

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESIRE AND DESTINY IN SELECTED STORIES
FROM ISAK DINESEN'S *WINTER'S TALES*

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ABSTRACT

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Isak Dinesen's writing is characterized by the theme of destiny. Past analyses of Dinesen's treatment of destiny oppose the concept to desire, arguing that Dinesen advocates "acceptance" of God's plan at the expense of personal motivations. This construction of destiny as external to the individual has negative implications for agency. Critics have recognized the importance of agency, but efforts to present "acceptance" of destiny as an active rather than passive practice have been relatively unconvincing. This thesis argues that the characters' agency is never in question because the acceptance framework is incomplete. An analysis of four stories from *Winter's Tales* shows that desire is not incompatible with destiny. By tracing the motivations of Dinesen's characters, this thesis actually shows that desire constitutes the characters' destinies. Whereas past critics see desire in Dinesen as something to overcome, this thesis shows that desire is a necessary way of knowing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. TRACING MOTIVATIONS IN “THE SAILOR-BOY’S TALE”.....	16
III. WAYS OF KNOWING DESTINY IN “THE INVINCIBLE SLAVE- OWNERS” AND “PETER AND ROSA”.....	42
III. UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE IN “THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CARNATION”.....	71
IV. CONCLUSION.....	92
WORKS CONSULTED.....	97

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Isak Dinesen is the pen name of Karen Blixen (1885-1962), a Danish writer who is known primarily as a storyteller. Although she is best known as the author of the autobiographical *Out of Africa*, the majority of her body of writing comes from several collections of short stories. All of her works center on the theme of destiny.

Consequently, this theme has been discussed numerous times in scholarship; yet there is a surprising amount of uniformity in how it has been applied to Dinesen. Specifically, destiny is positioned as the opposite of individuality and personal desires. While there is certainly abundant evidence for the dominant view of Dinesen's philosophy of destiny, it draws on a rather limited selection of her work. The following analysis of less well-known stories shows that an alternative interpretation is possible. It shows that desire is not antithetical to destiny but rather a necessary component; for it is not an external force but rather internal desire that constitutes one's destiny.

Dinesen's approach to destiny is philosophical in nature. While her presentations of destiny involve religious elements, such as the presence of God and numerous biblical references, they tend to illustrate her views on life and the purpose of living rather than religious concepts like morality, for example. For this reason, Dinesen's relationship to God has been discussed mostly in connection to her literary works and her essays instead of, for instance, her religious activities. Biographer Linda Donelsen provides a rare

reference to Dinesen's actual religious background, noting that she was raised as a Unitarian and that "the religious group fostered an independent approach to dogma where Jesus Christ was regarded not as divine but as one of history's great religious teachers" (154). Donelsen states, "She surely did believe in a Superior Force, but her concept of God was synonymous with Fate—less to be venerated than respected" (154). This view is supported by an observation in a literary analysis by Donald Hannah, who says, "her attitude to God is not one to God as a supernatural being but becomes, ultimately, an attitude to human existence and a belief in the value of life itself as offering us the possibility to manifest our own destiny" (176). Thus, although a concept traditionally tied to religion, destiny in Dinesen is related to philosophy and can be read primarily through that lens.

Interpretations of Dinesen's later stories depend heavily on one of her earliest works, a play that she wrote as a teenager entitled *The Revenge of Truth*. The play features marionettes whose status as such is apparently an advantage that Dinesen's future human characters do not share. Citing Dinesen critic Aage Henriksen, Donald Hannah notes that puppets "have no soul or consciousness" and writes,

As a result they enjoy the blessing of automatism and unconsciousness, respond completely to the demands of the puppet-master, and have no possibility whatsoever of playing any role independently of him. Consequently, they deliver, quite literally, their role and destiny safely into his hands. The idea . . . is that each person has a particular destiny to fulfil, but that man, in contrast to the puppet, is

endowed with self-consciousness, and is therefore able to thwart this destiny . . .

Consequently man has the doubtful, even dangerous privilege of being able to live according to his own will and ideas, rather than simply carrying out God's purpose like the puppet obeying the puppet-master. ("*Isak Dinesen*" 117)

The message is that humans should be skