairs, Dinesen extols syphilis in her tales as a symbol of the opposite—of liberated sexuality, transgressing Protestant ethics—while she herself was excluded from it in real life. To her syphilis could thus symbolize her insight into the falseness of puritanism and the truth of love.

Syphilis as the seal of insight is the concluding point in Dinesen's tale about Lady Flora in "The Cardinal's Third Tale" (*Last Tales*). Lady Flora, a British lady from the Scottish highlands, is at first incapable of appreciating life's rich joys, but after she has contracted syphilis, she miraculously changes. Abandoning her cold and severe self, she suddenly appears with "a new joviality, a mirthful forbearance with and benevolence toward the frailty of humanity" (LT 96). Her wit still alive and sparkling, she now has a "gentle and delicate irony" added to it; "she was changed; mystically she had become a maiden – an old maid" (LT 96).

Moreover, while first portrayed as a huge giantess, an Athena figure in a severe outfit with no embellishment, her skin white, her voice full and clear, she later appears as the goddess Diana—she is "referred to as Diana" at the Bath of Monte Scalzo among "libertines" who like her sought treatment against their disease (LT 95-96). Further, whereas she was before "correspondingly vast of hips and chest" (LT 74), she is now extremely thin, and whereas she before had rich red hair, she now wears an elegant wig. Even her voice has changed and she now speaks in a "low and hoarse voice, like to the cackle of an old wise raven or a cockatoo" (LT 96). Thus she actually appears quite similar to Dinesen in her later years. Dinesen's thinness and hoarse smoky voice became

the unique characteristics of her appearance as her health deteriorated. In pictures we often see her wearing a turban and her attire is always very stylish, at times flamboyant.

Before Lady Flora's transformation has taken place, we learn that she had, from an early age, "yearned to annihilate the small, slim wanton women" who seduced her father (she had her gigantic size from her mother who always suffered under her husband's derision), as well as her own budding body (LT 79). Abhorring her body, she would shrink from any touch, physical or mental, and she presented an "utter contempt of Heaven and Earth" (LT 81). It is not until she enters the basilica of San Pietro in Rome that she realizes how awesome great proportions can be. It is particularly the statue of St. Peter that impresses her. In front of it she would compare his hand of bronze to her own (LT 89). One night it appeared to her as "if his lips moved faintly," and when she sees a young man kissing the foot of the statue, she follows his example and holds her lips against the bronze for a long time, which was still warm from the young man's mouth and "slightly moist" (LT 97-98). Four weeks later she discovered "the sore" on her lip; the "rose" or the "seal" of her disease (LT 97).

Lady Flora's syphilis is thus portrayed, I maintain, as the seal and insignia of her new insight and indeed she now "displays the pride of one initiated" (LT 95). As Bjerring notes, the sore of syphilis on Lady Flora's lip with which the tale concludes, indicates both "en 'lukning' på et livsområde" ["a 'closure' of one area of life"] and "en så meget desto mere 'almægtig' 'åpning' på et andet vitalt livsområde: kunstens, livssynets og verdensbilledets—helhedens" ["a so much more 'almighty' 'opening' to

another vital area of life: art, her view of life and outlook on the world, the totality”] (211). Whereas she would earlier appear as a disciple of Jonathan Swift—the poet who was “filled with a strange and terrible loathing of the earth and of humanity as a whole,” citing his most celebrated book, *Lemuel Gulliver’s Travels* (“she evidently knew it by heart”), to deride nature—she is now, as Diana, the goddess of hunting and childbirth, a patron of the earthly joys of life (LT 77-78). Thus she is also a patron of the pangs of the birth-giver, as is Zarathustra. The suffering her disease implies is a sign of her new profundity and love for life, attained through initiation.

#### **THE COST OF MADNESS**

Despite the insignia madness can be and the freedom the mask of madness can afford to move beyond conventional standards of measuring rationality versus irrationality, sanity versus insanity, there are, as there are for the masks discussed above, evident costs attached to wearing the mask of madness. Indeed, while commenting on those “impatient spirits” who take “a veritable delight in madness ... because madness has such a cheerful tempo,” Nietzsche asserts that they also represent “*the greatest danger*” (GS 130-31). Nietzsche refers to himself as one among those who “*are the exception and the danger,*” arguing that “there actually are things to be said in favor of the exception, *provided that it never wants to become the rule*” (GS 131). For, as he notes, “man’s greatest labor so far has been to reach agreement,” and he commends “the faithful of the great shared faith [who] stay together and continue in their dance” (GS

130-31). Madness in this way embodies the same ambiguity as solitude; it may be needed to create new values, but the ultimate desire is to return from solitude and find true companions who are also faithful to the earth.

Further, Dinesen's appropriation of syphilis as an insignia of insight and the symbol of love and sexuality obviously has a high price in terms of the disease's physical pains. Moreover, Lady Flora's syphilis closes off, as Bjerring notes, one area of life, and not everyone may agree that this area is so worthless in comparison to the new area that has opened up for her.

Moreover, we've seen how Dinesen's Miss Malin, for instance, uses madness to make up for the little sins she never made herself, thus one may argue that madness has to her been a substitute for real life. Considering Hamsun's use of madness in his post-war memoir *On Overgrown Paths*, we may also question the costs he has to pay while using madness as a mouthpiece for his truths. As with Leverkühn's syphilis in Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*, Hamsun's "madness" does not rescue him from a lonely and rejected existence, though the "disease" in both cases has the appearance of a pact and a promise to support its carrier in his art and work.

On the other hand, one may argue that Hamsun has not been doomed into a lonely and rejected existence. Indeed, his fame today may verify his own words; that he was writing for a future audience. Of course, the reader may, out of his or her own choice, focus on the losses Miss Malin's deranged mind and Lady Flora's syphilis cause their lives. However, Dinesen would disagree with such an estimation of their losses. To her

their madness signifies the affirmation of love and life as an artistic-existential project, which promises that we can create something higher out of ourselves, beyond the everyday life of the all-too-human mediocrity.

Moreover, regardless of our estimation of Hamsun's and Dinesen's protagonists, they are portrayed as heroes and heroines of love and truthfulness, truthful in the sense of being faithful to the earth and the complexities of life ignored by men of reason, and true to their opposition to bourgeois ethics and logical "truth," which limit the rich flux of life that they affirm. In fact, in the next chapter I will show just how profound their love for the earth is, arguing that it is rooted in a pantheistic conviction of the interconnectedness of all life. I contend that it is this religious, or pantheistic, conviction that heightens the urgency of their projects and fuels the artistic-existential endeavors of their protagonists.

#### CHAPTER 4: THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS INSIGHT TO OVERCOME THE ALL-TOO-HUMAN

The artistic-existential projects of both Hamsun's and Dinesen's Nietzschean protagonists are fueled—as is Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra's self-overcoming—by an insight into, or a conviction about, the divine of the eternally creative forces of nature, a pantheism which exalts the transient as eternally becoming. While critical of organized religion and Puritan Christianity, there is thus nevertheless a religious—even mythical—element in their philosophies. This religious element is manifest in their protagonists' experience of being one with all life and nature, facing the abyss of the eternally creative forces, affirming all of life's joys and sorrows. What Hamsun and Dinesen write about this has close connections to Nietzsche's ideas about the original "Oneness" in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the "eternal recurrence" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Though Nietzsche—through Zarathustra and the "madman" at the market place—maintains that God is dead, there is nevertheless a promise of redemption in his philosophy. Zarathustra talks about the redemption of the earth with the coming of the *Übermensch* and redemption as man's own creation, overcoming himself. Moreover, there is, I maintain, from *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche's debut) to *The Will to Power* (published posthumously) a sense of religious insight in Nietzsche's writing. In his "Drunken Song," celebrating the brightness of the midnight hours, Zarathustra describes himself as "a drunken sweet lyre—a midnight lyre, an ominous bell-frog that nobody

understands but that *must speak*" (434). Zarathustra is a mouthpiece of a profound insight—his teaching which promises redemption and affirms eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche has been called a "poetic mystic" and an "esoteric" thinker, comments worthy of our consideration if we want to understand the religious elements of Nietzsche's philosophy.<sup>192</sup> Among Nietzsche's perhaps most esoteric ideas are those regarding the "eternal recurrence." Nietzsche's ideas about the eternal recurrence have been hotly debated by his commentators. Martin Heidegger gave a metaphysical interpretation of the eternal recurrence, but this is rejected today by many interpreters, such as Jacques Derrida, Joan Stambaugh, Laurence Lampert, Alexander Nehamas, Bernd Magnus, and Daniel Ahern.<sup>193</sup> Adding to the confusion surrounding Nietzsche's

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<sup>192</sup> Joan Stambaugh alludes to Nietzsche as a "poetic mystic" while referring, for instance, to his ideas about the encounter with "the abyss of light" as leading to a response of "utter stillness" (*The Other Nietzsche* 135-51). Laurence Lampert also notes the esoteric characteristics of Nietzsche's teaching (*Nietzsche's Teaching* 246-67). Daniel Conway argues that "the esoteric wisdom hidden behind Nietzsche's crumbling masks is expressed in the gnomic teachings of eternal recurrence, *amor fati*, and the innocence of Becoming" (157-58). John Wilcox discusses Nietzsche's "esoterism" in terms of Nietzsche as a "noncognitivist" (36-43). Ted Sadler, finally, discusses Nietzsche's "Dionysian truth" as "the positivity of mystery." Further, Sadler finds that "the Dionysian aspect of the eternal return, the fulfilling 'moment' (Augenblick) of affirmation, has all the characteristics of a mystical experience" (150). According to Sadler, "Dionysian truth" implies a redemptive experience of eternity. "Dionysian redemption involves a return to the 'centre' of life," concludes Sadler, which "is achieved through the affirmation of life" (136-37).

<sup>193</sup> Daniel Conway explains the different approaches taken by critics to Nietzsche's eternal recurrence—and their "distortions"—(he lists for instance Simmel, Bäumler, Löwith, Vaihinger, Heidegger, Jaspers, Arendt, E. Heller, Deleuze, Danto, Klossowoski, Kaufmann, Bataille, Nehamas, Strong, Stambaugh, Lingis, Kundera, Vattimo, Warren, Magnus, Irigary, Clark, Shapiro, and Lampert) as an aspect of Nietzsche's "Dangerous Game." While wanting to be "born posthumously"—to be understood someday in the future when men have become ready for his ideas—Nietzsche did not communicate on a common level, nor did he explicate "the eternal recurrence." This is, however, also "the enduring attraction" of this idea, contends Conway, because "Nietzsche whets his readers' appetite for a redemptive teaching, hinting salaciously at the epiphanies that await his rightful audience" (160). "The ensuing distortions of the eternal recurrence may eventually disfigure Nietzsche's teaching beyond recognition, but this is the risk he must accept in order to project his influence into the next millennium," concludes Conway (164).

eternal recurrence is the idea that it belongs to a later phase of his work, unrelated to his early works. In the following I will focus on the connections between Nietzsche's religious ideas in his early and later works in order to secure a fuller understanding of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, which I consider the central myth of his religion. I will then turn to the kindred insights in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen.

### NIETZSCHE'S PROFOUND INSIGHT

Nietzsche dismisses religious beliefs as a "metaphysical need,"<sup>194</sup> yet he does not dismiss the significance of religions. In fact, even in *Beyond Good and Evil* where he vehemently attacks Christianity, Nietzsche underscores the importance of religions, asserting that "religion can even be used as a means of obtaining peace from the noise and effort of *cruder* modes of government, and cleanliness from the *necessary* dirt of all politics. Thus did the Brahmins, for example" (BGE 86). Recognizing the significant role religion plays for so many people, he rejects the dismissal of religious beliefs by modern philosophers. The "German scholar" does not "take the problem of religion seriously," complains Nietzsche; "his whole trade ... disposes him to a superior, almost good-natured merriment in regard to religion, sometimes mixed with a mild contempt" (BGE 84). Opposed to such scholars, Nietzsche asserts the value of his own research to

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<sup>194</sup> In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche refers to Schopenhauer's assertion that the metaphysical need is the *origin* of religions. According to Nietzsche, on the other hand, "what first led to the positing of 'another world,' in primeval times was not some impulse or need but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, a failure of the intellect" (GS 196). "The metaphysical need is," however, "a late offshoot," for man has now become accustomed to "another world," hence "when religious ideas are

understand the significance of religion throughout history. Not only does one thus gain understanding, but “a reverent seriousness and a certain shy respect towards religion” (BGE 84).

Moreover, according to Nietzsche,  
 a single look at the Greek gods will convince us that a belief in gods need not result in morbid imaginations, that there are nobler ways of creating divine figments—ways which do not lead to the kind of self-crucifixion and self-punishment in which Europe, for millennia now, has excelled. The Hellenic gods reflected a race of noble and proud beings, in whom man’s animal self had divine status and hence no need to lacerate and rage against itself. (GM 227)

While Nietzsche rejects the Christian God, he admires the Hellenic gods. It is among the latter that he finds Dionysos, who becomes a central figure in his own philosophy.

We have seen how Nietzsche celebrates Dionysian art and myth in Attic tragedy. Prior to Attic tragedy, Dionysian stirrings arose through the influence of narcotic potions or through the powerful approach of spring, explains Nietzsche further in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more by the magic of the Dionysiac rite, but nature itself, long alienated or

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destroyed one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation,” i.e. by one’s “metaphysical need” (GS 196).

subjugated, rises again to celebrate the reconciliation with her prodigal son, man ... Now that the gospel of universal harmony is sounded, each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him—as though the veil of Maya had been torn apart and there remained only shreds floating before the vision of mystical Oneness ... the productive power of the whole universe is now manifest in his transport, to the glorious satisfaction of the primordial One. (BT 23-24)

Later, these Dionysian stirrings were produced by the music of the Greek festivals; the Dionysian dithyramb sung by a chorus of satyrs, i.e. the chorus of primitive tragedy without stage, and then, finally, in Attic tragedy, in particular through the dithyrambic chorus. Just as the Greek felt himself absorbed into the satyr chorus, he felt in the next development of Greek tragedy

an overwhelming sense of unity which led back into the heart of nature.

The metaphysical solace ... that, despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful, was expressed most concretely in the chorus of satyrs, nature beings who dwell behind all civilization and preserve their identity through every change of generations and historical movement. (BT 50)

Nietzsche never abandoned this sense of encounter with life as one of unity with the indestructibly joyful and powerful life, though he later criticized the way in which he had presented it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. According to Nehamas, Nietzsche seems at the

time when he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, mainly under the influence of Schopenhauer and his reading of Kant, to have believed that there are some ultimate facts concerning the real nature of the world. He denied that these facts could ever be correctly stated through reason, language, and science.

Yet he also believed (and here the influence of Schopenhauer became dominant) that tragedy, primarily through the musically inspired, “Dionysian” chorus, can intimate the final truth that the ultimate nature of the world is to have no orderly structure: in itself the world is chaos, with no laws, no reason, and no purpose. Tragedy gives a nondiscursive glimpse of the contrast between “the real truth of nature and the lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality.” (42-43)<sup>195</sup>

In Nietzsche’s later writing, on the other hand, Nehamas continues, “Nietzsche comes to deny the very contrast between things-in-themselves and appearance which was presupposed by his discussion of tragedy. ‘The antithesis between the apparent and the true world is reduced to the antithesis between “world” and “nothing” —,’ he now writes in a representative passage (*WP*, 567; cf. *TI*, IV)” (43).

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<sup>195</sup> As Nehamas also explains, what makes tragedy so remarkable in Nietzsche’s eyes is that in the very process of revealing the painful truth that the world has no orderly structure—that it is chaos, with no laws or reason—it offers a consolation for the negative and desperate reaction this is bound to generate. “It shows that ultimately we are not different from the rest of nature, that we are part and parcel of it, and belong totally to it. It leaves its audience, which at least for a moment ceases to regard itself as separate from the rest of the world, with the ‘metaphysical comfort ... that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearance, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable’ (*BT*, 7), and that its blind, purposeless, constant ebb and flow is to be admired and celebrated” (43).

In his “Critical Backward Glance,” added as an introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, Nietzsche criticizes the book as “a ‘first book,’ also in the worst sense of that term, and one that exhibited, for all the hoariness of its topic, every conceivable fault of adolescence” (BT 5). He is in particular critical towards “that whole esthetic metaphysics [which] might be rejected out of hand as so much prattle or rant” (BT 10).

Yet, he asserts that

in its essential traits it already prefigured that spirit of deep distrust and defiance which, later on, was to resist to the bitter end any moral interpretation of existence whatsoever ... Thus it happened that in those days, with this problem book, my vital instincts turned against ethics and founded a radical counterdoctrine, slanted esthetically, to oppose the Christian libel on life ... I christened it rather arbitrarily—for who can tell the real name of the Antichrist? —with the name of a Greek god, Dionysos. (BT 10-11)

It is the Kantian language and the talk of metaphysics in his first book that Nietzsche later came to criticize. It is not his understanding of what life is, but the distinction between words and things, interpretations and facts, since we can never reach an immediate relationship to the nature of the world through words. That does not, however, prevent him from describing the world as it really is in his own language. While insisting on the Dionysian essence of life, he writes in his notebook in 1885 that “this world” we live in is

a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller ... as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces ... my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal ... *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* (WP #1067, 550).<sup>196</sup>

In 1888, sixteen years after he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explains the Dionysian as follows:

The word “Dionysian” means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. (WP #1050, 539)

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<sup>196</sup> *The Will to Power* represents a selection from Nietzsche’s notebooks published posthumously.

In his persistent affirmation of the total character of life, which remains the same through all change, Nietzsche shows that his later description of life does not break with his account of the primordial One in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Moreover, though Nietzsche does not talk about the healing illusion of Apollonian art in his later writings, or the redeeming effects of art,<sup>197</sup> he does call for a commitment by the individual to affirm and celebrate life in a way that also represents an esthetic form of redemption, creating art out of his own life in great style. As we've seen, Zarathustra, while denouncing God, asserts that "creation—that is the great redemption from suffering" (Z 199). Describing himself as "a seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future," Zarathustra extols the "will," asserting that the "will—that is the name of the liberator and joy-bringer," capable of affirming life and creating beyond for the future (Z 251). The problem as Zarathustra sees it is that the will today "is still a prisoner," lamenting the past and how "it was," wanting "revenge" against all the "suffering" (Z 251-52). Therefore the will must be liberated, for then "the will is a creator," and the will can thus "become his own redeemer and joy-bringer" (Z 253).

Commenting on the apparent change in attitude regarding man's relationship to life from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85), Sehmsdorf argues that "Nietzsche later came to replace conventional morality not with an aesthetic

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<sup>197</sup> Nietzsche writes that "I feel inclined to the hypothesis that the original Oneness, the ground of Being, ever-suffering and contradictory, time and again has need of rapt vision and delightful illusion to redeem itself" (BTE 32). The Dionysian chorus would supply the rapt vision, the Apollonian art and acting on the stage, the delightful illusion.

concept (the Dionysian), but with the call for radical commitment” (355). First of all, it is the Apollonian principle Nietzsche later criticizes while he expands the concept of the Dionysian. In 1888 Nietzsche describes the “*Apollonian*” as “the urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical ‘individual,’ to all that simplifies, distinguishes, makes strong, clear, unambiguous, typical: freedom under the law” (WP #1050, 539). It is this constrained form of living he later rejects, not the existential imperative to give style to one’s character according to one’s own will. It is by creating himself beyond the all-too-human typical individual—shaping himself in great style—that the *Übermensch* redeems himself through his own self-overcoming. An esthetic concept thus still plays a significant role in Nietzsche’s later years in terms of his artistic-creative existential imperative.

Dionysos represents the overcoming of man and thus his redemption. Hence, according to Nietzsche, “the highest state a philosopher can attain” is “to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*” (WP #1041, 536).<sup>198</sup> Discussing Nietzsche’s idea of a Dionysian relationship to life as “redemption,” Ted Sadler summarizes it as follows:

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<sup>198</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, written in 1888, published posthumously, Nietzsche likewise asserts that: “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it” (258). Nietzsche introduced this concept for the first time in *The Gay Science* (first ed. 1882), exclaiming “*Amor Fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse ... some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer” (GS 223).

a state of intoxication, rapture, forgetfulness of self, ecstasy, enchantment and cheerfulness, of surging power and strength which transports man out of himself ...[while]... at the same time it is a state of great seriousness, reverence and gratitude. (137)

Finally, Dionysos represents eternal recurrence. According to Nietzsche, Zarathustra—“the teacher of the eternal recurrence” (Z 332)—is “*the concept of Dionysus himself*” (EH 306). He speaks “the language of the *dithyramb*” and he affirms the “most terrible insight into reality ... the ‘most abysmal idea’ ... its eternal recurrence ... being himself the eternal Yes to all things” (EH 306). “Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being,” the animals chant to Zarathustra (Z 329), and finally he himself exclaims that “joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same” (Z 434). Even agony the will thus affirms, “for all joy wants itself, hence it also wants agony ... Joy wants the eternity of *all* things, *wants deep, wants deep eternity*” (Z 434, 436).

In positing eternal recurrence, Nietzsche never abandons his affinity for the Dionysian mysteries. Indeed, he asserts that they also teach eternal recurrence while consecrating the eternal ebb and flow of joys and pains. “In the teachings of the mysteries, *pain* is sanctified,” explains Nietzsche, but not pain as destructive, but as productive: its “overflowing feeling of life and energy within which even pain acts as a stimulus provided me with the key to the concept of the *tragic* feeling” (TI 109-110). Such tragedy is far from pessimism, explains Nietzsche further, and is actually the

“decisive repudiation of it and its *counter-verdict*” (TI 110). It is “affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility ... *not* so as to get rid of pity and terror ...[but] beyond pity and terror, *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*” (TI 110). All in all, it is “in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the Dionysian condition, that the *fundamental fact* of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself—its ‘will to life’” (TI 109). Its will to life is for “*eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality” (TI 109).

In Nietzsche’s estimation, there is “no more exalted symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism” which he sees as “the profoundest instinct of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life” (TI 110). Moreover, it is in line with its celebration of the becoming of life—through “the mysteries of sexuality”—that Nietzsche objects to Christianity which—“with *ressentiment against* life” and its denial of sexuality—“threw *filth* on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life” (TI 110). Christianity excludes the eternal recurrence of life and the innocence of eternal becoming, while making the beginning—and thus every new “Yes”—impure. Opposed to such a life-denying morality, Nietzsche declares that “I am a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus; I should prefer to be even a satyr to being a saint” (EH 217).

In *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche for the first time posits eternal recurrence,<sup>199</sup> he puts it in the following question:

What if, some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you wish it, speck of dust!” (GS 273).

“How well disposed would you have to become to yourself,” Nietzsche reflects further, “and to live *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (GS 274). His answer is that a powerful and healthy will is essential not only to bear, but to celebrate the Dionysian insight into the eternal recurrence of life. It is such a will that says “*amor fati*.” In this way, Nietzsche concludes, the eternal recurrence implies “the highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable” (EH 295).

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<sup>199</sup> As we’ve seen, Nietzsche discusses the idea of “eternal recurrence” further in *Zarathustra*, and he indicates in *Ecce Homo* that the idea was already present in his first work *The Birth of Tragedy* as spoken through the words of Heraclitus (EH 274). Further, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explains that “the fundamental conception of this work [*Zarathustra*], the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable, belongs in August 1881... that day I was walking through the woods along the lake of Silvaplana ... it was then that this idea came to me” (EH 295).

The insight of the eternal recurrence thus underscores not only Nietzsche's emphasis on profound pain as continuously returning, it also highlights the implicit demands on the individual's great and healthy will to face the abyss of existence, as opposed to the Christian's weak will and his metaphysical need for belief in pre-ordained salvation. "I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over," says Zarathustra (Z 127). Facing the abyss of pain and suffering in the eternal recurrence of life, Dionysian man goes under, but this also gives him the impetus to cross over with his powerful affirmation of life that says "Yes" to life as it is. The eternal recurrence thus affords the same stimulus as the Dionysian mysteries.

Recognizing the stimulus eternal recurrence affords, Nehamas concludes that Nietzsche puts the idea of recurrence to a psychological use (142). Discussing Zarathustra's speech "On Redemption," which bids man to affirm life as "thus I will it" (see my Chapter III), Nehamas relates the idea of eternal recurrence to Zarathustra's celebration of the earth and affirmation of our own self-overcoming. "'On Redemption' (Z, II, 20) suggests that a life can be justified only if it comes to be accepted in its entirety," explains Nehamas; "the mark of this is the desire to repeat this very life, and so everything else in the world as well, in all eternity" (159). In other words, man's psychological attitude to life is at the foundation of the teaching of eternal recurrence.

Supplementing Nehamas' discussion is Bernd Magnus' book *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, in which he interprets the eternal recurrence in terms of an "existential imperative." According to Magnus, "*the attitude toward life captured in the*

*doctrine of eternal recurrence is the expression of nihilism already overcome ...* The affirmative attitude expressed by the doctrine is the attitude toward life expressed by the *Übermensch*" (142).<sup>200</sup> Hence, in contrast to the otherworldliness of Plato's philosophy and Christian religion,

Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence serves the function of a countermyth, an eternalistic countermyth, which serves to sanctify and consecrate the transient flow of experience, that temporal flux which philosophers since before Plato have baptized with the name "becoming."

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, then, is a sort of deification of that which is transient, by eternalizing it. Temporality is eternalized in

Nietzsche's doctrine, if the myth is construed factually. (162)

As an imperative for man to affirm transient life, Nietzsche thus found in the doctrine of eternal recurrence a potent drug to overcome the nihilism of modernity.<sup>201</sup> It could be, as Nietzsche said, "the religion beyond religions" (qtd. in Magnus xiii).

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<sup>200</sup> Likewise Joan Stambaugh explains, when discussing the role Dionysian insight plays in Nietzsche's philosophy, that what Nietzsche is pointing to when he talks of the possibility of transcendence as man's activity of self-overcoming, is "a type of human being who *experiences* differently from most of us. The artist is the man *able* to experience and shape a higher dimension of reality" (10). Stambaugh means by this that in his creative response to the abyss of existence, man as an artist of himself—as the "overman"—may transform his life into a higher dimension and thus overcome himself and his terror.

<sup>201</sup> Ahern refers to it as a "potion" (169). Further, Ahern also emphasizes the "psychological impact [the doctrine] has on the individual who takes it to heart" (166). "Recurrence ... is meant as a potent drought of poison for those incapable of affirming life as incessant becoming ... as a ploughshare tilling the soil of humankind to cultivate the overman ... there can be little doubt of Nietzsche's passionate desire to provide a vision of innocence and eternity which 'compels a faith in the "eternal recurrence"' (WP 55). Somehow the doctrine had to be taken to heart and held with the same fervent devotion that any Christian ever directed to God" (168-70). However, "this faith is not a belief in yet another deity ... It is a faith that, no matter how excruciatingly lonely it becomes or how many and intense the sources of

According to Nietzsche, the will to power inheres in man prior to the insight into the abyss of existence (though he sees it around him as both sick and imprisoned), and it is an absolute requirement to face and affirm the eternal recurrence of life. Yet, the Dionysian insight also serves as a fundamental stimulus to create and to realize the joy of becoming in oneself, hence it perpetuates the will to power in the eternal becoming of life. As we shall see in the following, the religious insight delineated in the texts of Hamsun and Dinesen also appears as a stimulus for a more powerful affirmation of life and nature, or the nature of life. In other words, the success or failure of the artistic-existential projects of Hamsun's and Dinesen's heroes and heroines is determined not only by, on the one hand, the individual's own health and creativity, or, on the other hand, the resistance the individual encounters in his or her historical context. A pantheistic belief and affirmation of life is imperative in order to achieve success. However, a strong and healthy will is required to act as a Dionysian pantheist.

#### **HAMSUN: ONENESS WITH NATURE**

In his article "Filosofiens spor hos Hamsun" ["The tracks of philosophy in Hamsun"], Øystein Rottem notes in Hamsun's writing "en panteistisk søken etter å gå opp i naturen og bli ett med den, som en drøm om det vegetative eller kontemplative liv i

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suffering are, one will revere and want to be worthy of life. And one will only be worthy when, in the midst of great suffering, life itself is never betrayed by blaming or hating it *because* one suffers and understands that one will continue to suffer. On the contrary, one can laugh with *amor fati* and dance with death; and though one might mock them, there is no hate for those who are unworthy: those who, in seeking merely to preserve themselves, commit the blasphemy of cursing life out of *ressentiment*" (147).

skogenes ensomhet. Forfatterskapet tegner en kurve fra 'Sult-helten til Abel i 'Ringens sluttet,' hvor dette ønsket ytrer seg med stadig sterkere kraft" ["a pantheistic desire to be absorbed by nature and become one with it, like a dream about the vegetative or contemplative life in the forest's loneliness. The authorship draws a curve from the hero of 'Hunger' to Abel in 'The Ring is closed' which shows how this desire is expressed with increasing power"]. Further, Béatrice Oudry Henrioud comments on Hamsun's rejection of church and liturgy, seeing how characters in his work connect instead with God in nature without any mediator. "Hele Hamsuns verk framstiller naturen som et sted for meditasjon og trøst" ["Hamsun's entire work portrays nature as a place for meditation and comfort"], explains Henrioud (98). Referring to how, for instance, Glahn in *Pan* and Nagel in *Mysteries* have ecstatic experiences in their encounters with nature, Henrioud concludes that in Hamsun's works "naturen er velgjørende og moderlig—og den er et sted for gudsdyrkelse" ["nature is benevolent and motherly—and it is a place for worship"] (99). In fact, she adds, "Glahn minner om en prest" ["Glahn reminds me of a priest"] (99).

Like Nietzsche, it is the sense of unity and interconnectedness in nature that Hamsun celebrates and which intoxicates Glahn. As Kittang argues, discussing the experiences of oneness in Hamsun's texts, it expresses "trua på ein identitet mellom subjektet og grunnkreftene i tilværet: ein identitet og ei gjenkjenning som er av panerotisk karakter" ["the belief in an identity between the subject and the original

powers of existence: an identity and a recognition of a pan-erotic essence”] (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 186).

The celebration of nature that runs through Hamsun’s entire work has the appearance of a pantheism that requires no church or ministers for the individual to experience his immediate connection to nature. Hence, in his article “The Whisper of the Blood: A Study of Knut Hamsun’s Early Novels,” McFarlane concludes that “the deeper implications of *Pan* are not so much Pantheistic as pantheistic; and one must acknowledge not merely the horned and bearded Pan but also the ‘pan’ of the *hen kai pan*, the Universal and All-embracing” (586). Glahn expresses an intense sense of an all-embracing love and affirmation of nature as a unity, to which he belongs. I have mentioned the bursts of ecstasy that at times well up in him. According to Ferguson, these produce in him “moods of profound pantheistic identification with the nature around him” (154).

A closer look at some of Glahn’s experiences of natural ecstasy is necessary to assert their Dionysian pantheistic identity, in line with Nietzsche’s pantheism. In the very beginning of the book, a storm ravages the settlement. “Alt stod i røk. Jorden og himlen blandedes sammen” [“Everything was on fire. The earth and sky were melted together”] (9). The effect the storm has on Glahn brings Nietzsche’s words on the world as chaos and power to mind. Intoxicated by the power of the storm, Glahn feels as if he is seeing “det indre av jordens hjærne” [“the inside of the earth’s brain”], and he stands as if fixated, observing the storm, immersed in its powers (9). A little while later, we

encounter him on his way home to his cabin after a day out in the forest hunting. Suddenly he is filled by “en sælsom taknemmelighet, alt indlater sig med mig, blander sig med mig, jeg elsker alt” [“a strange gratitude, everything enchants me, blends with me, I love everything”], he exclaims in silence (15). In line with Nietzsche’s celebration of the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow, Glahn thus affirms his gratitude to the earth.

It is in particular the magic of the summer nights that intoxicates Glahn, turning him into a drunken lyre, like Zarathustra: “Sommernætter og stille vand og uendelig stille skoger. Intet skrik, intet fottrin fra veiene, mit hjerte var fuldt som av dunkel vin” [“Summer nights and still waters and endlessly quiet forests. Not a sound from the animals or from foot steps on the road, my heart overflowing as with a heavy wine”] (30). In love with life, Zarathustra talks about life as a mistress and himself as her wooer,<sup>202</sup> and Glahn feels embraced by the ocean, and kissed in the forest (55). It is, he believes, “livets elskerinde” [“life’s mistress”] (56).

Towards the end of the book, during the Three Iron Nights, the first days of frost, Glahn is out holding a vigil in the forest. During the first night he hears God:

Hør! Det er den evige Gud! Denne stilhet som mumler mot mit øre er  
alnaturens blod som syder, Gud som gjennemvæver verden og mig.

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<sup>202</sup> See for instance “The Other Dancing Song” in which Zarathustra jealously pursues life but is eventually caught by her words, finding them dearer than any wisdom (Z 336-39).

[Listen! It is the eternal God! This silence humming against my ear is the blood of All-nature seething, God weaving his way through the world and me.] (74)

During the last night he feels seen by God:

Jeg klinger med i den store stillhet ... Vinden kalder mig og min sjæl bøier sig bejaende imot kaldet og jeg føler mig løftet ut av min sammenheng, trykket til et usynlig bryst, mine øine dugger, jeg sitrer. – Gud står et sted i nærheten og ser på mig.

[I am one with the great silence ... The wind calls for me and my soul obeys the calling and I feel lifted out of my entity, embraced by invisible arms, my eyes become moist with tears, I tremble. – God stands nearby, watching me.] (77)

The God he hears and who observes him is woven into nature; it is the wind that calls for him and it is the atmosphere that embraces him.

These examples demonstrate Glahn's pantheism and his pantheistic identification with the nature around him, which result in elevation and gratitude, as it does for Dionysian man. Finally, it produces his Dionysian affirmation of life; his "Yes" to life, underscoring the power his experiences exert on his own life; his own will to life, not as a Lieutenant working for the State, but as a hunter living as he chooses, attuned to nature. Out in the forest, intoxicated by a feeling of coming home, Glahn exclaims: "Ja nu kommer jeg!" ["Yes, I'm coming!"] (54). Later, out in his boat, he again asserts his

gratitude to nature: “Velsignet være livet og jorden og himlen ... Velsignet være I ... mit blod bøier sig i mine årer av taksigelse mot jer!” [“Blessed be life and the earth and the sky ... Blessed be you ... the blood in my veins salutes you in gratitude!”] (55).

Rejecting the church and its liturgy and dismissing its commandments as repressing nature, Hamsun thus redefines God to fit into his pantheistic celebration of nature. Nagel, in Hamsun’s *Mysteries*, derides the Lutheran God when he is in his cocky mood, but, like Glahn, he experiences the divine—or God—in nature. As Nettum explains, “Nagels lengsel etter å gå opp i altet er en lengsel etter det opprinnelige, ubesmittet av sosiale konvensjoner” [“Nagel’s desire to become one with an all-embracing being is a desire for the original, unsullied by social conventions”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 140). Lying down on the ground in the woods, he feels at one point

henført og forstak sig ind i det rasende solskin ... intet forstyrret ham, bare oppe i luften suset den bløte lyd, lyden av det uhyre stampeværk, Gud som trådte sitt hjul.

[carried away and engulfed by the magic rays of the sun ... nothing could disturb him; the only sound was a soft murmur from above, the hum of the universal machinery—God turning his treadmill.] (52)

Like Glahn’s experiences, we can read Nagel’s experience as his Dionysian experience of oneness with nature; his insight into the eternal cycles of existence with its ensuing intoxication, spurring his power to affirm life, exclaiming “Yes” to life. During his experience Nagel hugs his knees in sheer delight and feels exhilarated because life is so

good. Life beckons to him and he responds: “Det kaldte på ham og han svarte ja” [“It was calling for him and he answered yes”] (52). Finding no one around him, he repeats his “yes.”

Nagel’s “yes” to life echoes Nietzsche’s Dionysian urge to unity, reaching out beyond the everyday and society, across the abyss of transitoriness, as a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states, resulting in an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life. It is the ecstatic, overflowing, and floating characteristics of Nagel’s experience, which identify it as Dionysian.

Han var i en gåtefuld tilstand, fylt av psykisk behag; hver nerve i ham var våken, han fornåm musik i sit blod, følte sig beslægted med hele naturen, med solen og fjældene og alt andet, kjendte sig omsuset av sin egen jegfølelse fra trær og tuver og strå. Hans sjæl blev stor og fuldtonende som et orgel inde i ham og aldrig glemte han hvorledes den milde musik likefrem gled op og ned i hans blod.

[He was in a strange, euphoric state of mind; his every nerve vibrated; music surged through his blood; he was part of nature, of the sun, the mountains; he was omniscient; the trees, the earth, the moss, spoke to him alone. His soul went into a crescendo, like an organ with all the stops pulled out. Never would he forget how this heavenly music seemed to pulsate through his blood.] (52)

Moreover, the power of the Dionysian experience Nagel has convinced him about the significance of religious life. To the town's doctor at a party, Nagel explains that he defends the "religiøse liv i mennesket ... ikke specielt kristendommen, aldeles ikke, men overhodet det religiøse liv ... Det religiøse liv er et faktum" ["the religious *life* of human kind ... not Christianity as such, by no means, but the religious life in general ... The religious life is a fact"] (157). Further, he argues that "det avgjørende er nemlig ikke *hvad* man tror på, men *hvorledes* man tror på det ..." ["the decisive point is not *what* one believes in, but *how* one believes in it"] (157). In line with Nietzsche, Nagel thus underscores the significance of religious life for human beings, maintaining that there are other more noble forms of religious life than that preached by Christianity.

Following Nagel, one may call one's religious insight by the name of God, but how one feels, believes, and experiences God, are what really matter. To Miss Dagny, Nagel confesses that "hele skogen her er min kirke" ["the entire forest here is my church"] (169). He explains that "jeg føler mig i et hemmelighetsfuldt slægtskap med hvert træ i skogen. Det er som jeg har tilhørt skogen engang; når jeg står her og ser mig om farer likesom en erindring gjennom mit hele menneske" ["I feel as if I have a secret bond with every tree in the forest. It's almost as if I have belonged to the forest at one time. As I look around, a flood of memory seems to surge through me"] (171). Like Glahn, Nagel experiences God in his communion with nature and it is in nature he feels the divine.

Nagel tries to communicate and convince the townspeople about his pantheistic insight, but with little luck. The Doctor sarcastically asks him how many he thinks he will be able to “omvende” [“convert”] in his life, to which Nagel curtly replies that “skulde jeg leve av å omvende folk så kreperte jeg snart” [“if I had to live by converting people I’d soon be dead”] (154). Yet, he continues, “jeg kan bare ikke fatte at ikke også alle andre mennesker går og tænker det samme om tingene som jeg” [“what I can’t understand is that no one else seems to think the way I do about these things”] (154). Determined to stand by his truth, Nagel “biter tænderne sammen og forhærder [sit] hjærte fordi [han] har ret” [“grit[s] [his] teeth and harden[s] [his] heart”];

jeg vil stå eneste alene menneske foran alverden og ikke gi efter! Jeg vet  
 hvad jeg vet, i mit hjærte har jeg ret; stundom, i visse stunder, aner jeg den  
 uendelige sammenheng i alt.

[I’ll stand alone against the world and I will not yield! I know it in my  
 heart that I’m right. – At certain moments I can sense the relationship  
 between all things in the universe.] (228)

Thus Nagel persists in his affirmation of the insight he has had into the bottomless interconnectedness of all life.

Nettum describes Nagel as an aspiring “misjonær” [“missionary”] who wants to “fiske med Sølvangel” [“go fishing with a silver hook”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 132).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Nettum is here referring to Nagel’s story about himself fishing with a silver hook in the sky, which he tells the townspeople later (56). Nettum notes the biblical associations the term “angel” [“hook”] has,

Nettum here also notes the similarities between Nagel and Zarathustra; Nagel “vil ‘fiske’ menneskesjeler” [“wants to ‘go fishing for human souls’”], explains Nettum, and thus, like Zarathustra, he appears as a prophet who desires companions (129).<sup>204</sup> However, while comparing the symbol of “himmelbåten” [“the boat in the sky”]—symbolizing hope and desire—in Nagel’s dream (about a journey in a boat on an ocean in the sky)<sup>205</sup> to Zarathustra’s vision (of a golden boat on nocturnal waters in the eyes of life),<sup>206</sup> Nettum asserts that “der er en karakteristisk forskjell: tyskeren og ‘natt’-filosofen Nietzsche inspireres av månen, nordlendingen—‘kvenen’—Nagel av solen” [“there is a characteristic difference: the German and the philosopher of the night Nietzsche is inspired by the moon, the Norseman—the ‘Finn’—Nagel by the sun”] (130). Whereas Zarathustra’s dream is soaked by the depth of the night, Nagel’s dream is a daydream.

According to McFarlane, Nagel can only be considered “a small-time Zarathustra, a prophet of the provinces” (582). Moreover, Nagel fails to affirm any “Nietzschean ‘will to power;’ it is simply the will to be different,” McFarlane asserts (583). McFarlane concludes that Nagel is thus “a deficient Nietzschean” (584). Indeed, as we’ve seen, Nagel’s disillusion with the people around him eventually overpowers the intense energy

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referring to Matthew 4, 19. The Norwegian word for “hook”—“angel”—is an anagram of Nagel’s name.

<sup>204</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes of himself that beginning with *Beyond Good and Evil* “all my writings are fish hooks: perhaps I know how to fish as well as anyone? — If nothing was caught, I am not to blame. *There were no fish*” (EH 310).

<sup>205</sup> Lying on his back, looking up in the sky, Nagel sees himself fishing with a silver hook. He tells the townspeople later how this happened (56).

<sup>206</sup> See “The Other Dancing Song” and “On the Great Longing” in Book III of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

of the insight of which he wants to speak. He drowns himself, convinced that the womb of life is calling for him: “Det roper!” [“It is calling for me!”] (272). It therefore seems that his will is deficient, hence his pantheistic insight fails in the long run to fuel his artistic-existential affirmation of this terrestrial life which he concludes at the age of twenty-nine.

Nettum, on the other hand, suggests that it is “det kompromissløse ved Nagel” [“Nagel’s unwillingness to make compromises”] which prevents him from success (*Konflikt og visjon* 140). Asserting the value of that which Nagel has experienced and his desire to make people recognize that “sansen for natursammenhengen ... innebærer et bud til alle, en berikelse av følelses- og stemningslivet” [“an appreciation of the interconnectedness of nature ... implies a message to all, an enrichment of the life of our feelings and moods”], he concludes that it is “Nagels ekstremisme som svekker forkynnelsen” [“Nagel’s extremism which impairs his preaching”] or “agitasjonen” [“his agitation”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 140). Nagel’s stubborn insistence not to compromise his experiences in nature in order to appease the social needs and conventions of the people in the small town community alienates him from society. However, if loneliness is his doom, that also indicates that his will is not as courageous as that of the *Übermensch*. Loneliness, or solitude, does not overpower Zarathustra.

We have also seen that Lieutenant Glahn’s experiences of oneness with nature eventually fail to prevent him from wanting his life over before his time has come, at the age of thirty-two. Unable to draw sufficient power from his pantheistic sense of oneness

with nature to affirm his own temporal life, his will thus also proves itself deficient. As McFarlane explains, “Glahn’s existence changes the slow fusion of his soul with the great Oneness of nature into a violent reaction that ends only with his own disintegration” (588). Glahn fails to create either the healing art of Apollo or the redemptive overcoming of Zarathustra in response to his experience of Oneness and the shattering of individuation, and therefore he dies. He remains at the level of shattered individuation—disintegration—and thus he goes under without actually crossing over.

Nilson offers another explanation to why Nagel and Glahn fail. According to Nilson, Hamsun’s worship of life could quite simply not be the absolute value for him; “tomheten ligger bare så ofte og lurer” [“emptiness is simply there too often, lurking under the surface”] (*En ørn i uvær* 238). As I discussed earlier, Dragvoll argues that Glahn is a Schopenhauerian figure and according to Nilson, Hamsun was at times drawn to death as an eternal sleep (237). However, Hamsun also expresses horror in the face of death and is by no means a worshipper of death.

Om Knut Hamsun stundom kunne dyrke livet, så er det ikke riktig å si at livsfryden var det dypeste hos ham. Men jeg tror det ville være like galt å si at dragingen mot døden er det. Karakteristisk for ham er den veldige spennkraft i svingningene mellom disse to ytterpunkter for tilværelsen.

[Though Knut Hamsun at times worshipped life, it is not correct to say that joy of life was his deepest characteristic. However, I think it would be wrong to say that a desire for death is. Characteristic for him is the

immense tension in the oscillations between these two extremes of existence”] (236)

It was, finally, neither life nor death that Hamsun celebrated, concludes Nilson, but “kjenslene, de varme følelser som han dyrket i motsetning til grå teorier, til kaldt intellekt” [“the emotions, the warm feelings he worshiped as opposed to gray theories and cold intellect”] (239).

Nilson’s comments are enlightening, however, as Nettum asserts, the enrichment of the lives of our moods and feelings is essentially connected to Hamsun’s gospel of the interconnectedness of nature. Even Marstrander who, as we’ve seen, is mostly out to catch the Hamsun-outsider in his narcissism, asserts in the last paragraph of his book that we must never forget that “Hamsun samtidig er nærhetens dikter, den nærhet som hører sansningen til, den nærhet som har berust, ikke bare han, men generasjoner av unge og aldrende lesere. I denne jeg-løse sansning, i denne dypere sansenes forening utover bevisstheten fant han livet. Evnen til opplevelse ga ham evnen til liv” [“Hamsun is at the same time the author of intimacy, that intimacy which belongs to the senses, that intimacy which has intoxicated not only him, but generations of young and older readers. In this intimacy which has no sense of self, in the profound union of sensations beyond consciousness, he found life. The ability to experience gave him the power of life”] (65).

It is exactly the power of life that inspires Hamsun’s *On Overgrown Paths*, even when his thoughts alternate between the themes of death and life. First of all, in contrast to Glahn and Nagel, Hamsun does not kill himself in the end. Secondly, he predicts an

eternal life for himself through his own words and works. Finally, while the cycles of nature and the changing of the season constitute a central theme in Hamsun's entire work, it is in his last book that he most clearly articulates a doctrine that echoes Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. In his last book he has formulated an idea of eternity that affirms transience, hence, the flux of the transient—mortality—no longer overwhelms him.

Pondering the coming of spring after one of his walks while residing at Landvik retirement home during the proceedings against him, Hamsun asks: "Hvad er vårkjendslen for noget, denne grosmak som hvert år huserer med vårt sind?" ["What is this feeling of spring, this sense of burgeoning which wreaks havoc every year in our mind?"] (51). His answer is easy: "Vi vil tilbake igjen, vi vil hjem" ["We want to go back again, we want to go home"] (51). He maintains that "vi dør jo ikke for å være død, for å være noget dødt, vi dør for at vi kan gå over til liv, vi dør til liv, vi er i en plan" ["we die not to be dead, not to be something which has died; we die in order to go over to life, we die to live, we are in a plan"] (92).

Though Marstrander does comment on Hamsun's celebration of life at the very end of his discussion, his main argument is that a desire for "glemselens nirvana" ["the nirvana of oblivion"] permeates Hamsun's work (28). However, Hamsun's sense of a "plan" does not express a yearning for nirvana, but on the contrary, a celebration of the eternal rebirth of life, including the most trifling and transient events. While reflecting further upon this "plan" and the continuous coming and going of spring and fall, birth and

death which it implies, Hamsun faces, like Nietzsche, the most abysmal thought, hence, he sighs:

Det samme solskin, den samme tørke. Jeg går min daglige tur ut i bygden og ser på at alt brænder op ... Har det hændt før? Bierne slår ned på sine gamle steder, ser sig om, summer litt og flyr hjem igjen.

[The same sunshine, the same drought. I go for my daily walk around in the countryside and see how everything is scorched ... Has it happened before? The bees strike down on their old places, look around, buzz a little, and fly home again.] (74)

Further, like Nietzsche, who shudders when he thinks about the recurrence of man—speck of dust, Hamsun reflects about the minuscule significance of man.

Av alt levende i verden er du født til næsten ingen ting. Du er hverken god eller ond, du er blit til uten et tænkt mål. Du kommer fra tåken og går tilbake til tåken igjen, så hjertelig ufuldkommen er du.

[Of all living creatures in the world you are born to be almost a mere nothing. You are neither good nor evil; you have come into being without any purpose. You emerge out of the mist and return to the mist. So utterly nebulous you are.] (41)

Nonetheless, Hamsun concludes, like Nietzsche, in celebration of the energy and vitality of life as eternally creating itself anew. Ecstatic, he exclaims: “åpne vande og vårtegn ... en stor gave og velsignelse fra himlen” [“open waters and signs of spring ... a great gift

and blessing from heaven”] (92). Nietzsche and Hamsun might at moments feel overcome by the most abysmal thought that even man—speck of dust or nothingness out of mist—is a part of the eternal plan, but they nonetheless extol the power of life and its new beginnings as prophets of a greater plan. For Hamsun, as for Nietzsche, it is a plan which deifies life by eternalizing it that affords a great stimulus on his will to affirm life.

### **DINESEN: UNITY OF CONTRARIES**

Though Dinesen did not affirm a “plan” or a “doctrine” eternalizing transient life, she did define her religion as pantheism. In a letter of November 20, 1928, to her aunt Mary Bess Westenholz, Dinesen writes about how she has been guided in her life “af min Tro paa det guddommelige i Verden, og uden den kunde jeg, - som har kaldt mig Pantheist fra mine unge Dage, - daarlig se nogen Sammenhæng i Tilværelsen” [“by my belief in the world’s divinity, and without that I—who have called myself a pantheist from my youth—would hardly have been able to see how everything in existence is connected”].<sup>207</sup> Moreover, she maintains that she does not see “nogen Grænse mellem Naturen og Mennesket” [“any separation between nature and mankind”].<sup>208</sup>

We have seen that Dinesen, while rejecting Protestantism, celebrates Diana and Venus and other pagan gods and goddesses, such as the Wendish goddess of love and the Greek god Dionysos, letting a French chef serve as priestess and a former opera-singer as

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<sup>207</sup> Qtd. from *Breve fra Afrika* [*Letters from Africa*] (II: 196).

<sup>208</sup> In a letter of May 13, 1954, to the Danish scholar of literature Aage Henriksen. Reprinted in *Blixeniana 1985* as “Karen Blixen-Aage Henriksen. En Brevveksling. 1952-1961.” Qtd. in Bjerring (126).

a missionary of a gospel of love. However, she also refers frequently to God. Yet, as Sara Stambaugh asserts, Dinesen rewrites God—like Hamsun—to fit the concept into her pantheism (59). In line with Zarathustra, who maintains that he “would believe only in a god who could dance” (Z 153), Dinesen perceives, as Stambaugh notes, God as a laughing artist.<sup>209</sup> The poet Mira Jama in “The Dreamers” is thus entirely in line with Nietzsche when he tells us that “to love [God] you must love change, and you must love a joke, these being the true inclinations of his own heart” (SGT 355). In such a joking spirit, Miss Malin in “The Deluge at Norderney,” who, as we’ve seen, argues that the Lord has a penchant for masquerades, asserts that he probably finds the “truth,” on the other hand, a little bit dull (SGT 24). Moreover, Miss Malin is proud to assert that she has learned how to grin back at the devil when the devil grins at her (SGT 78).

In her pantheistic redefinition of God, Dinesen combines the God and the Devil as one.<sup>210</sup> Commenting on “Dinesen’s view that ‘God and the Devil are one,’” Stambaugh argues that Dinesen sees the deity as that which “must embrace all aspects of experience, feminine as well as masculine, dark as well as beneficent, and see both as part of the richness of life” (61). According to Stambaugh, Dinesen’s view of God is very much like

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<sup>209</sup> Johannesson likewise explains that Dinesen’s God is a God who has a penchant for masquerades, who likes a joke, and who is the great artist of comedies (116-25). “Gods are fond of mockery; it seems they cannot refrain from laughter even when sacraments are in progress,” Nietzsche also writes (BGE 218).

<sup>210</sup> According to Dinesen, the native people of Africa can teach us this, that God and the Devil are one. See my Chapter V. As Bjerring notes, a sense of “*Motsætningernes Enhed*” [“*The Unity of Opposites*”] permeates Dinesen’s entire work, which combines a sense of God and Devil together, represented by the goddess Venus (97). In opposition to the pre-ordained and oppressive dogmas of Christianity, she affirms the sensual together with the spiritual, the earthly together with the heavenly, as “en

Nietzsche's as he presents God in his 1886 introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy*—God as “the supreme artist, amoral, recklessly creating and destroying” (62).<sup>211</sup> Dinesen's “devil,” continues Stambaugh, “is specifically anti-Christian but not evil in the conventional sense. Instead, Dinesen uses it to represent the positive forces she found expressed in Nietzsche and especially,” adds Stambaugh, “*Zarathustra*, the laughing truth-sayer” (62). In response to “the confines of a triumphant Christian world,” Dinesen presents “an alternate, Nietzschean scheme. Her universe is ruled by a pantheistic deity who, as embodiment of the forces of life, includes both sexes but, not surprisingly, is more often female than male” (Stambaugh 74).<sup>212</sup>

Focusing on the significance of witches and goddesses in Dinesen's work as a representation of Dinesen's redefinition of God, Stambaugh presents Babette in “Babette's Feast” as the “central presentation of woman as godlike artist” (79). We have already seen how Babette—perceived as a witch—acts as a priestess in this tale for the members of a pious sect, creating a great feast in honor of the late Dean's hundredth

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modsætningsfyldt, helhedsorienteret harmoni, omfattende tilværelsens dybder og tinder” [“a harmony of oppositions in an entirety that includes the depths and peaks of existence”], explains Bjerring (121).

<sup>211</sup> Nietzsche here writes about *The Birth of Tragedy* that “throughout the book I attributed a purely esthetic meaning—whether implied or overt—to all process: a kind of divinity if you like, God as the supreme artist, amoral, recklessly creating and destroying, realizing himself indifferently in whatever he does or undoes, ridding himself by his acts of the embarrassment of his riches and the strain of his internal contradictions” (BT 9). Though he goes on to criticize the metaphysical implication of this, he asserts, as we've seen, that the ideas he thus presented prefigured his later ideas, embodied by “that Dionysian monster: Zarathustra ... Zarathustra the soothsayer, Zarathustra the laughing thruthsayer ... lover of leaps and tangents” (BT 15).

<sup>212</sup> As we've seen, Zarathustra courts life as a woman, hence his God is in a sense the universal goddess.

birthday. In the light of Nietzsche's Dionysian pantheism, she appears as a priestess of the Dionysian mysteries.

Babette has lost everything during the revolution in France, but she takes her losses with great calm, persisting in her celebration of life. Having faced the most abysmal suffering of life, while currently living under quite destitute conditions with the two pious sisters in a small coastal town in Norway, she asserts nonetheless to the two sisters that "a great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing" (AD 58). Babette has gone under and has faced the pains and suffering of life, but she crosses over in celebration, continuing to affirm her life as an artist. Thus she creates her own destiny, her self-overcoming and redemption.

Hence, whereas the members of the sect restrict their diet to split cod and ale-and-bread-soup, considering any luxurious fare sinful, Babette celebrates, as we've seen, the art of sensuous cooking (AD 32). Affirming the gifts of the earth, Babette, through the feast she prepares, thus lures the members of the sect to a state of intoxication. Bjerg describes the feast as "Babettes store nadver" ["Babette's great communion"] in which the earthly and the heavenly are affirmed together (35). If, however, Babette is a minister administering the bread, it is not as a Jesus-figure, forsaking herself for others, but as a priestess of the Dionysian mysteries, celebrating all life.

The guests who participate in the sharing of Babette's earthly sacrament fail to appreciate its pantheistic identity. While their elevated state of being is actually the result of Babette's celebration of the gifts of the earth, the late Dean's flock considers it is the

result of heavenly bliss. Hence, “when later in life they thought of this evening it never occurred to any of them that they might have been exalted by their own merit,” i.e. by their own appreciation of the gifts of the earth (AD 53). Rather, the sect members believe that during the supper, “infinite grace ... had been allotted to them” and that “the vain illusions of this earth had dissolved before their eyes like smoke, and they had seen the universe as it really is” (AD 54).

As Bjerg notes, to the members of the sect the world appears as “dybt spaltet. De praktiserer from pilgrimskristendom, mens de skelner skarpt mellom det himmelske lys og denne verdens flammer” [“deeply split. Like pilgrims, they practice a pious Christianity while they distinguish sharply between the heavenly light and this world’s flames”] (34). Babette, on the other hand, affirms the complexities of life in herself. She has “en sammensat karakter ... I sig rummer hun store modsætninger” [“a complex character ... She holds great oppositions”] (35). Babette’s affirmation of the complex richness of the earth frightens the pious sisters. They realize “that Babette was deep, and that in the soundings of her being there were passions, there were memories and longings of which they knew nothing at all” (AD 34). The sisters “shiver” at this realization (AD 34).

Thus afraid, the sisters consider Babette a witch. When they first see her at their door, they are frightened by the look of “a massive, dark, deadly pale woman ... [with] sunken eyes” (AD 29), and when they later see her on the three-legged chair in the kitchen, she appears to them “as enigmatical and fatal as a Pythia upon her tripod” (AD

33). By the time of the dinner party, they perceive her as “the bottled demon of the fairy tale ...[of] such dimensions that her mistresses felt small before her” (AD 39). After the dinner, Martine cannot help but associate Babette with an old African chief she once heard of, who one time treated a missionary, who had saved the old African’s wife, with “a small fat grandchild of the chief’s, cooked in honor of the great Christian medicine man” (AD 57).

Thus Babette, like Glahn and Nagel, intimidates the people around her and hence she receives no true companions. Yet, unlike Glahn and Nagel, Babette does not despair or kill herself. She continues in her affirmation of the earth to create great art. For as her friend, the opera-singer Monsieur Papin once said, “through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost” (AD 59). Like Zarathustra, Babette knows that self-overcoming and redemption must be the individual’s own act, and she is content to create her own. As the Cardinal who offers, as we’ve seen, a story to answer the question “Who are you?” asserts, only through the story—by elevating life to art—is salvation attained (LT 26).<sup>213</sup> After the feast Babette therefore replies to Philippa that she did not create the meal for their sake, but for her own (AD 57). Her Dionysian insight into the abyss of life fuels her will to courageously affirm her

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<sup>213</sup> “Hard and cruel it may seem,” the Cardinal further explains to the Madame who’s been listening to his story about himself as artist and priest combined, “yet we, who hold our high office as keepers and watchmen to the story, may tell you, verily, that to its human characters there is salvation in nothing else in the universe” (LT 26). The Madame, pale, asks him if he is sure that it is God he serves, to which he smiles and replies; “that, Madame, is a risk which the artists and the priests of the world have to run” (LT 26). As an artist and storyteller, and thus creator of salvation, the Cardinal, in other words, appears as one of Dinesen’s godlike artists.

destiny. Stoically she stands in front of Philippa who feels “the cook’s body like a marble monument against her own” (AD 59).

Like the Cardinal, Babette is artist and priest combined. According to the Cardinal, he is also, as “God’s mouthpiece,” doomed to be “forever lonely” (LT 21). The Cardinal recognizes that his words, like Zarathustra’s teaching, may be hard to bear, but they are also those that “will bring out all music that stringed instruments contain” (LT 22). In conversation with God before he was ordained to work in his service, God explained to the Cardinal that the world of which he is the artist is not meant as a “peaceful world,” nor a “pretty and neat word ... or a world easy to live in” (LT 21). Rather, it is “a sublime world, with all things necessary to the purpose in it, and none left out” (LT 22). Further, among the benefits working as a servant of God, is the one related to the so-called “benefit of remorse” (LT 22). To the Cardinal it is forbidden; “the tears of repentance ... are not for him” (LT 22). True to Dinesen’s pantheism and God’s creation as all-inclusive, the Cardinal affirms life in all its pain and suffering and does not regret any of its aspects while he creates eternal art out of life by means of the story.

Much has been written on Dinesen’s sense of religion, in particular by Danish scholars, such as Mogens Pahuus, Peter Hjorth S. Bjerring, Svend Bjerg, and Hans Holmberg, but also by Americans, such as Sara Stambaugh. Donald Riechel also touches upon the topic in his article on Dinesen’s Nietzscheanism. It is in particular Dinesen’s sense of destiny, the divine story, and her affirmation of God, that seem to have puzzled scholars trying to figure out her sense of religion. Discussing Dinesen’s sense of

“destiny,” Riechel writes that Dinesen “believes in the transcendent,” arguing that “whereas for Nietzsche there is no meaning, design or pattern in life unless we create it, for Dinesen there is a pre-given pattern, symbolized by aristocratic tradition and story plot, which it matters to discover” (“Roads Round Nietzsche” 346-47).<sup>214</sup> However, Riechel’s conclusion is refuted by the more thorough discussions by Pahuus and Bjerring. Dinesen has “en immanent, en ikke-metafysisk opfattelse af skæbnebegrebet” [“un-metaphysical understanding of the concept ‘destiny’”], maintains Pahuus (133). Likewise Bjerring asserts that there is no pre-ordained sense of destiny in Dinesen’s texts, rather it is a question of affirming “en heroisk livsholdning” [“a heroic attitude to life”] (44).<sup>215</sup>

Bjerring, moreover, notes the similarity between Dinesen’s active sense of destiny and Nietzsche’s *amor fati*, however, he concludes that “der er dog også forskel, for hos Blixen indgår forholdet i en langt mere sammenhængende ... forståelse, en helhedsforståelse ... Endelig svarer en Nietzsches såkaldte ‘overmenneske-teori’ ikke til Blixens opfattelse, hun peger i stedet på det guddommelige, hvilket er noget helt andet” [“there is, however, a difference, for in Dinesen the sense of destiny enters a far more coherent ... understanding, an understanding of the entirety ... Finally, Nietzsche’s so-

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<sup>214</sup> Like Riechel, Bjerg finds evidence of a transcendent power in Dinesen’s work. According to Bjerg, the Christian belief in that which prevents life “fra at gå til grunde ... en religiøs magt” [“from going to rack and ruin ... a religious power”] is incorporated by Dinesen (61). Pahuus, on the other hand, who asserts Dinesen’s immanent sense of destiny, rejects Bjerg’s interpretation of it (134-38).

<sup>215</sup> What this means, explains Bjerring, is “at kunne og ville—og have fantasi og mod til—at overtage sit eget liv, bl.a. via et aktivt forhold til én selv og verden” [“to be capable and to want—and to have the required imagination and courage—to take control over one’s own life, that is, by an active relationship with oneself and the world”] (44). Leander Hansen likewise maintains that destiny to Dinesen is a matter

called ‘overman-theory’ is different from Dinesen’s understanding, she points instead to the divine, which is something entirely different”] (45). Dinesen’s sense of destiny is indeed related to her understanding of life in its entirety, however, Bjerring fails to recognize that Nietzsche’s “amor fati” is so too. Opposed to Bjerring, I have shown that Nietzsche’s *amor fati*—the love for one’s destiny affirmed by the *Übermensch*—is essentially related to the affirmation of the eternal recurrence and the creation of one’s own redemption. In other words, the theory about the overman *is* related to a coherent entirety. Moreover, the entirety as Nietzsche sees it is indeed divine in the light of his Dionysian pantheism.<sup>216</sup>

On the other hand, Dinesen’s frequent references to a “God,” including dialogs between men and God in which the former is informed about God’s design, as the one referred to above between the Cardinal and God, do suggest that Dinesen—unlike Nietzsche—held on to a sense of transcendent God or a pre-determined pattern of life. Nietzsche has not been accused for believing in the transcendent, but his idea about eternal recurrence has been debated and interpreted as a metaphysical doctrine or cosmological hypothesis. As Nehamas explains, eternal recurrence interpreted in this way “holds that everything that has already happened in the universe, and everything that is

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of being open to nature and actively affirm its potentials (9-10). Juhl, Jørgensen, Thurman, and Rostbøll also underscore that there is no transcendent power involved in Dinesen’s idea of destiny.

<sup>216</sup> Bjerring’s comment on Nietzsche’s theory of the overman seems symptomatic of the tradition I referred to in my Introduction, namely the superficial understanding of Nietzsche that considers him primarily as the philosopher of the *Übermensch*, “beyond good and evil,” in terms of ethics and politics. Likewise Nettum emphasizes in particular “Nagels Nietzschepåvirkede herremenneske-forkynnelse” [“Nagel’s

happening at this very moment, and everything that will happen in the future, has already happened and will happen again, preceded and followed by exactly the same events in exactly the same order” (142).<sup>217</sup>

According to the metaphysical or cosmological interpretation of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, it would seem that Nietzsche also presumed a pre-determined plan for life. However, Magnus, who interprets eternal recurrence as an eternalistic countermyth, argues that eternal recurrence does not imply a cosmology (xv). According to Magnus, “what the doctrine of eternal recurrence teaches is not what the world is, but how it might be taken, given a certain attitude toward it. That attitude is one of radical affirmation” (155). The doctrine thus has a “diagnostic trust” to overcome the nihilism of modern men, for “eternal recurrence intensifies the dynamics of choice, because whatever I choose to be, that I *shall* be for infinite recurrences” (156-57). “Eternal recurrence proclaims a fate which we can presumably embrace, because it is one which we alone shape. The attitude which would eternalize the moment through eternal recurrence is the most extreme affirmation; the most extreme approximation of a world of becoming to that of being. It is, in fact, the deification of the world” (159). To affirm life in this way one must, as we’ve seen, have the attitude to life of the *Übermensch*.

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Nietzsche-inspired preaching of the overman”] when comparing Nagel to Zarathustra (*Konflikt og visjon* 134).

<sup>217</sup> As Nehamas further comments, though Nietzsche did leave some sketches of a proof of a cosmology in his notes, “it is very difficult to determine what the purpose of these sketches is” (143). Moreover, the “cosmological doctrine is not to be found in a number of passages where Nietzsche discusses recurrence” (142).

Taken as a countermyth, eternal recurrence underscores man's freedom and responsibility. Taken literally, it poses a paradox. As Magnus asserts, "the literal version of the doctrine poses an existential paradox," namely that "we are free to create our determined fate" (157). Indeed, the doctrine thus resembles the heart of Christianity. However, continues Magnus, "Nietzsche was fully aware of the Christian puzzle, I believe, and exploited the force of its contradiction, while avoiding its unhappy consequences. Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, when pictured literally, differs from the God-hypothesis because the actor writes his own scenario *in* the performance" (158-59). Essentially, the doctrine turns the Christian otherworldliness upside-down by eternalizing and thus deifying the transient.

Magnus' interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence is helpful to understand Dinesen's sense of God's design. Like Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, the idea that God has a plan for our lives (as our destinies that will shine for eternity) underscores the importance that we embrace our destiny. The paradox in Dinesen's tales is thus that she extols the hero and heroine who shape their lives into great destinies while, on the other hand, she also suggests that their destinies are parts of God's design. Considering the similarity in character between this paradox and the paradox of eternal recurrence, I contend that Dinesen, like Nietzsche, appropriates a myth of the eternal to embrace the transient. Dedicated to the earth and this life, her tales promise that transient life can be eternalized as destiny, destiny being the product of an artistic-existential project by which the earth and the powers of life are affirmed in great style. To affirm life in this way one

must have the attitude to life of Dinesen's aristocrat, as Leander Hansen asserts, who "vinder ... sin skæbne ved åbenhed og handling" ["wins ... his/her destiny by openness and action"], affirming "urkræftene" ["the primitive forces"] (10-11).

Moreover, Dinesen's aristocratic art is her answer to the transitoriness of time as a way to affirm eternity, as Leander Hansen explains. "Tiden behøver evighed—og Karen Blixens aristokratiske kunst var et svar herpå" ["Time needs eternity—and Isak Dinesen's art was her answer to this"], explains Leander Hansen (194). We have seen that Dinesen's tales, in line with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, present a defense for heroic tragedy and comedy, or tragicomedy, in which the hero and heroine are eternalized. For Dinesen, the story thus serves as a counterdoctrine to Protestantism, eternalizing the powers of nature and the destinies of those who affirm these.

Dinesen's heroine Pellegrina, for instance, affirms her destiny in the face of the abyss and the recurrence of transitory life. In "Echoes" she muses that "God likes a *da capo* ... also called resurrection" and she wonders if Emanuele may be the rebirth of herself (170).<sup>218</sup> Pellegrina welcomes a *da capo*, however, as we've seen, Emanuele fails to become a second Pellegrina. Thus he also fails to create his destiny by affirming the potential he has as an artist. Instead, he reveals his fear of the powers of life, accusing Pellegrina for being a witch.

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<sup>218</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes the "most living and most world-affirming man" as he who "has not only learned to get on and treat with all that was and is but who wants to have it again *as it was and is* to all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole piece and play ... And would this not be—*circulus vitiosus deus*?" (BGE 82).

Whereas Dinesen's aristocrat radically affirms life, others, such as Emanuele and the entire bourgeoisie, repress nature. In this way, as Leander Hansen explains, their attitude to life is revealed as "skæbnefjendsk" ["hostile to destiny"] (10). In other words, Dinesen has an active relationship to destiny, but not everyone recognizes and realizes his or her destiny because they fail to affirm nature and the potential of their natures. In a letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen, Dinesen writes that destiny is a question of how one strives to "frit at kunne udvikle sin Natur til det højeste" ["freely develop one's nature to the highest"].<sup>219</sup> Only when nature is not repressed but, on the contrary, set free as "det oprindelige ... urkræfterne" ["the original ... the primitive forces"] can destiny be affirmed, concludes Leander Hansen (11). Dinesen therefore "bestræber sig for at få dén erkendelse frem, at sandheden ligger i at leve i overensstemmelse med det udødelige" ["strives to communicate the understanding that truth resides in the act of living in accordance with the eternal"] (11).

When characters fail to affirm their destiny, Dinesen portrays them as obstinate in the face of God. As Johannesson notes, there are many such characters in Dinesen's tales who "struggle against their own destiny, they kick against the pricks, they try to break up God's pattern or plan, they try to set things right according to their own limited imagination or knowledge" (121). The problem in the case of such obstinate characters is that they have no true insight into the nature of life and the potential of their own lives.

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<sup>219</sup> The letter is dated August 19, 1923. Moreover, Dinesen writes that "for at kunne føle sig fri og lykkelig" ["to feel free and happy"] one must be able to "frit at kunne udvikle sin Natur til det højeste, den er istand til" ["freely develop one's nature to the height of its potential"] (*Breve fra Afrika* I: 211).

Dinesen's heroes and heroines, on the other hand, are they who recognize their own destiny as "an insight into the real nature of life, an experience which brings [them] to an acceptance of [themselves], [their] own role in life, and of God and the world" (121). Their insight results in their affirmation of their destiny and the world as divine and thus their redemption.

This is why Dinesen criticizes the gospel of the New Testament, for, as Bjerring notes, "det gør ifølge Blixen mennesker passive, ja æreløse via den udbredte tendens til forkyndelse af den 'automatiske frelse'" ["it makes, according to Dinesen, human beings passive, yes, without honor, because of the frequent tendency to preach 'automatic salvation'"] (57-58). Hence, concludes Bjerring, "ifølge Karen Blixen er det kristne—nytestamentlige—næstekærlighets- og frelsesevangelium ganske enkelt for nedværdigende" ["according to Isak Dinesen, the Christian gospel in the New Testament of benevolence and salvation is quite simply demeaning"] (57-58).

In opposition to the Christian gospel's sense of salvation and in line with Zarathustra's sense of redemption, Dinesen maintains that everyone must "work out their own salvation" (qtd. in Bjerring 58). She sees, as Bjerring notes, "skæbne" ["destiny"] as the author's creative idea (49). Indeed, Dinesen asserts that "*digteren selv er Gud*" ["*the poet himself is God*"].<sup>220</sup> It is Dinesen's point that by creating herself as an artist through her work, she redeems herself as her own God. In her essay "En båltales med 14 års forsinkelse" ["Oration at a Bonfire, Fourteen Years Late"] Dinesen thus explains that

“kunsten er en udfoldelse af kunstnerens eget væsen, og hans værk ligger ikke egentlig uden for ham selv, men det *er* ham selv” [“the art is an unfolding of the artist’s own nature, and his work is not really something outside of himself, it *is* himself”] (SE 223).

In contrast to Hamsun, who is mostly interested in portraying the Dionysian experience of the eternal recurrence in nature, Dinesen is more interested in portraying her protagonists’ love for their destinies in the face of everything transitory. Hence, while rejecting, like Nietzsche, the Christian faith in salvation and eternal bliss beyond this life, she emphasizes the floating and transitory essence of life, the cycles of becoming. In contrast to the Christian obsession with guilt and punishment and the yearning for redemption in a future time, she turns—in line with Nietzsche’s turn to the ancient Greeks—to people in other cultures whose lives are attuned to nature and whose sense of time is not tied to a linear concept. These people include the Wends and the native Africans.

We learn about the pagan Wendish thrall, Granze, an old wizard in Dinesen’s tale “The Fish,” that he, though baptized, has kept his Wendish memory which reaches back to the collective unconscious of a primitive age when people did not distinguish between themselves and the rest of nature.<sup>221</sup> To Granze, past and present are one. Hence, he

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<sup>220</sup> These are her words kept in capsule 146 in The Royal Library in Copenhagen, qtd. in Bjerring 82.

<sup>221</sup> Thurman writes that “the pagan thrall, like the storyteller herself, has access to the collective unconscious. His memory reaches back to the harmonious fatalism of a primitive age and of a people who did not distinguish between themselves and the rest of nature—which is also the innocence of early childhood. It is just this innocence of which Christianity, the ‘poisonous tradition of dualism,’ has, in her view, deprived us. In the landscape Granze inhabits, sea and sky, heaven and earth, conscious and unconscious, past and present are one, undifferentiated” (423). Thurman also discusses the title of this

explains to King Erik of Denmark who has come to see him, wanting to save his unhappy soul, discontent with the doctrines of Christianity, that

with us Wends it is a different thing, What has happened to our father's father, and to those old men who were mould when he was suckled by his mother, we still keep in our mind; we recall it whenever we want. You, too, have the lusts and fears of your fathers in your blood, but their knowledge you have not; they did not understand how to put that in when they were begetting a child. That is why each of you has to begin anew from the beginning, like a newborn mouse fumbling in the dark. (WT 241)

Whereas Christianity has alienated man from the knowledge that connects him to nature, Granze thus carries the wisdom of cycles of generations.

About the native Africans, Dinesen writes in *Out of Africa* that they “staar ... paa en venskabelig Fod med Tiden og finder aldrig af sig selv paa at fordrive den eller slaa den ihjel, de er tværtimod glade for den” [“are ... on friendly terms with time and will never by themselves try to make it pass or kill it, they are, on the contrary, happy about it”] (188). If one leaves one's horse to a Kikuyu to look after it while one pays a visit at someone's house, continues Dinesen, “kan man straks se paa hans Ansigt, at han ønsker, man vilde blive derinde i lang Tid. Han prøver da ikke paa at faa Tiden til at gaa, men sætter sig ned og lever” [“one can immediately tell by his face that he wishes one will

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tale, “The Fish,” as “one of Isak Dinesen's most rich and allusive images. It is a symbol of the continuity between the Christian, pagan, and animalistic mysteries, and it reminds us that when she writes of ‘God’ it is always as a pantheist” (423).

stay inside for a long time. He tries then not to make the time pass, but sits down and lives”] (188). In her essay on “Sorte og Hvide i Afrika” [“On Black and White People in Africa”], Dinesen concludes that

de sorte har ganske sikkert en helt anden forestilling om tid end vi og skelner ikke på samme måde som vi mellem fortid, nutid og fremtid. Der er ingen tvivl om, at vor opfattelse forekommer dem højst barnagtig, — de ler ad os.

[Black people have a quite different perception of time than we do and do not separate in the same way as we do between past, present, and future.

There is no doubt that our idea appears to them quite childish—they laugh at us.] (SE 73)

The natives are, moreover, not afraid of death, “og de har alle, i sammenhæng med deres rodfæstede skadefryd, en egen sympati eller føling med ulykken, også når den rammer dem selv” [“and they all have, related to their ingrained mocking spite, a unique sympathy or feeling for disaster, even when it strikes themselves”] (SE 74). In other words, the natives are at peace with the floating movements of time as they are with their destiny. They are not haunted by anxiety over the future or the transitoriness of their lives.

Dinesen thus proposes other ways of understanding time that may liberate man from the obsession with guilt and the yearning for salvation according to a Christian God’s plan. The fish in Dinesen’s tale “The Diver” (*Anecdotes of Destiny*) opposes

man's anxiety about "the direction in which he moves ... attaching vital importance to his rising or falling" to the fish's equilibrium, asserting that "one may quite well float without hope" (17). Further, the fish continues,

our changing of place in existence never creates, or leaves after it, what man calls a way, upon which phenomenon—in reality no phenomenon 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*.

(17-18)

Whereas the fish is comfortable in the eternal fluidity of his element, modern man is burdened by the measurements of time while he obsesses about his ephemeral acts.

#### **THE ANXIETY OF TIME**

Nietzsche attacks the obsession with time as a product of slave morality; its yearning for transcendent bliss. According to Magnus, Nietzsche interprets this yearning, or need, as symptomatic of men's "kronophobia," i.e. their loathing for time (190). To attain a sense of security against the flux of time,

[Nietzsche] was persuaded that Platonism, conceived as hierarchical dualism, had dominated metaphysics and that together with Christianity it had conspired to degrade the earth and the earthly, and was itself a

symptom of decadence, of nihilism ... Nietzsche remained convinced that human beings could only rededicate themselves to the earth if traditional eternalistic predicates are attached to it. (190-91)

In other words, when Zarathustra turns Platonism and Christianity upside-down, deifying the transient by eternalizing it, he acts according to Nietzsche's decision to appease people's phobia against time without escaping from the flux of life and nature, but rather affirm it.

Hamsun's response to his kronophobia is, in line with Nietzsche, to eternalize the transient in terms of a pantheistic plan. In the face of the transient Dinesen, on the other hand, affirms eternity through the art of the story by which both destiny and salvation are realized. By having affirmed their destinies, Babette and Pellegrina, Leonidas and the Cardinal, have eternalized themselves as art.

The obsession with time is a predominant theme in Hamsun's *Hunger*. Though the narrative is constantly in the present and infused by a sense of time as "continuously billowing and literally getting nowhere,"<sup>222</sup> the story is full of clocks and the novel's protagonist (the starving journalist) is obsessed with clocks. Nettum's discussion of the protagonist's split soul between his anxiety that he may die (fear of time) and his desire to become one with a higher non-terrestrial existence (faith in eternal bliss), can help us understand the obsession with time in this book. After one euphoric experience the

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<sup>222</sup> John Vernon writes that in Hamsun's *Hunger* "a pure narrative present, a sense of time continuously billowing and literally getting no-where, for the first time fully occupies fiction" (117).

protagonist wakes up and “må føle på armer og ben for å få bekreftelse på at han eksisterer på det timelige plan. Sjelen har for en stund forlatt legemet, og han har vanskelig for å forsone seg med sin plass i det jordiske hylster” [“must feel his arms and legs to make sure he exists on a temporal level. His soul has for a while abandoned his body, and he dislikes having to reconcile with his place in a terrestrial shell”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 93). After another out-of-body experience, however, he wakes up to see the light and he cries tears of joy: “Han er reddet for denne gang ... Tilliten til at livet er sterkere enn døden, vender tilbake med lyset” [“He is saved for now ... His faith in life’s power over death returns with the light”] (91). Thus the protagonist in *Hunger* has an ambivalent relationship to time, for, as Nettum concludes, “han frykter den død som betyr slutten på hans eksistens i videste forstand, men lengter etter en tilstand som nok ligner døden, men som reserverer for ham en videre eksistens på et ikke-jordisk plan” [“he fears that death which would mean the end of his existence in the widest sense, but longs for an existence that may resemble death, but which reserves for him a wider existence on a non-terrestrial level”] (94).

Nagel in Hamsun’s *Mysteries* also appears to be constantly keeping track of time. However, instead of the anxiety which the passing of life has the capacity to produce and which is suggested by the obsessive keeping track of every minute and every hour, Nagel also experiences the joy of full presence that knows no time in his ecstatic communion with nature—a relief from his anxious obsession with time, counting the hours. “Tanken på det formålsløse og fattige ved jordlivet, fyller ham med fortvilelse” [“The thought of

the purposeless and pitiful characteristic of earthly life, fills him with despair”], notes Nettum (*ibid.* 123). He therefore desires to “forbli ett med kosmos” [“to become one with cosmos”], for experiencing a oneness with nature, his vital feeling of life (“livsfølelsen”) is intensified by “en voldsom utvidelse” [“a powerful expansion”] (124-125). Hence, Nagel is, at least for a while, empowered by his Dionysian experience.

The *Übermensch*'s realization of the most abysmal thought—the eternal recurrence—intensifies his celebration and affirmation of life. Since his will is strong and healthy, the experience triggers a movement forward in his creation of new values. However, the encounter with the abyss can also intimidate those whose wills lack the health and power of the *Übermensch*. The abyss can thus stimulate a desire to be soaked up by abyss, to return to the earth, the womb of life.

As Ahern explains, Nietzsche's abyss “is the abyss wherein the weak and exhausted confront the impossibility of attaining the ‘True’ world and are cursed by an inescapable desire for it. Thus recurrence could drive some to select the Socratic option of suicide” (175).<sup>223</sup> Ridden by illnesses and loneliness Nietzsche was himself at times attracted to suicide.<sup>224</sup> However, as Ahern underscores, “Nietzsche looked upon the

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<sup>223</sup> As Ahern notes, Nietzsche claimed that Socrates wanted to die while antagonistic to life (80-82). In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche writes that “when finally death, not banishment, was pronounced against him, it seems to have been Socrates himself who ... insisted on it” (BT 85).

<sup>224</sup> Quoting from letters from Nietzsche to his friend Franz Overbeck February-March 1883, Ahern writes about Nietzsche that “loneliness was his most constant companion, and this was perhaps more painful than all of his physical ailments. Sick, alone, and bedridden, he told Overbeck: ‘I’ve lost interest in everything. Deep down, an unyielding black melancholy ... The worst of it is, I no longer see why I should live for even half a year more.’ It is hardly surprising that, at times, Nietzsche found ‘the barrel of a revolver ... a source of relatively pleasant thoughts’” (145).

turbulent ocean of becoming and found, not a reason for suicide, but a new vision of himself and, indeed, of the whole human race” (157). This was the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. With faith in his doctrine he saw the coming of an age that would be strengthening to the strong and destructive for the world-weary (170). Hence Nietzsche writes: “In place of ‘metaphysics’ and religion, the theory of eternal recurrence (this as a means of breeding and selection)” (WP # 462, 255)

As the religion beyond religions, the eternal recurrence seems indeed to serve as a means of breeding and selection when considering the destinies of the heroes and heroines in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen who face the abyss. It explains why Glahn and Nagel fail to cross over and choose to commit suicide—to be soaked up by the abyss<sup>225</sup>—in contrast to Zarathustra’s commitment to this earth and his refusal to die for quite a while.<sup>226</sup> The doctrine seems more favorable towards the breeding of Dinesen’s heroes and heroines. Though she suggests death as an aesthetic closure to the artistic-existential projects of several of her heroes and heroines, including the said Master Leonidas and Pellegrina, they appear overall more courageous in the face of both life and

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<sup>225</sup> That Nagel drowns himself in the ocean is interesting in this respect, considering how the ocean symbolizes the original womb of life, or, as Nettum says, “dødens element” [“the element of death”] (*Konflikt og visjon* 181). Dinesen’s hero Peter and his cousin Rosa also drown at the conclusion of “Peter and Rosa” (WT), and her tale “The Deluge at Norderney” (SGT) ends with the flood water rising, suggesting that the heroes and heroines of this story (Kasparson, Miss Malin, Calypso, and Jonathon) will also conclude their life in the ocean’s womb.

<sup>226</sup> Zarathustra concludes his speech “On Free Death” as follows: “Now you, my friends, are the heirs of my goal; to you I throw my golden ball. More than anything, I like to see you, my friends, throwing the golden ball. And so I still linger a little on the earth: forgive me for that” (Z 186). Zarathustra thus lingers on for yet another generation.

death than Hamsun's heroes. Moreover, they secure eternity through the art of the story by which their great destinies shine through forever.<sup>227</sup>

Whereas the doctrine of the eternal recurrence overwhelms several of his fictional heroes who eventually go under without coming up again, Knut Hamsun insists himself upon crossing over. If he cannot find any companions in his time, he asserts that he will get them later and that his truths will speak to a future audience—"om 100 år" ["in a hundred years"] (*On Overgrown Paths* 86).

Hamsun's prediction is quoted from his defense against the accusations he faced after World War II for his affiliations with the Nazi movement. In the following chapter I will discuss the political implications the artistic-existential projects of both Hamsun and Dinesen. Though these projects are, as we've seen in this chapter, fueled by religious insight, not political motivation, their political implications cannot be ignored.

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<sup>227</sup> Other examples include Anne-Marie in Dinesen's story "Sorrow-Acre" (WT), whom I discussed in Chapter I, and Peter and Rosa in the tale by the same name, the adolescent couple who drown for their love and aspirations (WT).

## CHAPTER 5: THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF HAMSUN'S AND DINESEN'S PRIVATE PROJECTS

The debuts of both Hamsun and Dinesen were criticized for ignoring the lives of everyday people. The Danish publisher of Hamsun's debut novel *Sult* [*Hunger*] (1890), Gustav Philipsen, advised Hamsun, as the latter confessed, "ikke at ignorere 'Hoben' helt i min Produktion; i det offentliggjorte Stykke af 'Sult' synes han, at jeg slet intet Hensyn har taget til 'Hoben;' det er til syvende og sidst 'Hoben,' som danner de Tusinder af Købere, uden hvilke en Forfatter ikke kan leve, osv." ["not to entirely ignore the 'masses' in my work. In the published edition of *Hunger* he feels that no consideration at all has been given to the 'masses.' It is, in the end, the 'masses' which constitute the thousands of buyers without whom an author could not live, etc.].<sup>228</sup> Danish publishers, on the other hand, were reluctant to print Dinesen's first collection of tales, *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* [*Seven Gothic Tales*], fearing that the Danish public might find it "aristokratisk og forfinet" ["aristocratic and refined"], as the Danish writer and critic Otto Rung remarked in a letter to Dinesen of July 6, 1934 (KB I: 149). While Denmark

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<sup>228</sup> Qtd. from Hamsun's letter to Johan Sørensen, merchant and publisher, dated December 8, published in *Knut Hamsuns Brev* [*Knut Hamsun's Letters*] (91). Hamsun further writes that "dette forstemte mig lidt. Det er mit inderste Gemyt imod at skrive om blot en Linje for Hoben ... Hvad der interesserer mig er Nervenens Poesi, Tankernes Brøk, Følelsernes vage Mimoser—i ét Ord: *Sindsbevægelserne*. Skal jeg nu forenkle mit Arbejde—den psykologiske Side deraf—i Favør af Hoben, saa forrykker jeg hele min Stilling" ["I found this a bit discouraging. I feel very much against writing even a line for the masses ... What interests me is the poetry of the nerves, the fractions of the thoughts, the vague mimosas of the feelings—in one word: *the unconscious*"] (91).

developed into a social-democratic country, Dinesen continued to extol Europe's early nineteenth century aristocrats. And she herself attained the aristocratic title of "Baroness" through her marriage to Baron von Blixen (1914) and insisted on keeping it even after the divorce (1925).

We have seen that while seeking to overcome modernity and the human-all-too-human, the Nietzschean protagonists in the works of Hamsun and Dinesen prefer to be on their own rather than joining the herd of people. August and Pellegrina are wanderers, not founders of new groups of cultures or societies. In her essay "Daguerreotypes" Dinesen defends the wandering life of young people as an alternative to the settled life of the modern "komfort-tid" ["time of comfort"] (SE 209). She recounts the adventures of her young nephew who has had a wonderful time traveling around in Europe hitch-hiking. Now he plans to travel around the world with a friend of his, taking up miscellaneous work on his way. Wanting to assist him in his adventures, she has given him a class in making tattoos to secure him a craft he can always rely on for an income on his journeys. Responding in her conclusion to those who discard the new "vandrefugle" ["migrating birds"], such as her nephew, as followers of an empty fashion, Dinesen asserts that a fashion always has a meaning (SE 210). "Jeg selv sætter min lid til tatoverkunsten" ["I personally believe in the art of tattoos"], concludes Dinesen; "den er en rituel kunst-art, en kult. Den er kommet til os fra indianernes medicinmænd" ["it is a ritual art, a cult. It has come to us from the Indians' medicine men"] (SE 211).

Dinesen salutes the new wanderer not as a political alternative, but as an existential art form, describing her nephew's travel as an aesthetic way of living life; sustaining life through art.<sup>229</sup> Commenting on *Women at the Pump*, considered one of Hamsun's loudest cries against modern civilization,<sup>230</sup> Thomas Mann asserts that the novel is primarily about art and life as art; about how art sustains life.<sup>231</sup> This forces the question of whether the fiction of Hamsun and Dinesen is political or not. Are their concerns mainly existential and artistic, even when criticizing modernity, or are they also concerned with politics in their writing? How political are these authors in their writing and to what extent are their political positions products of their philosophies as expressed in their fiction? Moreover, can we understand Hamsun's and Dinesen's affinity for not only former aristocracies, but also primitive cultures and even fascist movements, as I shall suggest even in the case of Dinesen, in terms of their philosophies and critiques of modern society? Below I will contend a yes to these questions, which should warn us about being critical in our approach to their texts. Yet, I will also maintain that this should not blind us to what we *can* learn from them.

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<sup>229</sup> Nietzsche also salutes the wanderer: "Wanderer, who are you? I see you go your way without scorn ... What will refresh you? You have only to name it: whatever I have I offer you? – 'Refreshment? Refreshment? O inquisitive man, what are you saying! But please give me—' What? What? Say it – 'One more mask! A second mask!' ..." (BGE 212).

<sup>230</sup> See for instance Marstrander's essay "Fra Konerne ved Vandposten til Ringen sluttet. Et essay i Knut Hamsuns sosiale forfatterskap."

<sup>231</sup> In "Die Weiber am Brunnen" (1922), Mann's review of the German translation of the novel, Mann writes that the novel "handlar om *kunst*, om kunsten som kraft til livsopphald, om livet som kunst, kunst som naudhjelp" ["is about *art*, about art as the power for our subsistence, about life as art, art as first aid"] (trans. to Norwegian by Kittang and qtd. from *Luft, vind, ingenting* 251). Kittang refers to Mann as

## PRIMITIVISM AND PAGANISM

Hamsun and Dinesen are drawn to certain social or political alternatives because of the potential these have for the individual to affirm his or her own artistic-existential projects that resemble those of their own heroes and heroines. Hence, just as they turn to an older age of aristocrats as representing a healthier and higher form of living, while they attack the urban world of modern society, they also turn to primitive cultures. Dinesen praises the native Africans for their sense of style and perspective on life in her fictional autobiography *Den afrikanske Farm* [*Out of Africa*] (1937), portraying her years as a coffee farmer in Kenya. She returns to the topic in her essay “Sorte og hvide i Afrika” [“On Black and White People in Africa”] (SE), originally presented as a lecture in 1938, and in *Skygger paa Græsset* [*Shadows on the Grass*] (1960), the brief sequel to *Out of Africa*. Hamsun, on the other hand, reveals an affinity for the Sami people in several of his novels, portraying this people—native to the north of Scandinavia, living as migrants, herding reindeer, and as fishermen and gatherers—as a wandering people with a unique familiarity with nature. Opposed to western civilization, they are keepers of deeper insights and a healthier connection to nature. They are, in all, more at ease with existence.

Affirming the healthy expression of nature among more primitive cultures than modern Europe, both Hamsun and Dinesen bring to mind Nietzsche’s turn to the pre-

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well as Tiemroth who both discuss the artistic theme in the novel. Kittang wants to emphasize this theme even further.

classic Greeks and their Dionysian festivals. Zarathustra, whose home is in the mountains and who prefers the company of animals and birds to the rattle of people in the city, also represents Nietzsche's preference for more primitive cultures, or, rather, for cultures more attuned to nature and the instincts of nature. I am using the term "primitive" with a reservation in the case of Nietzsche who attacks Rousseau's romanticism and his idealism of a primitive man in a primitive state of nature. Summarizing his "struggle against the eighteenth century of Rousseau," he explains that he has been rejecting Rousseau's sense of "'nature,' his 'good man,' his belief in the dominion of feeling," because he is "against the softening, weakening, moralization of man" that Rousseau thus presents: "an ideal born of *hatred for aristocratic culture*" (WP # 1021, 528-529). As we've seen, Nietzsche extols the differences of classes in order to attain true nobility. When he salutes the barbarian—the man of a "still natural nature"—it is because he has, according to Nietzsche, an "unbroken strength of will and lust for power" to throw himself upon weaker races or cultures (BGE 192). In other words, Nietzsche's turn to the ancient Greeks for their innocence and health, as opposed to modern culture, has nothing to do with Rousseau's primitivism, which elevates natural man's capacity to feel pity for others.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Kaufmann argues that "Nietzsche's opposition to Rousseau cannot be understood unless one keeps in mind that Rousseau serves Nietzsche as the representative of the dangers of the Dionysiac frenzy" (143). Nietzsche rejected the "drowning in nature or in the brotherhood of man" that he saw in Rousseau in contrast to which he defended the individual's creative and affirmative response to the Dionysian experience (143).

Rejecting Rousseau's sense of a natural state as a harmonious and illusory paradise, Nietzsche, on the other hand, emphasizes the Dionysian essence of *true naïveté*—the overcoming of the terrible insights into the suffering of life.<sup>233</sup> At the time Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* (in 1870-71) he was hopeful that the German spirit was undergoing a positive change, represented by Wagner, the composer, and Schopenhauer, the philosopher, suggesting a return of the Dionysian spirit.<sup>234</sup> Though he turned discouraged about the Germans, he did not give up hoping. After he had rejected Wagner and attacked Schopenhauer, he nonetheless calls, in *Human, all too Human* (1878-80), for a “new culture” with “a much simpler life,” more cheerful than the grumbling “traits of old dogs and people” (HAH 42). Beyond the decadence of modernity, this would be a healthy culture in which “we would finally live among human beings and with ourselves as if in *nature* ... as if at play, feasting upon the sight of many things that had previously only made us afraid” (HAH 42).

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<sup>233</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche argues that “the harmony with nature which we late-comers regard with such nostalgia, and for which Schiller has coined the cant term *naïve*, is by no means a simple and inevitable condition to be found at the gateway to every culture, a kind of paradise. Such a belief could have been endorsed only by a period for which Rousseau's *Emile* was an artist and Homer just such an artist nurtured in the bosom of nature. Whenever we encounter ‘*naïveté*’ in art, we are face to face with the ripest fruit of Apollonian culture—which must always triumph first over titans, kill monsters, and overcome the somber contemplation of actuality, the intense susceptibility of suffering, by means of illusions strenuously and zestfully entertained. But how rare are the instances of true *naïveté*, of that complete identification with the beauty of appearance! It is this achievement which makes Homer so magnificent” (31).

<sup>234</sup> Thus he argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that “no one shall wither our faith in the imminent rebirth of Greek antiquity, for here alone do we see a hope for the rejuvenation and purification of the German spirit through the fire-magic of music ... what amazing change is wrought in that gloomy desert of our culture by the wand of Dionysos!” (BTE 123).

Nietzsche's celebration of a healthy culture in which we would live as if in nature, at play, must be understood in the context of his turn to the ancient Greek, the noble barbarian, and Zarathustra. His focus is not on how the culture works as a political alternative, but on the individual who brings about such a culture. Likewise, the affinity both Hamsun and Dinesen felt for more primitive cultures is rooted in their admiration for the approach to life found among people in these cultures. Like Nietzsche, they detect aristocratic qualities of superiority in individuals of more primitive cultures.

Hamsun's and Dinesen's portrayal of the primitive may, however, appear condescending and racist to the modern reader. That is the conclusion of Marit Elin Skrødal, discussing Hamsun's comments on the Sami people. While I disagree with Skrødal's interpretation of Hamsun's view on the Sami people, Hamsun did express racist or at least condescending views against the Native American people, even while praising them. In a series of articles on America, published in the national newspaper *Aftenposten* in 1885 upon his return from his first visit to America, he includes a discussion on the Native American people and how they are being colonized by civilization. Impressed by this people, he writes that "Det er med en Art Vemod man ser Indianerfolkets gradvise Undergang. De eiede det rigeste Land paa Kloden og var Herrer over en Trediedel af Jordens Fastland. De levede i sine wigwam's (Telte) eller ude paa sine vide Jagtjorder, jagede, fiskede, fangede, krigede, forlystede sig—som Skogens fri Sønner og Døtre" ["It is with a kind of sadness that one sees the Indians' gradual decline. They used to own the richest country on earth and were masters over a third of the earth's mainland. They lived

in their *wigwams* (tents) or out on their hunting grounds, hunting, fishing, gathering, fighting, entertaining themselves—as the free sons and daughters of the forest”] (PS 35).<sup>235</sup> He goes on to describe a visit he had with a chieftain, admiring his beauty and courage. Yet, while critical of the white man’s civilization and oppression of the Native American people, his comments on their primitivism is at times extremely condescending, implying, for instance, that they are on a lower rung of the ladder than civilized man. Disgusted by the listlessness of the women, he argues that “Forholdet er ikke det samme for Indianernes Kvinder som for deres Mænd; disse er Generationer forud for hine” [“the case is not the same for the Indians’ women as for their men; these are generations ahead of the former”] (PS 43).<sup>236</sup>

Nonetheless, Hamsun admires the Native Americans for their courage and resistance against the White people, preferring death to submissiveness. He attacks, on the other hand, Black people for their compliance. In the article “Røde, Sorte og Hvite” [Red, Black and White people], published in *Verdens Gang* January 8, 1891, he writes that,

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<sup>235</sup> Hamsun used the at that time common term for Native American people—Indians—which is today considered racist in the English language. In Norwegian, however, the term “indianere” is still in use.

<sup>236</sup> One of the women attracts him with her sensual beauty, but then disgusts him with “hendes døde, lidenskabsløse Blik, som ... gav hende et fedt Dyrs sanseløse udtryk ... Hvorlænge skulde Indianer pigen ligge paa Bugen og tygge paa sin Tunge, førend hun blev et erkjendende og afklarnet Væsen som vi? Og hvorlænge havde hun ligget saa fra den Tid hun hang i Træerne som Abehun?” [“her dead, apathetic look, which ... gave her a fat animal’s senseless look ... How long will the Indian girl lie on her belly and chew on her tongue, before she will be a comprehending and enlightened being such as ourselves? And how long had she been lying like that from the time she was hanging in the trees like an ape-woman?”] (PS 43).

Negeren blev i Amerika, hvad Indianeren var for stolt til at blive: Opvartere i de store Hoteller og Skopudsere paa de skidne Gader. Ti lever den sorte Mand, naar den røde maa dø. Negrene er et Folk uden Historie, uden Traditioner, uden Hjerne, et Slavefolk uden Stolthed og Ære, Pøbel fra Urilds Tid, der kan lade sig piske for 75 Cents og belyve for 25. Indianerne er et Folk af Diplomater, kløgtige Hjerner, med den stejleste Tapperhed, et Jæger- og Krigerfolk, hvem man vilde gjøre til potetsdyrkende Kristne, et Folk med Historie, Poesi og urgammel Kultur, et Folk af bare Individier, der falder, før de bøjer sig.

[The Negro became in America what the Indian was too proud to become: servants in the big hotels and shoe shiners on the dirty streets. Thus lives the black man when the red man must die. The Negroes are a people without history, without traditions, without brain: a people of slaves without pride and honor, a mob from the time of Uriel's. They will let themselves be flogged for 75 cents and will have the wool pulled over their eyes for 25 cents. The Indians are a people of diplomats, clever brains, the most unyielding courage, a people of hungers and warriors who one wanted to make into potato farming Christians, a people with history,

poetry and ancient culture, a people solely of individuals who fall before they bend down.] (PS 116)<sup>237</sup>

Hamsun's statement on Black people shows how ignorance can turn to racism.<sup>238</sup>

Dinesen can not be accused of being ignorant about the lives of the Native African people. Nonetheless, she has also been accused of being racist. According to Carolyn Martin Shaw, "Blixen's romanticism never removed Europeans from their pinnacle. She delights in nature, and her belief that Africans had not quite severed the umbilical cord with nature results in both admiration and disdain for them. This is paternalism (maternalism), and it is racist" (192). Many critics share Shaw's opinion that Dinesen was a racist, but others, such as Dane Kennedy, have praised *Out of Africa* for its unique focus—unique, that is, for 1934—in its critique of Europeans and its positive portrayal of the Kenyans. Commenting on the reception of *Out of Africa*, from the accusations against Dinesen as a racist to the praise of her work as a highly critical piece of work against modern civilization, Susan Brantly shows how complex the question about Dinesen's attitude to the native Africans is.

Central to *Out of Africa* is, as Linda Donelson and Marianne Stecher-Hansen assert in their article on Dinesen in *Twentieth-Century Danish Literature*, her "idealization of the aristocrat and the aristocratic spirit, but her definition of the aristocrat

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<sup>237</sup> The Norwegian term "neger" ["negro"] that Hamsun used is still in use by Norwegians today and is not considered racist in the same way as the English term "Negro."

<sup>238</sup> See Zagar's article "Knut Hamsun's Black Man or Lament for Paternalist Society" for a further discussion on Hamsun's racism.

has little to do with socio-economic distinctions” (50). We have seen that Dinesen groups aristocrats, proletarians, and the Native Africans together. Johannesson considers Dinesen’s portrayal of her Somali servant Farah as “Dinesen’s most succinct statement of the aristocratic attitude toward life” (91).<sup>239</sup> Indeed, in *Out of Africa* both the Somali people who had immigrated to Kenya from the northern parts of Africa and the people native to Kenya appear as true aristocrats. Dinesen detects a hierarchy among the Africans in Kenya where the Somalis, traders and business people, consider themselves to rank highest. Among the Kenyan tribes, the Masai, the male warriors, rank above the Kikuyus, squatters at her farm. While Dinesen approves of such hierarchical cultures, they all—Somalis, the Masai, and the Kikuyus—appear to her as aristocrats while asserting that courageous quality characteristic for her favored aristocrat. “De Infødte har i langt mindre Grad end hvide Folk Følelsen af Risiko i Livet” [“The natives have to a far less degree than white people a sense of risk in life”], she comments (21). Further, Dinesen recounts how she has “nogle Gange, paa en Safari eller paa Farmen, i et særligt spændende Øjeblik mødt mine indfødte Folks Øjne og har følt, at vi var paa lang Afstand fra hinanden, og at de undrede sig over min Vurdering af Situationens Alvor” [“some times, on a safari or at the farm, in particularly exciting moment, met the eyes of my native people and have felt that we were far apart from one another, and that they were wondering about my estimation of the situation’s critical character”] (21). Perhaps they

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<sup>239</sup> “Farah” is included in *Skygger paa Græsset* [*Shadows on the Grass*], the sequel to *Out of Africa*, as the first piece. The piece was originally given as a radio talk on March 24, 1950, and appeared the same year as a booklet.

were, though incomprehensible to us, “i selve Livet i deres rette Element, som Dybvandsfisk” [“in life itself as if in their true element, like deep-sea fish”], she reflects (21). “Denne Sikkerhed i Tilværelsen, denne Svømmekunst” [“This confidence in life, this art of swimming”], she continues,

har de, fordi de har bevaret en Kundskab, som vore egne første Forældre satte overstyr for os, og hvori, mellem alle Verdensdele, Afrika især kan undervise os: At Gud og Djævelen er een, deres Herlighed er lige stor, deres Majestæt lige evig, saa at der ikke er to, som er uskabt, men een som er uskabt, ikke to umaalelige, men een umaalelig—og de afrikanske Infødte ærer Dobbeltheden i Enheden og Enheden i Dobbeltheden.

[they have, because they have kept a knowledge which our own ancestors lost, in which, of all the continents, Africa in particular can teach us: That the God and the Devil are one, their greatness is equally large, their majesty equally eternal, so that there are not two that are un-created, but one who is un-created, not two immeasurable, but one immeasurable—and the African natives honor the duality in the oneness and the oneness in the duality.] (21)

In other words, the native Africans have that profound insight and attitude to life and eternity, which Dinesen’s own pantheism represents and which her Nietzschean protagonists also embody, such as Pellegrina. With the courage and health of an overman, the native embraces the risks of life.

The native Africans are proud (102-03), but free from prejudice (44-45). They have a vivid imagination and a great sense for the dramatic effect in life (24, 29). They know the art of pausing between each spoken line (43), and they have, moreover, an exquisite sense of style. “En Masaikriger” [“A Masai warrior”] is—like her heroine Pellegrina who creates herself in great style—“et pragtfuldt Syn” [“an awesome sight”] (108). True to their nature and ideal, their particular style is neither false nor copied, explains Dinesen, but has grown out from within. “Navlestrengen mellem dem og Naturen er ikke helt overklippet” [“the umbilical cord between them and nature has not been entirely cut through”] (131). In other words, their styling of themselves is not a decadent form of art, but an art attuned to nature.<sup>240</sup> Finally, the natives have a sense of destiny—an *amor fati*—lost among modern Europeans:

Kikuyuerne er indstillet paa det uforudsete og vante til det uventede. Heri adskiller de sig fra Europæerne, som helst vil holde sig assureret imod Skæbnen. Negren staar paa en venskabelig og fortrolig fod med Skæbnen, for han har været i dens Hænder hele sit Liv, og den er for ham saa at sige

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<sup>240</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche criticizes the modern “*l’art pour l’art*” as a decadent “will-paralysis dressed up,” symptomatic of the “sickness of will ... distributed over Europe unequally” (BGE 137). The term “decadence” appears in Nietzsche’s published writings only in 1888, however, the synonymous term *Entargung* (degeneration) appears as early as 1883 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where it is deemed “bad and worst of all” (187). In *The Antichrist* (1888) Nietzsche criticizes modernity as “the corruption of man” with its “*decadence-values*” as “its supreme desiderata” (572). The connection Nietzsche makes between cultural, moral, and organic decay is reflected in his use of the metaphor of “the deity of decadence, gelded in his most virile virtues and instincts,” which, according to Nietzsche, “becomes of necessity the god of the physiologically retrograde, of the weak” (A 583-84). See also Daniel Conway’s discussion on Nietzsche’s use of the term in his chapter “The Economy of Decadence” (22-66).

Hjemmet, det velkendte Tusmørke i Hytten, dyb Muld for hans Rødder.

Han tager imod Livets Omskiftelser med stor Ro og Fatning.

[The Kikuyus are prepared for the unexpected and used to the unexpected.

In this they differ from the Europeans who would rather remain insured against destiny. The Black man is on friendly and confident terms with

destiny, for he has been in its hands his entire life, and it is to him his home, so to say, the well-known dusk in his hut, deep mold for his roots.

He accepts life's changes with great ease and composure.] (24)

Regarding the Somali people, Dinesen recounts in particular their pride and sense of superiority as an Arab people who considered themselves descendants of Mohammed. Even their women, though dependent on their men, seem to have astonished Dinesen as exceptionally proud beings, like the heroines of her own fiction. "Alle de unge Kvinder havde høje Tanker om deres eget Værd" ["All the young women had high thoughts about their own value"], reflects Dinesen, commenting on the Somalis (141). Among them, she continues, "føjte jeg et særegent, stærkt og mægtigt ideals Nærværelse, uden hvilket Besætningen ikke havde kunnet holde saa heltemodigt ud: Tanken om et Tusindaarsrige, hvor Kvinderne skulle herske over Verden" ["I felt the presence of a unique, strong and powerful ideal without which the people could not have borne life so heroically: the idea of a millennium in which the women would rule the world"] (143). Only through a man can the Somali women get anything at all,

even a pair of slippers, they cannot even possess themselves, but must belong to a husband, a father, a brother, etc. Yet, asserts Dinesen, “de er dog alligevel og bestandig, allevegne Livets højeste Værdi. Det var et forbavsende Fænomen, som tjente begge Parter til Ære, hvilke Mængder af Silke, Guld, Rav og Koraller, Somalikvinderne kunde presse ud af deres Mænd” [“they are nonetheless and always and in every way life’s highest value. It was a remarkable phenomenon, which served both sides to their honor, the amounts of silk, gold, amber, and corals that the Somali women could squeeze out from their men”] (143-44). The Somali women are strong willed and proud, and move about with wisdom, ingenuity, and style.<sup>241</sup>

Dinesen’s portrayal of the Somali women brings to mind Hamsun’s portrayal of Marianne in the Segelfoss-novels, Holmengrå’s daughter, who has Native American blood in her veins from her mother. Marianne is a unique woman in Hamsun’s work. As I said earlier, she represents, together with “the old mother” in *The Road Leads On*, a rare example of step-daughters in his books. She also represents Hamsun’s affinity for primitive cultures, seeing how her Native American background is emphasized, and thus also a break from his earlier racism against Indian women.

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<sup>241</sup> While Dinesen thus commends the Somali women in her published work, she expresses some reservations about the Mohammedan view of women as repressive in her private letters, referring to the Somali customs of women going veiled, seclusion, and the harem system. Judith Lee discusses the difference between Dinesen’s presentation of the Somali women in her letters and *Out of Africa*.

As in the case of the Somali women Dinesen commends, Marianne's beauty and value stymie men around her who would go out of their way, it seems, to please her. Many are the men who want her, including the town's doctor Muus, Theodore who runs the local shop, and Willatz IV, son of Lieutenant Holmsen. With the latter Marianne has had a close friendship since she was a child, and it is he she eventually sails off to marry.

Further, like the Somali women, Marianne is connected to nature, is strong willed, and has a good sense of humor, coupled with an ironic perspective on life. Moreover, Marianne rejects black and white standards of good and evil and reevaluates ethics as she sees fit.

Hun var så purung og lystig, dertil så egenartet, en mestiz fra Mexico, indiansk i trækkene, glidende i sin gang, god og ond, begge dele, stundom et rent trolld.

[She was so very young and cheerful, and such an unusual type too; a mestizo from Mexico, Indian in feature, with a gliding gait, good and bad, both—at times quite a troll.] (ST 44)

She is too proud to pay any attention to the townspeople's gossip and is liberated from the customs of civilized female behavior: "Marianne smældte i å le. Hun hadde litt vanskelig for å være dame" ["Marianne burst into laughter. She had a bit of a hard time being a lady"] (ST 112). All in all, she is "listig som sin indianske oldemor og visste vel hvad hun gjorde" ["a fox like her Indian great grandma and knew very well what she was doing"] (ST 157). A wise girl, she understands her father's situation in Segelfoss and

stuns men around her with her calm ease and superiority. Confident and independent, she chooses her own love, young Willatz, and lets no one dupe her.

Just as Marianne is a step-child of society, its norms and conventions, and therefore a heroine in the eyes of Hamsun, the Sami people are also portrayed as step-children of society in the books of Hamsun while representing his affinity for primitive cultures. Skrødal's dissertation entitled "Samene i Knut Hamsuns diktning" ["The Sami people in Knut Hamsun's writing"] (1995) offers the only substantial discussion to date on Hamsun's treatment of the Sami people. As I said, her conclusion is that Hamsun's portrayal of the Sami people is negative and racist. I, on the other hand, argue that Hamsun's portrayal of the Sami people—such as Os-Anders in *The Growth of the Soil*, Gilbert lap in *Rosa*, and Åse in *The Road Leads On*—is ambiguous, leaning more towards approval than disapproval. Moreover, Hamsun does not idealize the life of the settled people, but uses the Sami people to show how the "idyllic ideal" of the settled farmer is easily disrupted.

Questioning the popular notion that we can see the life of the settled farmer Isak in *The Growth of the Soil* as Hamsun's ideal, Kittang shows how the wandering sheriff Geissler—who frequently drops by to visit and inspire Isak—negates and disrupts the idyllic life of Isak.

Geissler er den som kjem og fer, som fører med seg snart velsigning, snart uro, endring, industri, modernitet. Samstundes som han forkynner bondelivets djupaste meining ... Definitivt skild frå uskuldtilstanden ved

morsbarmen ... speglar vandraren Geissler først og fremst dei grunneleggande disharmoniane i Hamsuns verk og liv. Hos han finn vi den same dragnaden mot mytane, idyllane, dei trygge og rolege standpunkta; men òg den uavvendelege erfaringa av distanse og avspalting som skaper ei slik særeiga ironisk spenning midt inne i det storfelte lærediktet om jorda.

[Geissler is he who comes and goes—who intermittently brings blessings and uneasiness, change, industry, modernity. At the same time he preaches the profound meaning of a farmer’s life ... Definitely separated from the state of innocence at his mother’s breast ... the wanderer Geissler mirrors first of all the fundamental disharmonies in Hamsun’s work and life. In him we see the same attraction towards myths, the idyllic, the safe and quiet points of life, but also the consistent experience of distance and separation which creates such a uniquely ironic tension in the middle of this imposing edifying poem about the earth.] (*Luft, vind, ingenting* 206-07)

The wandering lifestyle of the Sami people is a clue to Hamsun’s affinity for their culture. The national borders of the Scandinavian countries were imposed on the Sami people in particular from the seventeenth century when the colonization of their land gained serious momentum. Before that they lived as a freely migrating people in the

northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.<sup>242</sup> Hamsun was indeed aware of the oppression suffered by the Sami people; their traditions and lifestyle threatened as their land was taken away from them while they themselves were being forced into settlement. In an article reviewing *Muittalus samid birra. En bog om lappernes afstamning* [*Muittalus samid birra. A book on the heritage of the Sami people*] (1910), written by Johan Turi, a Sami author, Hamsun praises the book, asserting that it is one that he truly “nyter” [“enjoys”] (SP 193). Complaining that the book has been mostly ignored by Norwegians, he reflects that “Boken er av den Art at den nødvendigvis maa sætte en Nordmand i litt Forlegenhet: den er en litterær Begivenhet, men den er ogsaa et Aktstykke” [“the book is of such a kind that it necessarily has to make a Norwegian a bit embarrassed: it is a literary event, but it is also a document”] (SP 193). Hamsun thus asserts the book’s significance, which brings our attention to the difficult situation the Swedish colonization of the Sami people’s land has put them. As an accurate document, the book also shows how the Norwegians living on the other side of the border worry about the Swedish Sami people invading their space. “Jeg er meget opsat paa at faa løst Lappespørsmålet” [“I am very concerned to have the problem regarding the Laplanders resolved”],<sup>243</sup> Hamsun concludes, “og desuten kommer nu dette til at Johan Turi er en

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<sup>242</sup> During the eighteenth century the emergence of a Christian Pietism, and in particular Thomas von Westen, worked to oppress the Sami people’s religion. The colonization of the Sami people gained momentum after that and “fornorskingsprosessen” [“the Norwegianization process”] was on the offensive even as late as between the two world wars. Not until after World War II did the political climate change and in the 1980s significant changes were made to secure the Sami people’s rights.

<sup>243</sup> The term “Laplander” or “Lapp” is today considered racially prejudiced and “Sami” is the officially recognized definition for a member of this people.

slik prægtig Mand, man har faat tilovers for ham, man vil hjælpe ham og hans Folk” [“and besides Johan Muri is such a splendid man. One cannot but like him; one wants to help him and his people”] (PS 197).

Hamsun recognizes the position of the settled people who feel threatened by the possibility of having their land invaded by the Sami people’s reindeers. However, he persists in his critique of a settled lifestyle. Like Geissler who, as Kittang comments, disrupts the idyllic life of the settled farmer, the Sami people destabilize the so-called harmonious ideal of the settled farmers. In fact, as wanderers whose life is attuned to nature, they resemble Hamsun’s own heroes even more so than to Geissler, who, according to Kittang, lives a life which is separated from nature’s womb.

Moreover, Hamsun uses the Sami people to give the reader an ironic perspective from which s/he can consider the settled people, such as Inger, the wife of Isak in *Growth of the Soil*. Inger relies on “lappen Os-Anders” [“the Lapp Os-Anders”] for news from home from where she came before she settled with Isak. In general, she is pleased by his comments on her new home and the children she has with Isak. Yet, she is terrified when she sees him with a hare, interpreting it as a spell on the child with which she is pregnant, thinking that it will, like her, be born with a harelip. Her fear, however, says more about her superstition and anxiety than Os-Anders’ powers about which we can conclude nothing, though the child is born with a harelip. When another Sami family comes by and asks Inger if she buys hares, Inger concludes that “det var ikke til å misforstå” [“it was not to be misunderstood”] (53). But, as the narrator lets us know, it is Inger’s *belief* in the

Sami people's powers to cast spells and misery on her that makes her draw the conclusions she does: "Lappen spurte kanskje i god tro, nogen hadde indbildt ham det, han spurte kanskje i ond; men Inger hadde ialdfald fåt et bud. Skjæbnen varslet ...." ["The Lapp was perhaps asking in good faith, perhaps someone had made him think so, perhaps he was asking in bad faith; nonetheless Inger had received a message. Destiny was warning her ..."] (53). It is Inger's racist naiveté, rather than the Sami people's ominous powers, that is thus underscored.

Likewise Gilbert lap in *Rosa* frightens the young woman Rosa, who hides her face when she sees him, believing that he brings "ulykke" ["calamity"] to her life (23). *Rosa* is the sequel to *Benoni*, published the same year (1908), a novel about the rise of Benoni from postman to wealthy businessman. He is in love with Rosa, the minister's daughter, who feels too good for him until he has moved up in the world. In *Rosa* they have married after Rosa's first husband has passed away. Concerned to maintain correct appearances and distraught by the thought that her first husband might still be alive, she explains to the young student Parelius—who has just proclaimed his love for her—that "saken er: lappen har været her idag, Gilbert; han gjør mig altid så angst. Han vet så meget" ["the thing is: the Lapp has been here today, Gilbert; he always makes me so scared. He knows so much"] (67). She further explains to Parelius that Gilbert had told her that a large amount of money has come into the possession of her first husband's mother. Rosa fears that the money might be from her first husband and that he is still alive. "Gilbert har i grunden hver gang varslet sandt" ["Gilbert has in fact always

foreboded truth”], she continues, “og idag har han kanskje også varslet sandt” [“and today he has perhaps also foreboded the truth”] (69). As a messenger of truth and by knowing so much Gilbert lap threatens to unsettle the quiet surface of the town, revealing secrets and truths that some (such as Rosa) may prefer to keep hidden. Thus he actually represents Hamsun’s own desire to reveal what goes on beneath the surface.

Like Os-Anders, Gilbert lap remains a vague figure, but in spite of the sense that he may impose calamity, we never encounter him doing so, except indirectly causing a rash on Munken Vendt [Friar Vendt], another wanderer, who touches Gilbert lap’s pagan idol when he finds it in the woods. The idol was covered with a poisonous wax. Driven by his own curiosity and lack of respect for Gilbert lap’s religion, his rash seems a fair punishment.

We learn a little bit more about Åse in *The Road Leads On* (the last novel of the trilogy on August), who is half Sami (“lap”) and half Gypsy (“tater”).<sup>244</sup> Åse may alarm the people at Segelfoss, but she is also portrayed as a wise and skilled woman who helps out in emergencies when needed. When the doctor’s son can’t sleep after a bad fall resulting in a broken leg, it is Åse the doctor’s wife calls for and it is she who is able to make the young boy sleep.

Åse var høy og mørk, hendes far skulde være tater og morn lap. Hun kom i  
en lapkofte som var sid som en kjole, hun skridde dronningaktig frem,

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<sup>244</sup> Like “lap,” “tater” has condescending connotations, referring to gypsies, or the Romany, but also to tramps.

stolt av væsen, langsam og alvorlig i sin tale. Hun var et merkelig vakkert kvindfolk, men meget skitten.

[Åse was tall and dark, her father was said to have been a Gypsy and her mother a Lapp. She came in a Sami coat, which was as long as a dress. She strode forward like a queen, proud by character, slow and serious in her talk. She was a remarkably beautiful woman, but very dirty.] (19)

Not only does she have the demeanor of an aristocrat—a queen—she is also a wanderer, like so many of Hamsun’s heroes: “Åse vandret altid, Gud vet når hun sov” [“Åse was always wandering about, God knows when she slept”] (19).

According to the people at Segelfoss, Åse “omgav sig med mystik” [“had a mystical aura about her”]; in her brown eyes was something “nifst og uutgrundelig” [“scary and irresolvable”] (19-20). The narrator Hamsun suggests, however, that this may very well be simply because she was “så tung av sig” [“so heavy by nature”], or because of “kjærlighetssorg” [“a broken heart”] (19). In other words, the townspeople’s fear of Åse is symptomatic of their racist superstition. Åse helps people out when they need her special skills, and she also she has a special familiarity with nature and animals, such as with the horse that August, the protagonist of the novel, gives to a poor family. Whereas August is a bit afraid of the horse and unable to lift up its legs to look at its hooves, the horse obeys Åse who easily lifts up the horse’s legs.

Though August is overpowered by Åse in terms of her connection to nature, he is nonetheless Hamsun’s hero of the book. Overall, Dinesen presents a more sympathetic

portrait of primitive people than Hamsun does. In fact, Dinesen portrays both witches, as we've seen, and also gypsies with great warmth and admiration. Moreover, they live, in contrast to the Sami people, under a warmer sun. Thus we have for instance Simikie of the moors in France in "The Caryatids: An unfinished Gothic Tale" (*Last Tales*).<sup>245</sup>

In "The Caryatids: An unfinished Gothic Tale" our attention is brought to a saying which has it that Udday, gypsy and father of Simikie (who is eighteen years old, yet a widow, and who runs the local mill, Masse-Bleue, in the Province of Dordogne, in France) laid a curse on the Lord of the house Haut-Mesnil and his descendants. Regardless of the saying, Childerique, daughter of the said Lord, confides to her husband that as a child she often wished to be a gypsy child and wander about with the gypsies. However, she is jealous of her brother when he announces his desire to marry Simikie, and she is anxious to protect the family name. With the intention of preventing the marriage, she walks over to Simikie at the mill. Though at first hostile to Simikie, she is eventually "enraptured and transported" by the magic Simikie shows her, revealing pictures of scenes and landscapes from her own life in the water wheel at the mill (LT 146). On her way home from Simikie, she exclaims: "How much have I learned since I stood here last! How much wiser I am!" (LT 149).

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<sup>245</sup> The role Dinesen gives France as the home of Simikie resembles Nietzsche's attitude to France, opposing "the whole of Protestantism" to the "southern *delicatezza*" (BGE 78), arguing that the French connection to the south "preserves them from dreary northern grey-on-grey and sunless concept-ghouliness and anaemia" (BGE 187).

Suggesting a pagan connection to nature and sexual instincts unrepressed by puritan Christianity, Simikie's magic reveals to Childerique a vision of the sensual love between her parents, liberating Childerique's own sensuality. Walking home "like a honey-bee, carrying the collected sweetness of moors and gardens through the rain to the hive, heavy and a little unsteady on the wing ... [Childerique] thought of her husband, and for the first time in her life she felt an overwhelming longing for his embrace. She calculated how long it would be until she could be in his arms, and pictures of love-making swarmed at her from all sides" (LT 149).

Gilbert lap plays a similar role in Hamsun's *Rosa* in which he awakens the sexual desires of the bitter and unhappy Baroness Edvarda whose marriage to the Finnish Baron has come to an end and who has come home to her father with two children. Revealing her tormenting feelings to the narrator, the young student Parelius, the reader learns that Edvarda is still in love—or obsessed—with Glahn, the hunter she dismissed in *Pan* and who is no longer alive (28). One day, Parelius comes across Edvarda and Gilbert lap in the woods by a little pond where he observes how "de bader, de dukker sig samtidig, han holder sin arm om hende ... de står undertiden ret op og ser på hverandre, men det er intet blik i deres øine, de puster og er i ekstase ... de smelter sammen med armer og ben" ["they bathe, they dive under at the same time, he holds his arm around her ... some times they stand straight up looking at each other, but there is no look in their eyes, they breath and are in ecstasy ... they melt together with arms and legs"] (45). The morning after "var baronessen mild og venlig og hun gik der blek av avflammethet, træt,

trængende ro. Hun var likefrem rædd for å støte nogen av os” [“the Baroness was mild and friendly and she walked around pale after her departed blush, tired, in need of peace and quiet. She was actually worried about offending any of us”] (47). Having affirmed the nature of her sexual desires, she appears enamored by love and content and care for others, no longer bitter, selfish, and capricious. Through Gilbert lap she has received a taste of the life of his kind; a life of carelessness, health, power, and play, to conclude with Nietzsche’s words.

#### THE “NEW” WORLD OF AMERICA

Nietzsche witnessed the peak of European immigration to America and was aware of the idea of America as a “New World” of new opportunities and untrodden land. However, while recognizing that America still hasn’t reached the decadence of Europe, he criticizes it for going in the same direction. Moreover, he attacks “the American lust for gold ... spreading a lack of spirituality,” and their hasty lifestyle, “living in a constant chase after gain” (GS 258-59).

The myth of America as the New World still played a vivid role among Scandinavians at the turn of the century. In contrast to Nietzsche, both Hamsun (at least originally)<sup>246</sup> and Dinesen were impressed by it and they both gave a shot at success in America. Whereas Hamsun failed and turned, as we’ve seen, bitterly critical about America, Dinesen had immense success in America where she won an enthusiastic

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<sup>246</sup> See Ferguson and Næss for a further discussion.

audience for whom she could play out her role as the mysterious storyteller in full style.<sup>247</sup> She notes her gratefulness to the American audience in several of her letters,<sup>248</sup> as well as her desire to visit the country, which she eventually did in 1959. In one of her letters to Robert Haas, her American publisher at Random House, dated July 1, 1938, she writes that “I have a strong feeling that there is a renovation of our civilization for which we must look to America ... I would go a long way to get into touch with it, and I know that it could not fail to be to me a great experience to see and know America. I should like to settle down in the States for a year or two, and should trust that I might work my way into the true spirit of them” (KB I: 281).

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<sup>247</sup> Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales* was a huge success in the United States where it became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and a best-seller. Dinesen's next book, *Out of Africa*, was also chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club committee, as were her *Winter's Tales*, *The Angelic Avengers* and *Shadows on the Grass*. When interviewed by Harvey Breit for *The New York Times Book Review* upon his award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954, Ernest Hemingway said that he would have liked to see the prize go “to that beautiful writer, Isak Dinesen” (1). George Schoolfield suggests that Dinesen's tales were a success in America because they “fed a public taste for the elegantly bizarre, delicately ironic, and refinedly perverse that had been whetted by, i.e., James Gibbons Huneker's stories, Thornton Wilder's *Bridge of San Luis Rey* and *The Woman of Andros*, and James Branch Cabell” (406). The factors that played a role in the success of Dinesen's work in America are definitely worth investigating. It would be interesting to see if such an investigation might clarify why modernism fared better in America than in Scandinavia. At least it would be interesting to see how certain aspects of modernism were differently received in these two parts of the world, and such an analysis might suggest some clues to the question.

<sup>248</sup> To Robert Haas, her publisher at Random House, Dinesen writes in a letter of July 1, 1938, that “my books' reception in America has been to me a great, fine experience. The reviews have been so extraordinarily *understanding*, - many of them have said just what I wanted them to say ... I feel highly grateful to your nation” (KB I: 281). In another letter to Mr. Haas, dated August 23, 1937, she repeats that she is so “delighted” with “the reviews of the American Critics” and that she is so grateful to America which “took me on when I could not even make the publishers in Europe have a look at my book, and the American reading public received with such generosity and open-mindedness as I shall never forget ... It has been a great richness in my life to feel in contact with a great, generous nation far away over the Sea” (KB I: 246). To her friend Gustav Mohr she writes on June 2, 1934, how wonderful she finds it, “og helt overraskende at blive modtaget med en saadan Venlighed af en stor Nation som Amerika” [“and quite a surprise to be received with such friendliness by such a great nation as America”] (KB I: 146).

Though Hamsun was at first thrilled to see New York and Chicago, he soon grew displeased by the urban culture of America and its lack of what he deemed real culture.<sup>249</sup> He remained, however, quite sympathetic to life outside of the cities in America, not the remote towns, but the huge farms on the prairies.

Following in the footsteps of more than eight hundred thousand Norwegians emigrants, who traveled from Norway to America during the nineteenth century, Hamsun crossed the Atlantic ocean two times to try his luck in the New World. His dream had been to work as a lecturer and journalist, but he had ended up doing various laborious works on the American railroads and on large farms in the Midwest.<sup>250</sup> In several of his short stories collected in *Noveller* [*Short Stories*], such as “På Prærien” [“On the Prairie”], “Zachæus” [“Zachaeus”], and “Vagabonds dager” [“Vagabond days”], he describes the life he experienced on the prairies of North Dakota at large bonanza farms, portraying the life of the tramps and migrant worker—that make up for a significant part of the new world beyond the city—with a warm fondness.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Hamsun was, as Næss shows, impressed by the architecture in these cities. From his first visit to Chicago in 1882, Hamsun wrote: “Det nye Raadhus er ligeledes firkantet og optager næsten hele Kvartalet i New Street; den er den *smukkeste* Bygning jeg har set” [“The new city hall is likewise rectangular and takes up nearly the entire space of nearly the entire block of New Street; it is the *most handsome* building I have ever seen”] (qtd. in Næss 61).

<sup>250</sup> Hamsun first traveled to America in 1882, wanting to work as a writer or lecturer, but he ended up funding his stay with miscellaneous work at stores and farms in Wisconsin. He returned to Norway in 1884, suffering from tuberculosis. In 1886 he went back to America to work as a reporter for Norwegian newspapers, *Dagbladet* and *Verdens Gang*. This time he did manage to give several lectures in Dania Hall, Minneapolis, toward the end of his stay. Before that he had worked on the railroads and streetcars in Chicago and large farms in North Dakota.

<sup>251</sup> Næss discusses the relationship between these stories and Hamsun’s own experiences.

Hamsun's stories about rural America focus on the verve as well as the harshness of the life of emigrants and newcomers in America. Moreover, the heroes of these stories represent a more powerful attitude to life than that of the townspeople and city dwellers. The Irish vagabond Evans in "On the Prairie," for instance, is portrayed as a calm and stoic life-gambler whose attitude to life makes him, like Bårdsen discussed earlier, into a spiritual aristocrat. The narrator meets Evans at a large farm "i den Røde Flods dal i Amerika" ["in Red River valley in America"] where they work together (120). "I regnveir lå han alltid og læste i romaner som han hadde kjøpt med sig" ["On rainy days he always laid down and read novels which he had brought with him"], recounts the narrator; "han var en stor, vakker kar på en seks og tredive år og talte et utsøkt sprog. Han kunne også tysk ... Han var en besynderlig mand" ["he was a big, beautiful man, thirty-six years old, and spoke a lovely language. He also knew German ... He was a strange man"] (121). Buying rounds of drinks for each other one night at a drinking hole to mark the completion of the work at a large farm, Evans loses all his money gambling. However, he never loses his stoic calmness, and by the end of the night he has won back his money. That he doesn't receive the money the banker owes him doesn't bother him; he has enough to move on. "Hver sommer er han da på prærien og høster hvete og hver vinter ligger han inde i Wisconsins skoger og hugger favnved. Dette er nu hans liv. Et liv som kanskje er like så godt som noget andet" ["Every summer he is out on the prairies, harvesting wheat, and every winter he spends in Wisconsin's forests, logging wood. Thus

is his life, a life which is probably just as good as any other”], concludes the narrator (127).

In “Zachaeus” Hamsun elaborates on the extremes of the prairies:

Det hviler den dypeste fred over prærien. I mile utover er ingen trær og ingen huser å se, bare hvete og grønt græs så vide øiet kan nå ... Solen gløder med 102 grader Fahrenheit, himmel og jord står og dirrer i denne hete og intet ordentlig vindpust svaler luften. Solen ser ut som et morads av ild.

[The deepest peace rests over the prairies. For stretches of miles there are no trees and no houses to see, only wheat and green grass as far as the eye can see ... The sun glows with 102 degrees Fahrenheit, sky and earth are vibrating in this heat and not even a breath of wind cools the air. The sun looks like a morass of fire.] (101)

The story centers on a conflict between the half-blind worker Zachaeus and the Irish cook Polly at a large farm called Billybony farm. The conflict intensifies gradually, from when Zachaeus borrows Polly’s precious newspaper, to when he uses Polly’s collected rain-water to wash his shirt, until Polly finally has Zachaeus eat his own finger (which is cut off during an accident) as a revenge for having borrowed his newspaper once more. This infuriates Zachaeus who resolves his anger by fatally shooting Polly through his ear. The interesting part is not simply how anger is thus allowed free range in the wilderness, but the consequences of the shooting. The point is, there are no consequences at all!

Zachaeus' colleagues noddingly approves of his choice to shoot Polly through the ear; "ja det er det bedste skud ... Går den gennem hjærnen så er det døden" ["yes, that's the best shot ... If the bullet goes through the brain it's the certain death"] (111). The foreman simply replaces the cook with another one the day after, "en av de gamle medhjælpere som nu steg til chef og var inderlig lykkelig over mordet. Alt gik sin gang" ["one of the old assistants who was now promoted to chef and who was sincerely happy about the murder. Everything went along in its usual way"] (112). Thus instincts and violence are allowed free play in the Wild West without further ado.

"Vagabond days," finally, follows the adventures of three migrant workers, including Nut (the name Hamsun went by in America and the narrator of the story), who run away from the harsh struggles under the tyrant foreman over "Section Orange Flat" at a large farm. On their way to find work at some smaller farm, the hungry and thirsty men quarrel over basic issues, such as which way to go, and over food and drink rations, hiding food from one another, or even stealing from each other. Like "On the Prairies" and "Zachaeus," "Vagabond days" depicts a primitive culture in which the notions of written law and organized law enforcement are simply irrelevant. Though not ideally so, the characters of these short stories are liberated from bourgeois convention and show us that alternatives to modern civilized culture do exist—that there are more adventurous, courageous, and powerful ways of relating to life.

The America Hamsun experienced and portrays in his short stories is not the America Dinesen personally experienced. However, her father, Adolph Wilhelm Dinesen,

spent two years among the Pawnee and Chippewa Indians in Nebraska and Wisconsin (1872-74), hunting and exploring, learning from the natives. He defended the Indians in his later writing, for instance in his article on America published in the Danish journal *Tilskueren* in 1887.<sup>252</sup>

In some of her stories, such as “Caryatids: An Unfinished Gothic Tale” (*Last Tales*) and “Sorrow-Acre” (*Winter’s Tales*), Dinesen makes references to the America of her father’s time; America as a New World of ruggedness and courage. Childerique in “Caryatids” is married to Philippe who, at the age of seven, went to Canada with his father to live with him there. As a child in Canada he was “friendly with many of the red Indians, and went about with them for long whiles,” recounts Philippe to his wife (LT 114). He explains that “they were good people, kind to me, and taught me many things” (LT 115). That Philippe has learned many new things in the new wild world that are unacceptable in the old world is suggested in the observation that “on his return to France from America nine years before, his neighbors had been impressed and a little frightened by his new ideas and schemes of reform” (LT 116). However, “he had quite settled down by now, and seemed to form himself like a ringwall round the little world of his domestic life” (LT 116).

Adam, who we meet in “Sorrow-Acre” as the heir to the estate of his uncle’s manor in Denmark, seems at first unwilling to give up his modern ideas. As we’ve seen,

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<sup>252</sup> See, among others, Thurman and Bono for further information on Wilhelm Dinesen’s life and his impact on his daughter.

he has encountered the new ideas of freedom in England and desires to see the world of America to find out more about the world. He eventually asserts that he will do so, finding that he can no longer stand to witness the suffering of the old woman Anne-Marie who is reaping an entire field of rye in one day in order that his uncle, the lord, will save her son from execution. "I shall go to America, to the new world," he says to his uncle (WT 59). "To America?" replies his uncle, who continues that "yes, I have heard of America. They have got freedom there, a big water-fall, savage red men. They shoot turkeys, I have read, as we shoot partridges. Well, if it be your wish, go to America, Adam, and be happy in the new world" (WT 59).

However, as we've already seen, Adam decides, despite his original fervor and intention to leave for America, to stay with his uncle and resign to his fate, thus settling like Philippe. It seems, indeed, that his uncle's blessing overpowers him. America thus remains a country for the courageous while Adam stays behind in Denmark with his uncle who remains the one in power. For, as we've seen, it is his uncle—responsible for the "cruel" (in the eyes of Adam) bargain with Anne-Marie—who comes out victorious in Dinesen's "Sorrow-Acre."

Commenting on the relationship between "Sorrow-Acre" and Dinesen's own preference for the old order, Langbaum notes that "she does not sentimentalize the old order, or gloss over the hardness of the reality she is out to justify" (WT 34). The same is indeed true for Hamsun and his portrayal of the life and conflicts on the prairies, such as the disagreement between Zachaeus and Polly, which ends with Zachaeus' victory by

shooting Polly. In other words, both Hamsun and Dinesen allow men responsible for the death of other people to play the hero's role. This should caution the reader of Hamsun's and Dinesen's stories to pay attention to their social implications, beyond the artistic and existential concerns of their authors. If Hamsun and Dinesen are attracted to certain cultures or figures—or even political movements, as I shall suggest in the following—because they are less concerned with their social implications and more with their promises for the individual's artistic-existential project, recognizing this as an issue is crucial. Yet, recognizing the risks of Hamsun's and Dinesen's projects does not mean that we must dismiss them as useless, or ignore their constructive aspects, but rather that we can learn from them in a more critical manner, amending and supplementing their projects as we find appropriate.<sup>253</sup>

#### **HAMSUN'S AFFAIR WITH HITLER**

Like two other famous authors, Ezra Pound and Louis Ferdinand Céline, Hamsun supported the fascist governments during World War II. Like Pound and Céline, he also faced legal accusations after the war, and he remained a traitor in the eyes of his fellow citizens. According to Ferguson, Hamsun represents “an extreme example of that curious tendency in art for great creative revolutionaries to be personally reactionary and anti-

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<sup>253</sup> Even Peter Kirkegaard, who sees Hamsun as a conservative reactionary, asserts that Hamsun's “indsigter er *potentielt* kritiske og bør ikke uhindret blive tilladt taget til indtægt af en borgerlig ideologi” [“insights are *potentially* critical and should not be considered the property solely of a bourgeois ideology”] (8-9). Kirkegaard refers in particular to Hamsun's “‘eksistentielle’ problematik, i *kunstner-typisk form*” [“‘existential’ probing, in *the artist-type form*”], as worthy of serious consideration, even for Marxists (8).

liberal” (2). Perhaps that explains why even Dinesen could come to commend Hitler and the Germans in her private letters. However, whereas Dinesen remained on the “correct” side, Hamsun explicitly supported the enemy that occupied Norway, as well as Denmark, in some sixteen manifestoes and articles that were published in Norwegian and German newspapers and magazines during World War II, including his infamous obituary of Hitler, published in the national newspaper *Aftenposten* on May 7, 1945.<sup>254</sup>

Hamsun’s support of Hitler’s Nazi Germany continues to traumatize those readers who admire his literature but reject his political position. In order to avoid the political question, there has been a tendency among scholars to focus on Hamsun’s early writings from the 1890s, celebrating its radical focus on the life of the unconscious, while remaining silent on his later more “conservative” works.<sup>255</sup> Reacting against this unwillingness to deal with the political question in Hamsun’s work, others, such as Leo Löventhal and Peter Kirkegaard, have argued that Hamsun’s Fascism, or at least a predisposition for Fascism, is evident even in his earliest works from the 1890s.

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<sup>254</sup> Until recently, Hamsun’s political writings have not been easy to access for the general reader. Nilson gathered and included Hamsun’s political wartime journalism in an Appendix to his book on Hamsun and his politics, published in 1960. Nilson also included four articles that Hamsun wrote in the 1930s, after Hitler attained the power in Germany. Thanks to Gunvald Hermundstad, the editor of *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter [Hamsun’s Polemical Writings]* (1998), Hamsun’s controversial writings on modern culture and politics have now become easier to access. The book includes writings by Hamsun from 1879 through World War II. More than thirty of these are from the 1930s and World War II. Hamsun withdrew from writing after the war.

<sup>255</sup> This is true for the dissertations written on Hamsun in Norway after the war (by Olaf Øyslebø, Rolf N. Nettum and Jan Fr. Marstrander). The tendency has been the same in Europe, which critical studies by scholars such as James McFarlane, Gregory Nybø, and Martin Humpál reveal. Kittang criticizes this tendency and seeks to amend it in *Luft, vind, ingenting*.

Kittang, on the other hand, in his book on Hamsun, *Luft, vind, ingenting*, argues that it is impossible to isolate any singular ideological position in Hamsun's fiction. Even those points of view Hamsun himself most likely supported, such as the significance of feeling a oneness with nature, are never presented as triumphant or absolute—except in the case of Hamsun himself in *On Overgrown Paths*. On the contrary, Hamsun's texts always highlight the difficulties in affirming any one ideal position. As we've seen, his Nietzschean protagonists either die or remain outsiders in a no-man's land, incapable of integrating themselves or their ideas with society. Kittang refers to the *Hunger*-hero, Nagel, Glahn, and the post-master in *Women at the Pump*. Kittang asserts that Hamsun's texts “‘sympatiserer’ nok med Nagel og postmeisteren, men tar samstundes avstand frå dei, bl.a. på den klåraste av alle måtar: ved å ta dei av dage. Dermed blir dei ideologiske fragmenta fanga inn av ei dobbel rørsle, som stadfester og underminerer, konstruerer og de-konstruerer, på samme tid” [“might ‘sympathize’ with Nagel and the post-master, but at the same time the texts dissociate themselves from them by, for instance, making them die. In this way the ideological fragments are captured in a double movement which manifests and undermines, constructs and deconstructs at the same time”] (18). Considering how Hamsun's texts deconstruct themselves, Kittang concludes that “som ein tekst-teori utan rom for slike djupast sett *ironiske* rørsler mellom illusjon og desillusjon er ideologikritikken utan grep om det spesifikke i den hamsunske teksten” [“as a textual theory with no room for such basically ironical movements between illusion and disillusion, the ideology critic has no clue about the specifics in Hamsun's

text”] (18).<sup>256</sup> Hence, Kittang rejects the ideological interpretation of Hamsun’s work, such as Löwenthal’s.

While I argue that Hamsun’s heroes die not simply because Hamsun will not allow for one victorious ideology to speak, but because their artistic-existential projects fail—which again is the result of a range of factors, including their own disposition as well as society’s resistance—Kittang’s point is important. Hamsun’s books taken together cannot be dissected to reveal the proponent of one ideological position without reducing the complexities of the problems that they present. This is not to say that Hamsun does not appear as such a proponent in other texts he wrote, such as his articles, though, he denied that his writings were political. “Clearly he did not see his journalism as political in the accepted sense,” comments Ferguson (n360). During an interview on the radio January 24, 1941, Hamsun remarks that “I don’t believe any artist should practice a political art ... Is political art capable of achieving anything? Power? No, it is better to be the humble practitioner of one’s art. That way maybe the artist leaves behind him a great work after his death.”<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Kittang further suggests we see Hamsun’s Nazism as the result of his fascination with “det fråstøytande” [“the repulsive”]; i.e. the tension between desire and illusion, harmony of life and dissolution of meaning, life and death, “solkors og gasskammer” [“sun-cross and gas chamber”] (314-15). “Solkors” was the emblem of the Nazi party in Norway. In other words, Kittang suggests that Hamsun’s support of Hitler’s Germany is an example of a self-conscious appropriation of a vision whose void he knew would be revealed.

<sup>257</sup> Qtd. in Ferguson n360. Ferguson notes Hamsun’s comments in a footnote to reveal the irony of Hamsun’s position; that he was, as Ferguson says, unaware of himself and his own politically tinted journalistic writing.

Hamsun consistently denied until the bitter end to have ever enrolled as a member of any political party or organization, including Quisling's Nasjonal Samling (NS), the Fascist party that, as Hitler's puppet, ruled Norway during the German occupation. In *On Overgrown Paths*, Hamsun's account of the post-war proceedings against him, he argues that he has never participated in meetings and never given any financial support to NS. "Jeg har ikke vært medlem av NS" ["I have not been a member of NS"], he asserts (84). In fact, he argues that he has no clue what the party stands for and that it can only be coincidental if he has written anything in line with its ideology: "Jeg har prøvet på å forstå hva NS var for noe, jeg har prøvet å sette meg inn i det, men det ble ikke til noe. Men det kan godt være at jeg nå og da kan ha skrevet i NS' ånd. Jeg vet ikke, for jeg vet ikke hva NS' ånd er" ["I have tried to understand what NS was all about, I have tried to figure it out, but it never came to anything. But it might very well be that I have been writing in the spirit of NS. I don't know, for I don't know what NS' spirit is"] (84). Hamsun confessed, however, that he had been enrolled as a member by someone else,<sup>258</sup> and he was accused and sentenced for having been member number 26.000 of NS after April 8, 1940.

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<sup>258</sup> To the doctors who examined him after the war, Hamsun argued, according to the doctors' report, that he had "*aldri skrevet under på søknad om å bli medlem av NS, det er med N.S. som med det at jeg er lutheraner, jeg er glidd inn i det. En sønn av Fuhr [i.e. Sjur Fuhr] satte et NS merke på meg og det gikk jeg med til siste dagen*" ["never signed anything to become a member of NS. It is with NS as it is with me being a Lutheran, I have simply drifted into it. A son of Fuhr [i.e. Sjur Fuhr] put a NS pin on me and I wore it to the last day"] (Langfeldt 64). Everyone in Norway is born a member of the Lutheran church, the State religion in Norway, and continues to be a member unless he or she officially withdraws from it.

Hamsun insisted on his innocence, but in articles, letters, lectures, and interviews written before and during the war, he asserted his support and admiration not only for Quisling, the founder of the NS party, but for Hitler, Mussolini, and Goebbels. After a meeting with Goebbels, Hamsun sent him his Nobel Prize medal to assert his admiration and solidarity for the minister's work.<sup>259</sup> Hamsun also met with Hitler for whom he wrote the infamous necrology. Hamsun's admiration for these political figures indicates, I argue, where his political interests guided him—towards the great individual. Hamsun's political interests were less concerned with politics as a social question as he was more inclined to see politics in terms of the victorious projects of great individuals.

As Ferguson notes, "Hamsun observed an idiosyncratic distinction between Quisling and his Nasjonal Samling Party. To the psychiatrists examining him after the war, he denied that he had been a national socialist in the 1930s, but was happy to confirm that he had been 'Quisling's man' since long before the war" (333). When Hamsun first met Quisling in 1940, after six years of publicly praising and supporting him, "the full extent of Quisling's contribution to their conversation had been to say 'yes' twice. Yet," as Ferguson adds, "Hamsun clung to the illusion that this was Norway's charismatic leader, her Caesar, her Great Terrorist" (358). Likewise, Hamsun persisted in his glorification of Hitler though he had not read his work, nor did Hitler impress him

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<sup>259</sup> On June 17, 1943, Hamsun sent his medal to Goebbels together with a note where he writes that "Nobel stiftet sin Pris til Belønning for siste Aars 'idealisticke' Digtning. Jeg vet ingen som saa utrettelig Aar efter Aar har skrevet og talt Europas og Menneskehetens Sak saa idealistisk som De, hr. Riksminister" ["Nobel founded his Award as a reward for the most 'idealistic' writing during the past year. I know of

during their meeting at Hitler's private country residence in Berghof in Obersalzberg in 1943.<sup>260</sup> Interviewed by the psychiatrists after the war he actually calls Hitler "en snørrviktig fyr, snakket bare om JEG" ["a stuck-up fellow, talked only about ME"] (Langfeldt 61).<sup>261</sup>

In his book on Hamsun's politics, *En ørn i uvær* [*An eagle in stormy weather*], Nilson shows how Hamsun's support for Hitler relies on the promise of the Nazi movement to overthrow the power of the aging imperial England and attain the power for itself. On the other hand, "synes nazismen som samfunnssystem å ha interessert ham lite" ["Nazism as a social system did not seem to have interested him"] (88). In articles he wrote before and during the war, Hamsun defends the German nation and chastises the Norwegian resistance, while declaring his anglophobia, attacking England as an

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no one, Minister, who has so idealistically and tirelessly written and preached the case for Europe, and for mankind, year in and year out, as yourself"] (PS 264).

<sup>260</sup> Included in *Hamsun's Polemical Writings* is a transcript of the meeting between Hamsun and Hitler based on the stenographic notes made by Ernst Edmund Züchner, Hitler's interpreter (268-71). From this transcript it is obvious that Hamsun was concerned with the future role of Norway as a large shipping nation and frustrated with the German Reichskommissar Terboven's methods in Norway, denying Norway's freedom. Moreover, Hamsun is frustrated with Quisling's lack of a say as opposed to Terboven's dictatorial ruling. Hitler is eventually absolutely annoyed with Hamsun's persistent interrogation about the future of Norway and asks him to leave while he asks Hamsun's interpreter, Egil Holmboe, to calm Hamsun down. Upon his return home to Norway, Hamsun privately told his son Tore Hamsun that he had not liked Hitler, however, publicly, he continued to speak well of him. Tore Hamsun writes about the meeting that "det kom til veritable sammenstøt, og det endte med at fars nerver klikket. Under besøket gråt han av skuffelse over at den misjon skulle bli mislykket, som både han og andre hadde satt sitt håp til" ["it turned into veritable confrontations that nearly gave my father a nervous breakdown. During the meeting he cried out of disappointment that his mission, which both he and others had believed in, was failing"] (315).

<sup>261</sup> Tore Hamsun also recounts that "Jeg spurte far hva hans inntrykk var av Hitler personlig. 'Jeg brydde meg ikke om ham,' var hans svar. 'Jeg sa han hele tiden ... jeg!'" ["I asked my father about his personal impression of Hitler. 'I didn't like him,' was his answer. 'I he said all the time ... !'"] (315).

imperialistic nation and the embodiment of the modern age.<sup>262</sup> He is particularly critical of England's blockade of Norway during World War I (Norway remained neutral during this war), which caused starvation ("sultedøden") among the Norwegian people, and he scorns England's as a "terrormakt" ["terroristic power"], unwilling to give up its dominance of all the oceans (PS 238-39).<sup>263</sup> All in all, the basic content of Hamsun's war-time articles and manifestoes is his cheering for Quisling, Hitler, and Mussolini, his hatred for England, and his support for Germany, reproaching the Norwegian opposition to the Nazi occupation of Norway.

Discussing Hamsun's support of Hitler's Nazi movement, Ferguson concludes, in line with Nilson, that it was Hamsun's "fanatical anglophobia which played the decisive role in keeping him true to the German cause through the thick and thin years of five decades" (348). His fondness for the Germans, continues Ferguson, "had its roots in the 1890s, and was originally a combination of a feeling of racial kinship with the German people and a sense of tremendous gratitude towards them for recognising and supporting his talent early on in his career" (337). In contrast to England, Germany was for Hamsun "always the coming land, the coming people, the young power, seeking to challenge the stubbornly held might of the aging English" (235). Germany had only become a modern

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<sup>262</sup> "Englenderen var for Knut Hamsun det samme som Jøden var for Adolf Hitler: opphavet til alt vondt, ja inkarnasjonen av selve Det Onde" ["The Englishman was to Knut Hamsun the same as the Jew was to Adolf Hitler: the root of all evil, yes, the incarnation of the Evil in itself"], maintains Nilson (13).

<sup>263</sup> Qtd. from his article "Et ord til os ved krigsutbruddet" ["A word to us at the outbreak of the war"] originally published in Oslo April 19, 1940.

state with Otto von Bismarck as the Chancellor of the Union in 1867 when twenty-two feudal principalities were merged into a nation.

During Hamsun's speech as a guest of honor at the first plenary congress of the Press Internationale organized by Goebbels in June 1943, it is again his hatred for the English that plays the dominant role. Hamsun here maintains that he is "dypt og inderlig anti angloman, antibritisk" ["deeply and sincerely anti-Angloman, anti-British"] and that he has "aldri støtt på uelskverdiger folk enn englendere, så selvopptatte, så hovmodige, så eksklusive" ["never come across a less lovable people than the English—so self-centered, so arrogant, so exclusive"] (PS 265).<sup>264</sup> He goes on to explain that his attitude is the result of a hundred-year campaign by the English of treachery, lies, broken promises, aggression, terror, murder, hypocritical religion, oppression, and the activities of the British Secret Service. In contrast to the English, Hamsun then upholds Hitler as "en korsfarer og reformator" ["a crusader and a reformer"] who has taken up his sword against "Englands makt og maktmisbruk" ["the English power and abuse of power"]; the courageous individual against an old imperialistic state of international power (PS 267). His concluding salute to Hitler as the heroic crusader epitomizes Hamsun's politics; it remains a personal opinion and a celebration of the great individual.

Moreover, while primarily concerned in his work with the individual and his aspirations towards a creative-existential project, Hamsun does not reveal any particular interest in getting a thorough understanding of politics, including Nazism as a political

movement. As his son Tore Hamsun tells us, Hamsun “hadde aldri likt nasjonalsosialismens frieri til massen” [“had never liked that National Socialism courted the masses”] (316). There is no discussion of how society would be organized or what culture would be like in Hitler’s *Third Reich* in any of Hamsun’s texts, only that it would mean greatness for Norway, Germany, and the world.

In an article written at the request of “Norsk Artikkel Tjeneste” [“The Norwegian Article Service”] in October 1941, Hamsun suggests that sometime in the future “vi skal leve livet i fredelig samkvem med alle folk, arbeide sammen med dem, bytte varer, kunst og intellektuelle idéer med dem, skape gjensidig utvikling, innleve oss i et system av hjelpe-aksjoner—kortsagt nasjonalsocialisme” [“we shall live together in peaceful intercourse with all peoples, working together with them, exchanging goods, art and intellectual ideas. We shall create a society in mutual development with others, enter a world, a system based on helping—in short, National Socialism”] (PS 252).<sup>265</sup> This vision is a rare piece of Hamsun’s political writing in terms of what he expected from Hitler and his Nazi movement. In his speech to the court after the war, Hamsun again merely asserts that he had been promised that “Norge ... nå skulle få en slik høy rang blant de germanske land i Europa ... Norge, et selvstående og selvlysende land borti Europas utkant” [“Norway ... was supposed to get such a high position among the Germanic countries in Europe ... Norway; an independent and luminous country on the

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<sup>264</sup> Hamsun’s speech was published in the National Party’s newspaper *Fritt Folk* June 24, 1943.

<sup>265</sup> The article was published in several Norwegian, Swedish, and German newspapers.

outskirts of Europe”] (*On Overgrown Paths* 83). Though maintaining that he wants to “redegjøre for alt meg og mitt” [“give an account for all about me and mine”], he does not give any further information on what social, political, or cultural implications Hitler’s pan-German *Reich* might possibly have had for Norway beyond this point (83). He only repeats that “Norge skulle få en høy, en fremtredende plass i det storgermanske verdenssamfunn” [“Norway was going to get a high, prominent place in the pan-Germanic world society”] (84). The only other point he makes during his speech to the court about why he believed and still believes Germany would have been good for Norway, is that Norwegian artists and authors in the past had always made their name in Germany first: “Jeg kunne således minne meg selv om at hvert eneste stort og stolt kulturnavn vi eier i Norge først hadde gått gjennom det germanske Tyskland for å bli stort i hele verden” [“I could thus remind myself that every great and proud name of culture in Norway had first gone through the Germanic Germany to become great in the entire world”] (86). During the proceedings against him, Hamsun, at that time eighty-six years old, thus stubbornly persisted in his rather shallow, yet all the more disturbing, vindication of Hitler’s Nazi Germany.

#### **DINESEN’S FLIRTATION WITH HITLER**

Whereas Hamsun was pro-German and detested England and America, Dinesen admired the British sense of aristocracy. Whereas Hamsun openly supported Nazism, Dinesen publicly criticized it in her “Breve fra et Land i Krig” [“Letters from a Land at

War”]. Moreover, as an assistant in the rescue of the Danish Jews,<sup>266</sup> and the author of *Gengældelsens veje* [*The Angelic Avengers*] (1944), a novel that has been interpreted as a staunch critique of the Nazi regime,<sup>267</sup> Dinesen appeared, during and after the war, and contrary to Hamsun, a patriotic heroine.

Dinesen herself, however, maintained that she simply wrote *The Angelic Avengers* to have a little fun.<sup>268</sup> In *Shadows on the Grass*, published fifteen years after the war had ended, Dinesen writes that it is with “dyb Uvilje” [“deep aversion”] that she remembers the war (110). However, except for the persecution of the Danish Jews during the fall of 1943, which she remembers as a time of “Gru og Brutalitet” [“horror and brutality”], it

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<sup>266</sup> Dinesen opened her house to Jews escaping from the Nazis. Her house was close to the escape route for Jews on their way to Sweden, and Dinesen had given the keys to her kitchen door to two members in the Resistance, Johannes Rosendahl and Mogens Fog, her doctor, who was a member of the Freedom Council (Thurman 335-37).

<sup>267</sup> Dorothy Canfield Fisher, for instance, a famous author who wrote the Introduction to the first American publication of *Seven Gothic Tales* and who also served as the President of the Book of the Month committee for several years, interpreted the novel as an allegory for the Danish-German contest. In her review of the book, Canfield writes that “delighted Danes quickly recognized that here, thinly veiled, was something far more than the enchanting narrative it was on the surface ... Danes recognized the situation of their own beloved nation, prisoners of people ... the Nazis” (2-3). In his review of *Angelic Avengers* for *The New York Times*, Robert Gorham Davis also points out a possible allegory for Denmark under the occupation. According to Davis, the male main character, the puritanical Reverend, who uses his mask of holiness to ensnare young girls and sell them into white slavery, represents Hitler and the two girls, Lucan and Zosine, who are treated well in order to throw the police off the scent, represent Denmark, which received special privileges from the Nazis because they wanted to make it a showcase of the New Order.

<sup>268</sup> In a letter to Dorothy Canfield, Dinesen writes on April 14, 1946, “I am afraid that out of your own heart you do attribute too many fine qualities and too much weight to my book. I began it as a joke, in order to keep alive within the bleak, dumb prison-air of that time, I felt that I must have a little bit of fun or I should die!” (KB I: 443). Dinesen used the pseudonym Pierre Andrézel for the book and asserted that “I shall never admit to the authorship myself!” (KB I: 443). In a *Paris Review* interview of 1956, she finally acknowledged the novel as her “illegitimate child,” and explained how, finding herself bored under the German occupation and in want of money, she asked her publisher for an advance and a stenographer, and dictated the novel, improvising it as she went along (Langbaum 197).

is primarily the “dødelig Kedsomhed” [“dreadful bore”] she remembers (111-12). That’s why she wrote *Angelic Avengers*, she explains (111).

Considering Dinesen’s letters, written before, during, and even after the war, we will see that Dinesen presents, in fact, a more ambiguous attitude towards Hitler and Nazi Germany than what most biographers and critics hold her to do. George C. Schoolfield points this out in his review of Dinesen’s letters from 1931 to 1962 published in 1996, asserting that her “attitude toward Germany is mixed” (408). In fact, in a letter of June 1, 1938, to her aunt Karen Sass, Dinesen writes that “jeg tror jo om Hitler, at han er i høj Grad genial, - maaske virkelig, hvad man, i én Betydning kan kalde et Geni” [“Of course, I think that Hitler is highly gifted, perhaps really what you in a sense can call a genius”] (KB I: 278).

In the light of Dinesen’s private letters, which were first published only four years ago (1996), and which remain to be translated into English, Dinesen’s attitude to Hitler and Nazism needs to be reconsidered. Dinesen’s sister Ellen Dahl, who enthusiastically traveled in Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, encouraged her sister “to focus her vague pro-Germanness” (Schoolfield 408). In a long fragment of a letter to Ellen, written in May 1946, Dinesen attempts to do just that. Replying to her sister’s conclusion that Nazism appalled humanity because it had never before been faced with such evil, Dinesen confesses that the Allied public spied the beam in Hitler’s and the German nation’s eye, but was unaware of the splinter in its own (KB I: 444-45). “Jeg selv mente derimod” [“I personally held”], she continues, “at der vel var en *Gradsforsk*el, men ikke

nogen *Væsensforskel*, mellem disse Foreteelser og andre, som vi kender fra Historien, eller gennem vor egen Erfaring, overalt hvor et fantastisk og bevidst subjektivt Livssyn har gjort sig voldsomt gældende” [“that there certainly was a difference in *degree*, but not in *essence* between these phenomena and others that we know from history, or from our own experience, when a fantastic and subjective view on life has attained major predominance”] (KB I: 445). Moreover, she judges the opinion that the German people are more “sadistic” than others superficial (KB I: 445). Finally, she rejects the idea that Hitler and his party were a mob of gangster, asserting that there was “en *Væsensforskel* imellem Al Capones og Hitlers, - eller Mussolinis, - ‘Gangs.’ Gangsterne i Chicago var en Samling Francs Coquins, Røvere og Mordere, der ragede til sig, hvad de kunde faa fat i, og blæste Lov og Ret en lang Marsch” [“there is an *essential* difference between Al Capone’s and Hitler’s, - or Mussolini’s, - ‘gangs.’ The gangsters in Chicago were a bunch of Francs Coquins, bandits and murderers who raked in what ever they could get their hands on, they cared nothing about law and order”] (KB I: 445).

The supporters of Hitler, on the other hand, were devoted to a gospel they affirmed with passion, argues Dinesen, who goes on to explain her understanding of Nazism as, not a program of sadistic bandits, but a new religion.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Further, regarding Mussolini, Dinesen writes in a letter of February 4, 1949, to Constant Huntington, her publisher at Putnam in England, that she is “at one with Mussolini, who said: ‘Non amo i sedentari’” (KB I: 529). Four years later, in her essay “En båltale med 14 års forsinkelse” [“Oration at a Bonfire, 14 Years Late”], she repeats that “jeg ... er enig med Mussolini, som sagde: ‘Non amo i sedentari—jeg holder ikke af dem, der sidder ned’” [“I ... agree with Mussolini, who said: Non amo i sedentari!—I cannot stand those who sit down”] (SE 219).

Jeg tænker mig da, at Nazismen fra først af for det store tyske Folks Masse har været en Idé. Den har for Folket betydet Tysklands Genrejsning ud af Kaos, et germansk Fællesskab og, som dettes guddommelige Mission, den hele Verdens Frelse og Genfødelse gennem germansk Væsen,- d.v.s. gennem en Tilbagevenden til Naturen, gennem den kraftigere og enklere Aands, maaske det sunde Barbaris, Sejr over en frivol og ulevedygtig Civilisation, og gennem det heroiske Livssyns Triumf over den mekaniske, merkantile eller æstetiske Verdensanskuelse.

[Thus I think that Nazism has for the great German majority appeared as an Idea. It has meant for them Germany's resurrection out of chaos, a German community and, as its divine mission, the salvation and rebirth of the entire world according to the Germans' nature, i.e. by a return to nature, by the victory of a more powerful and simpler spirit, perhaps the victory of a healthy barbarism over a frivolous and unviable civilization, and by the triumph of a heroic outlook on life over the mechanical, mercantile or aesthetic view of life.] (KB I: 446-48)

In conclusion, Nazism must have appeared “for det store tyske Folk ... som et Evangelium” [“for the great German people ... like a gospel”] (KB I: 448).

While asserting the power such a gospel can have over a people—when “den subjektive Lidenskab samler og forklarer sig som Idé” [“the subjective passion is gathered around and identifies itself as an idea”]—Dinesen is, however, quick to caution

against the dangers of such a mentality (KB I: 446). The danger as she sees it is when it becomes a faith that not only excludes any other beliefs, but attacks them as “*Kætteri*” [“*heresy*”] (KB I: 447). Yet, she maintains that the German nation was not forced to believe in Nazism “med Ild og Sværd” [“under fire or by the force of the sword”] (KB I: 448). “Thi det maa gælde for Profeten Adolf Hitler, som det, ifølge Carlyle, gjalt for Profeten Muhammed” [“This is so, because, it must be true for the prophet Adolf Hitler as it was, according to Carlyle, for the prophet Mohammed”], she explains: “Enhver ny Religion begynder med en Minoritet paa een eneste Mand ... Det vilde ikke nytte ham at forsøge paa at udbrede sin Tro med Sværdet” [“Every new religion begins with a minority centered around one man ... He would not have succeeded in spreading his faith with the sword”] (KB I: 448). Enthralled by Hitler’s gospel about the coming resurrection of Germany, the Germans—like the Mohammedan people—were ready “ikke blot til at ofre Livet for dens Virkeliggørelse, men ogsaa til at overse og glemme saadanne Overgreb eller Ekscesser, som maatte forekomme betydningsløse i Forhold til den Salighed, som denne Virkeliggørelse skulde bringe Menneskeheden. Ethvert Folk vil tilgive sit Fædrelands Frelser nogle Forvildelser” [“not only to sacrifice life for its realization, but also to ignore and forget those encroachments or excesses, which were bound to appear unimportant in relation to that bliss which this realization would bring to human kind. Any people would forgive the redeemer of their native country some aberrations”], concludes Dinesen (KB I: 448).

Dinesen's comparison of Hitler with Mohammed is interesting, for she herself admired the latter. In *Shadows on the Grass* she describes Islam as a religion of "Hengivelse" ["devotion"] whose Prophet does not preach acceptance in terms of self-conquest or regret, but "Henrykkelse" ["rapture"] (30).

I modsætning til mange moderne Former for Kristendom giver Islam sig ikke af med at refærdiggøre Guds Fremfærd imod Menneskene, dens Ja er betingelsesløst. Thi Elskeren maaler ikke den Elskedes Værd med borgerlig Maalestok, men den Elskede herliggør og helliggør, ved at inddrage dem i sit Væsen, ogsaa Livets dunkle og farlige Kræfter, og fylder dem med Sødme ... Jeg har da ogsaa her tænkt mig, at mens Kristendommens Grundlægger, gennem sin personlige fjernhed overfor det erotiske, paa dette Omraade synes at have efterladt sine Disciple i en slags Tomrum, har Profetens vældige, utæmmelige erotiske Magfyldde gennemtrængt hans Tilhængere og bragt latente Kræfter hos dem til Udfoldelse.

[In contrast to many modern Christian ideologies, Islam does not occupy itself with justifying the ways of God to man; its Yes is universal and unconditional. For the lover does not measure the worth of his mistress by a moral or social rod. But the mistress, by absorbing into her own being the dark and dangerous phenomena of life, mysteriously transluminates and sanctifies them and imbues them with sweetness ... I have also been

thinking that whereas the erotic aloofness of the founder of Christianity has left his disciples in a kind of void, the indomitable potency of the Prophet has pervaded his followers and made mighty latent forces in them fetch headway.] (30-31).

Finally, Dinesen asserts that though it is a general notion among Christians that Islam is more intolerant than Christianity, that is not her own experience (33).

Dinesen's affinity for Islam enlightens her admiring comments on Nazism as a gospel that exerts extreme power over its followers who enthusiastically affirm it. Furthermore, her discussion of Islam as a *tolerant* religion clarifies her critique of Nazism as *fanatic*, believing in its own truth to the extent of forcefully excluding any other beliefs. Yet, just as she embraces the Mohammedan people as fearless "Krigere fra de store Fantasia'er" ["warriors of the great fantasias"] who rush forth to meet the will of God, fulfilling their mission on earth, sword in hand, Dinesen does not seem very concerned about the violent acts of Hitler's soldiers, committed in the name of their fantastic goal (*ibid.* 32).<sup>270</sup> "Man stiger ikke, ad en stejl Klippesti, til Tinderne uden et Fejltrin" ["one cannot reach the peaks by a steep rocky path without making a single slip"], writes Dinesen to her sister, commenting on the Germans' willingness to sacrifice themselves for the realization of Hitler's gospel (KB I: 448). We have already seen how

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<sup>270</sup> Further, Dinesen portrays the Masai people, native to Kenya, whom she also admires, as a people of heroic warriors who "gennem tusind Aar var hærdet til en Legemliggørelse af Nietzsches Ideal: 'Manden til Krig og Kvinden til Krigerens Vederkvægelse. Alt andet er Daarskab'" ["had hardened through a thousand years into a personification of Nietzsche's ideal: 'Man for war, and woman for the warrior's delight, all else if foolishness'"] (95-96).

Dinesen embraces the heroic act, even when the price is death, as in “Sorrow-Acre” where the old lord upholds the order on his land through a stipulation with the old peasant woman Anne-Marie who, fulfilling her part, works herself to death. In fact, admiring the capacity to make one’s life into great art, Dinesen even allows for the crime of murder, as in the case of the actor Kasparson in “The Deluge at Norderney,” who kills the Cardinal to attain his saintly role.

In fact, while admiring heroic battles, Dinesen actually seems disdainful about the British unwillingness to fight,<sup>271</sup> and she is ambivalent in her attitude towards the men of the resistance movement. Members of the resistance did not fight openly as real soldiers in uniforms do, but attacked in “mulm og mørke” [“the dead of night”], she writes on August 8, 1947, in a letter to Johannes Rosendahl, who had been a member of the Danish resistance movement (KB I: 476). Opposed to their secret fighting which lacked the marks of honor that characterized the open fighting of men of an earlier time—“den Ære som følger med Sværdet” [“the honor that comes with the sword”] (KB I: 475)—she objects to the glorification of these young men as an attempt to attain martial honor in a

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<sup>271</sup> Dinesen writes on June 1, 1938, to her sister Karen Sass that “jeg tror at de engelske Politikere har deres største Vanskelighed deri, at Folket *ikke vil slaas*. Det er vel ikke noget krigersk Folk, og de kan se, at de ikke har faaet det mindste ud af den sidste Krig, og de tror ikke for Alvor at England selv kan angribes. De lader jo til nok at ville ruste, men slaas tror jeg ikke at de vil” [“I think that the British politicians have the greatest difficulty in that their people *do not want to fight*. They are not a warlike people, and they reflect that they did not get much out of the last war, and they do not seriously consider that England can be attacked. It seems they will be arming, but I don’t think they want to fight”] (KB I: 277). Dinesen’s suspicion is confirmed when she meets a Lady Betty Balfour at a social event who says that she wants “rather peace with dishonour than war with honour,” to which Dinesen replies that one can not have “peace with dishonour;” if that is what one aims for, one gets “war with dishonour” (KB I: 277). Dinesen judges the Lady’s attitude a fundamental problem among the British people which makes it “meget vanskeligt” [“very difficult”] for England’s leading men (KB I: 277).

cheap way (KB I: 477). Moreover, she criticizes the idealization of these young men as “martyrs” and maintains her opposition to the plans of raising a monument to honor the fallen men of the resistance movement (KB I: 472-75). Asserting that “en Soldats Død for Fædrelandet er ikke tragisk” [“a soldier’s death for his native country is not tragic”], Dinesen turns instead to the men who fought and died bravely on the frontiers, but who have not yet, she admonishes, been honored with a monument (KB I: 476). In line with one of her own favorite mottoes, “Je responderai ... et godt Valgsprog for en Adelsmand” [“Je responderai ... a good motto for a noble man”] they faced the enemy as proud men (KB I: 477).

Finally, in a later letter to Rosendahl, Dinesen, while insisting on her opposition to the plans to raise a monument for the fallen men of the resistance movement, asserts that she has always wanted—and grieved about her exclusion from it—to be a soldier (KB I: 485). As Schoolfield comments, “in defense” of Dinesen’s sympathy for the defeated German troops, it stemmed not only from pity for the over-aged or under-aged enlisted men, but from her admiration for the discipline of the *Wehrmacht* officers (408).

That Dinesen admired the discipline and courage of soldiers and officers is also clear from her article reporting from Germany, supposedly written in 1940, but not published until 1948. In fact, contrary to the conclusion of other critics, the article from

Dinesen's semi-journalistic trip to Hamburg and Berlin in March of 1940 is quite ambiguous about "det Tredie Rike" ["the Third *Reich*"].<sup>272</sup>

In 1939 Dinesen received a travel grant and was employed by the newspaper *Politiken* to go to London, Paris, and Berlin and spend a month at each place, writing reports from the cities.<sup>273</sup> Like Hamsun, Dinesen stressed that she was not a political journalist. In the foreword she later added to her "Breve fra et land i krig" ["Letters from a land at war"] upon their publication in *Heretica* (another journal than originally intended), Dinesen recalls that she confessed to Mr. Hasager, the editor of the journal who funded her journey, that she "havde ingen indsigt i politik og ingen politisk flair" ["had no insight into politics and no political flair" (SE 92).<sup>274</sup> But, she continues, "jeg var et ærligt menneske, og måske kunne også en fordomsfri lægmands optegnelser fra en politisk mægtig bevæget tid engang i fremtiden få en slags interesse som document humain" ["I was an honest person, and perhaps even the notes of a layman with no prejudices from a politically charged time, might some time in the future achieve a certain interest as a document humain"] (SE 92-93). In other words, Dinesen claims that

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<sup>272</sup> Bjerring, for instance, argues that Dinesen's "væmmelse og kritik mod nazismen er så total" ["disgust and critique of Nazism is so total"] in this article (168). Likewise, Langbaum—always concerned to whitewash Dinesen from any political "incorrectness"—emphasizes Dinesen's "criticism of Nazi totalitarianism" in his discussion of the article, arguing that it "shows that her own political ideas are in the tradition that has produced modern liberalism—that she is really in her political thinking recalling liberals to their true tradition and their true ideals" (199).

<sup>273</sup> Dinesen's trip to Berlin did not take place until March 1940. The trips to London and Paris never materialized.

<sup>274</sup> In a letter of August 18, 1947, to Rosendahl, she likewise maintains that "jeg forstaar mig, som De ved, ikke paa Politik" ["I do not understand politics, as you well know"] (KB I: 476).

she acted as an objective and impartial human being when she was reporting from Berlin during the early phases of the war to inform others about what was going on.

Dinesen's claims to her objectivity should caution the reader not to excuse her ambiguous comments as a product of fiction. Regardless of her skillful use of irony and masquerade as an author of fiction, herself writing under numerous pseudonyms and her protagonists acting in different disguises, it is as a reliable commentator of objective facts she here presents herself. Dinesen is accountable for all her statements in this article.

Published in post-war Denmark while wounds were still bleeding, Dinesen begins her article by yet another time praising heroic battles and great warriors. In Africa she had gotten to know a German General by the name von Lettow Vorbeck who she visits as soon as she gets to Germany. Comparing him to another of her heroes, Albert Schweitzer, she recounts how the English in Africa admiringly described the General as "en genial feltherre" ["an outstanding commanding General"], a "tapper soldat" ["brave soldier"], and "en så ridderlig fiende" ["such a knightly enemy"] (SE 95). "Han troede på offensiven" ["He believed in the offensive"], Dinesen admiringly asserts while nostalgically remembering a time past when an officer would know who his enemy was (SE 96).

According to General von Lettow, however, "den gamle kampform" ["the old form of battle"] has come back among the pilots fighting in the air (SE 97-98). While Dinesen does not seem to be of the opinion that Hitler's new Germany is as heroic as the General's old Germany, she too sees a connection between the old and the new Germany

in, for instance, the campaign for colonies in Africa. They are to Germany a symbol, she reflects, “oprejsningen, ridderslaget mellem nationerne, regnbuen over Det Tredie Rige” [“rehabilitation, the accolade between nations, the rainbow over the Third *Reich*”] (SE 100).

As in the letter to her sister where Dinesen underscores the power of the Idea, Dinesen thus asserts in her article the impact of the symbol. While she was herself, as we’ve seen, inclined to hold the imagined—or the dream—higher than reality, she rhetorically asks: “Kæmper mennesket bedst, og helst, for en realitet eller for en drøm?” [“Do men fight best, and preferably, for a reality or for a dream?”] (SE 100). The astounding power of a dream is reflected in the phenomenon of Hitler: “det er underligt at tænke på, at en enkelt mands væsen, ligesom en magnet, der bliver ført henover en samling metalstykker, kan omgruppere og forvandle et samfund” [“astonishing to think about how one single man’s character, like a magnet that is led over a group of metal pieces, can re-arrange and change a society”], Dinesen concludes (SE 104).<sup>275</sup>

Dinesen further comments on the Third *Reich*’s architecture in Berlin—“et mageløst storværk ... meget smukt udført” [“an incomparable achievement ... beautifully executed”]—as a reflection of Hitler’s new Germany that amazes her (SE

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<sup>275</sup> Similarly Hamsun says, according to the doctors who interviewed him after the war, that “Hitlers diktatur var noe merkelig, jeg fikk noe bra inntrykk av ham. Det er massesuggesjon som virker. De måtte ha et navn i Tyskland dengang, merkelig at han greide å få dette til å bli kalt ‘Min Fører’ av alle, rart at generaler kunne få seg til å si sånt” [“Hitler’s dictatorship was something strange, I got quite a good impression of him. It was mass suggestion that worked. They had to have a name in Germany at that time, funny how he was able to have everyone call him ‘My Führer,’ weird that generals could make

105). “Det er umuligt ikke bestandig hele dagen igennem at imponeres af denne nations viljekraft og umådelige arbejdsevne” [“It is impossible not to be impressed the whole day through by this nation’s will and the immeasurable capacity of work”], asserts Dinesen (SE 105). Yet, she adds, while Germany is a society with structure, it is neither picturesque nor melodic (SE 105). Mohammedan culture, on the other hand, she commends as both “grum og malerisk” [“cruel and picturesque”] (*Shadows on the Grass* 12). However, in contrast to the Mohammedan people, the Germans structure and thus confine their art, argues Dinesen, who finds the idea “spøgelsesagtigt” [“ghostly”] that one might organize life so systematically according to a cause (SE 105).

On the other hand, Dinesen rejects the idea that the Germans’ fondness for systems and systematization represents a lack of individuality. “Måske har gennemsnittyskeren et eget dybtliggende fond av individualitet, så at han kan underkaste sig alle love, uden at hans væsens gehalt lider derved” [“Perhaps the average German has a deep well of individuality, so that he can submit to all laws without letting his character’s stance suffer”] (SE 106). We’ve seen how Dinesen uses the image of the deep-sea fish to explain the Native Africans’ confidence in life. About the German housewives, she reflects that they resemble “uanfægtede dybhavsfisk ... der svømmer på deres egne veje, med mange tusind tons vandmasse på sig. – Hvis det er sandt, at de brister, når de bliver trukket op til havoverfladen og slipper af med presset, så sker dette jo heller ikke af indre

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themselves say that”] (Langfeldt 65). Though Hamsun disliked Hitler as a person, he was amazed by his role as the Führer.

tomhed” [“unruffled deep-sea fish ... who swim along their own paths under many thousand tons of water pressure. If it is true that they explode when they are brought to the surface and the pressure is released, that does not happen because they are empty”] (SE 107).<sup>276</sup>

Further, Dinesen’s reflections on the Germans’ strong devotion to the cause leads her, as in her letter discussed above, to compare Nazism with Islam, including Carlyle’s discussion. Of the two, Islam is the more elevated ideal, asserts Dinesen, because it is better to serve God than to serve a country or a race (SE 107). Yet, she continues, the two have a lot in common. An “uhyre selvfølelse” [“enormous self-esteem”] characterizes both and, she adds, “nogle ting i ‘Min kamp’ ligner kapitler i koranen” [“some things in *Mein Kampf* resemble things in the Koran”] (SE 108). Though Islam bears the imprint of a desert origin with its sandstorms and great mirages—and thus the flair of a greater art, according to Dinesen—the Third *Reich*, she concludes, has “en rent ekstatiske respektabilitet, honnet ambition på liv og død, i himlen og på jorden” [“a purely ecstatic respectability, honest ambition in life and death, in heaven and on earth”] (SE 108).

While thus sounding quite “politically incorrect” when commenting on Nazism as a gospel and movement, Dinesen saves herself, however, when discussing its art. In defense of a widening of the perspective of art as opposed to a confinement of art, she attacks the German use of propaganda, representing their campaign to exclude heretics in the name of their own vision. The German propaganda reflects their enormous will, but it

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<sup>276</sup> See Chapter IV for a further discussion on the fish as a significant metaphor in Dinesen’s work.

is a will to “forvandling af selve sjælen gennem loven” [“change of the soul itself through the law”], comments Dinesen (SE 114). It is, she concludes, a kind of art which is drawn to “nytte” [“utility”] as opposed to “Guds nåde” [“God’s grace”] (SE 114-15).

In conversation with the Germans (in fact, explains Dinesen, there was more freedom of speech than she had expected), the Germans judge Dinesen’s praise of art as a product of “God’s grace” a defense of l’Ancien Régime (SE 113, 115). Dinesen, however, upholds the grace of God against propaganda, arguing that the latter—directed by the standard of utility—represents a belief in the connection between the word and the thing and is thus an art directed towards an audience that lacks imagination (SE 116-17). Dinesen, on the other hand, defends the art that inspires the imagination. Moreover, while she sees God as the great artist, she does not believe in predestination, but relates, on the contrary, God’s grace and designs to her sense of destiny as an artistic-existential project that is faithful to the power and flux of life. Thus we have seen her heroes and heroines create and re-create themselves. The difference between Hitler and Dinesen’s hero Kasparson would then be that whereas Hitler kills in the name of creating his Third *Reich*, whose identity implies the exclusions of a plurality of beliefs, Kasparson kills to allow his own self to grow into yet another role; his greatest role so far which allows him compare himself to God.

Dinesen ends her article with a report from the theaters that she visited in Berlin. While quite positive towards some of what she saw, she criticizes other things for representing a narrow interpretation of art. In this way she dislikes Beethoven’s fifth

symphony which, according to her escort from the ministry of propaganda, embodies the German soul. In other words, reflects Dinesen, it represents the German nation's will as opposed to God's grace (SE 128).

In line with her portrayal of God as a playful artist, Dinesen refers to "The Magic Flute" by Mozart as a contrast to Beethoven's fifth symphony. Whereas the former had given her wings when she heard it earlier, the latter astounds her as a gospel of a triumphant goal when she hears it that night in Berlin (SE 128).

Den Femte Symphoni gav mig, iaftes, ikke vinger. Den kom, efter mit nu snart måned ophold i Det Tredie Rige, med et ekko af samtaler om viljen og Guds nåde. Den blev for mig mere overmenneskelig end guddomelig. Den salighed, som den forkynder, er ikke noget væld af glæde, den har høj pathos og er et mål, der er nået, den er i sit væsen triumfen, der i sig selv forudsætter lidelse og kamp.

[The Fifth Symphony did not give me wings tonight. It came to me, after nearly a month in the Third *Reich*, with an echo of conversations about the will and God's grace. It seemed to me more superhuman than divine. That bliss, which it proclaims, is not a wealth of joy. It has high pathos and a goal that is reached. It is in its essence the triumph, which by its nature depends on suffering and struggle.] (SE 128).

Finally, Beethoven's concert made her think of "hvorfør vel overmenneskets nærvær synes at knuse, hvor guddommens opløfter ["how the presence of the overman seems to

crush where the divine uplifts”] (SE 129). Whereas in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare (which she also refers to as a contrast to Beethoven), poetic order arises from a cheerful play which mixes several worlds, disregarding the norms of poetry, the art representing the German soul crushes and confines life as it structures it (SE 129).

In other words, Dinesen sees, on the one hand, a systematic art, driven by a desire for utility in the name of a cause, imposing a structure on the flux of life. This is how she sees German propaganda, architecture, and Beethoven's symphony. Dinesen's own art, on the other hand, is an art that is faithful to the original powers of nature while it seeks growth and vitality that draw on these powers.

Discussing art, Dinesen sounds quite “politically correct,” criticizing Nazi Germany in particular for its will to create art for a certain goal. While commenting on Nazism as a political, social, or religious movement, on the other hand, she loses her “political correctness.” Recognizing this as a fact, Dinesen writes in her foreword to “Letters from a Land at War” that some readers might find that she has expressed herself in an “urimelig snørklet” [“unreasonably maladroit”] (SE 94). However, she begs the reader to keep in mind that Denmark was at that time still neutral and “det var hensyn at tage som siden faldt bort” [“there were concerns to keep in mind that later went away”] (SE 94). The fact that she declines to go any further into how these concerns may have affected her writing or to take the opportunity to express opinions they might have silenced, is crucial to recognize. First of all, the “concerns” she would have had to consider in 1940 neither explain, and nor do they excuse, the awe she at times expresses

in this article for the new German nation, Hitler's gospel and its impact on the Germans. Secondly, whereas other Danes—such as, for instance, Branner, was, as we've seen, at that time concerned to formulate a new humanism for post-war Denmark—Dinesen refrains from addressing such current concerns. There was no longer any censorship or constraints on free speech when Dinesen published her article in 1948. So why did she not—as an author skilled in the art of revising her texts, constantly rewriting, even in her own creative translations of her tales from English to Danish—take the opportunity to edit her article to better address current concerns?<sup>277</sup>

Rather than silencing the potential critique of her article as “unreasonably maladroit,” Dinesen insists, in post-war Denmark, on publishing an article that commends the Germans for their friendliness and hospitality (a point she repeats in her foreword). Further, she criticizes the Danish resistance movement while she refuses to compose an inscription for a planned (against her will) monument in their honor.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> When Dinesen began to write and publish stories in the thirties, she turned for the original material, as Thurman shows, to stories she had been outlining, sketching, and abandoning periodically for a decade. In one of her black notebooks from the twenties Dinesen listed the titles for a proposed volume of *Nine Tales* which were “The Dreamer,” “Nocturne,” “Carnival,” “The Monkey,” “Glass,” “The Roads Around Pisa,” “The Caryatids,” “Supper at Elsinore” and “The Poet.” Five of these were developed for her first book, two were saved for a later volume. “It is possible to see,” explains Thurman, “from the passages of dialogue and description, how she refined her style, building up the texture of the tales draft by draft, layer by layer, recopying a page to change perhaps one word ... The pride of craftsmanship behind the tales connects them and their author to the court poets and artists of another era, who were themselves spiritually still artisans—those ‘perfect artisans’ whom Benjamin calls ‘the incarnation of the devout’” (291-92).

<sup>278</sup> It was Rosendahl who had invited Dinesen to compose such an inscription. In one of her letters to him, she claims that all the talk about an inscription for the monument (a bell tower) have haunted her in her dreams until she came up with this little poem: “Jeg en Genlyd her / fra den Gang / da i eders Færd / Skræp klang” [“I hear echoes here / from that time / when in your deeds / cackle chimed”] (KB I: 486).

Finally, she aligns herself with the Riding Master in Branner's post-war novel who, as we've seen, was by others interpreted as the embodiment of the autocratic mind, preparing, as Frederiksen writes, the ground for Hitler.<sup>279</sup> Referring again—more than ten years later—to her visit to Berlin in *Shadows on the Grass*, Dinesen asserts that she had felt a relief when she watched the young soldiers marching west to the frontier while she was there, for in a fight the adversaries become one, and the two duelists make up a Unity (9).

Dinesen, finally, concludes her article with an ode to the stars that lit up the sky over Berlin while she was there, confessing that it would be they above all that she would remember from her visit. Thinking about the sky, that “her var da guderne kommet sammen for at rådslå om menneskenes skæbne” [“so here the gods had come together to deliberate the destiny of human kind”], she implicitly sees the Germans as the puppets in a marionette play (SE 130). We have seen that Dinesen describes life itself as such a play, bidding the individual to don a mask and play his or her role while conscious that life is a play. In her comment on the Berlin sky, on the other hand, the Germans do not appear to

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Inverting praise for the fallen men to cackle, Dinesen makes clear her attitude to the plans for a monument.

<sup>279</sup> Rossel further comments on how Branner's novel portrays the defeat of both Nazism and communism in the name of “goodness and democracy” (393). Herman, who has taken over the Riding Master's house and school, is painted in broad, Nazified strokes with his hair black and shiny as a helmet, his incessant goose-stepping back and forth across the carpet, his little whip, and his exclamatory barking about power and fear. In her review of the novel, Dinesen depicts him as a pathetic version of the Riding Master. Yet, she adds, he might have been able to afford some sexual release to Susanne (who, according to Dinesen, lives a sexless life with the doctor Clemens after the Riding Master's death) had he succeeded in his attempt to rape her (SE 141). Written in 1949, her essay on Branner's novel contains not a single mention of World War II nor of the novel's thinly veiled allusions to the Nazis.

be endowed with such an assertive capacity. The unfortunate implication of her comment is that the individual's private responsibility is lessened in the context of larger, national and historical, movements, the background for the individual's active destiny, at the cost of the latter.

Hamsun and Dinesen are either evasive or ambiguous in their political statements, as they are in their philosophical, or fictional, commentaries on cultural alternatives. In the case of Hamsun, the fervor of his critique of modernity and democratic civilization prepares him to admire Nazism in a most undefined fashion, aside from its "greatness." In line with his critique of truth and the radical characteristic of the artistic-existential project of his protagonists, Hamsun thus avoids closed definitions of the future, but in this case with the most dangerous consequences. As we've seen in the above, even Dinesen cannot but admire the powerful impact of Hitler's gospel though she criticizes its negative consequences in terms of a narrowing of art (and thus the individual's artistic-existential project) because its will is set on a narrow goal, reflected in its propaganda. In conclusion, while underestimating the significance of political issues as fundamentally social and communal, we find Hamsun praising Hitler and his political movement without paying attention to how it may affect the community, and Dinesen commending Hitler as a genius even while she recognizes the violence his gospel generates.

## CONCLUSION

Hamsun's support of Nazism and Dinesen's likening of Hitler to a genius are unfortunate. In the above I have argued that Hamsun and Dinesen are unwilling to formulate a political program for the future or a set list of ethical norms because they reject such rules and formulas, seeing how they tend to confine and repress life. Further, I have argued that their political pitfalls are the unfortunate byproducts of their lack of interest in the social and political implications of the great projects of great individuals.

Though Nietzsche has become the (in-)famous philosopher of the *Übermensch* and the suspected affiliate with Nazism, he actually never supported any political party or movement. As Kaufmann notes, Nietzsche "was basically '*anti-political*' (EH 13) and, moreover, loathed the very idea of belonging to any 'party' whatever" (361). In other words, affirming a Nietzschean will to power and an artistic-existential project do *not* need to imply any political pitfalls.

We cannot blame Nietzsche as the root of Hamsun's and Dinesen's philosophical and, eventually, political and ethical blunders. Rejecting the ethics of Christian-European civilization, Nietzsche, as Nehamas notes, "did not propose to replace what has passed for morality so far with a positive code of conduct of his own" (223). Thus, admits Nehamas, Nietzsche's own "moral view" may appear "banal, vague, inconsistent" (224). However, the point is, continues Nehamas, that "there are no principles that we

can follow in order to become, as Nietzsche wants us to become, unique” (225). Referring to Nietzsche’s call for us to become the poets of our lives, Nehamas concludes that “the fault has been ours. We have been looking for Nietzsche’s positive views in the wrong place, or, more correctly, in the wrong dimension” (230). Bidding us to affirm our own redemption and to style our own morality, Nietzsche makes it his point to lay the responsibility for our lives in our own hands. Only if we look for a “positive code of conduct” in his texts, do they “fail.”

Likewise, Bjerring notes how Dinesen’s texts present us with a “radikalt anderledes og langt mere omfattende ansvarlighed end moderne mennesker normalt præsenteres for” [“radically different and far more comprehensive sense of responsibility than what modern people are accustomed to encounter”] (51). The mystical or magic sense of entirety that her tales reveal come with no ethical rules, but with an imperative to commit to our lives and affirm our own destinies. As we’ve seen, this is also true for Hamsun’s books whose protagonists’ ecstatic encounters with the oneness of nature by no means produce a set of guidelines on how to live. On the contrary, the protagonists of, for instance, *Hunger*, *Mysteries*, and *Pan* struggle to find a way to integrate their ecstatic experience into their dim social lives. At least two of them commit suicide in the end, incapable of making their experiences compatible with their lives in general.

In other words, the challenge is not simply to reach beyond the decadence of modernity and attain the insight and the incentive to act from the encounter with the abyss (oneness with eternity, destiny, and nature), but to make that experience, that

insight, operate in our lives. “To be beyond good and evil is to combine all of one’s features and qualities, whatever their traditional moral value, into a controlled and coherent whole,” explains Nehamas (227). Nietzsche, Dinesen, and Hamsun reject traditional morality, but they are not immoral per se. Vindicating an artistic-existential imperative, their morality is essentially a private morality: everyone must affirm, style, and create their own sense of ethics on their own.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that it is exactly what we might find traumatizing or repulsive in Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s works that we need to consider in order to do justice to their fiction and philosophy. This means that we consider Hamsun and Dinesen as step-children to society; questioning and rebelling, transgressing boundaries and manifesting their own self-increase and insight beyond *status quo*. Thus their artistic-existential projects shine through. While I am by no means trying to downplay the problematic and unfortunate aspects of Hamsun’s and Dinesen’s projects, such as their politics, I maintain that as far as we recognize these aspects there is nothing to stop us from appropriating their projects, amending, revising, and supplementing them as we find fit. Looking at their projects with hindsight we can judge how successful their rebellion appears from our point of view, and it is up to us to decide what we may want to draw on today for our lives.

Thus, while considering the, at times, troublesome politics of Hamsun and Dinesen, it is important that we also consider their respect for nature as a key element of their projects, seeing how often the role of nature is ignored in today’s politics and

philosophy. In the works of Hamsun and Dinesen, on the other hand, a profound love for nature serves not only to guide their revaluations of truths and values—it empowers their projects. In other words, approaching these authors' work critically gives us the chance to reflect on what the gains of being a “step-child” may be for us today and how we can, and for which constructive purposes, become “step-children” ourselves. Finally, being a “step-child” does not rule out siblings. Indeed, we have seen how the step-children that have been discussed in the preceding, express an earnest desire for brothers and sisters and fellow companions and, finally, someone to pass their golden ball on to.

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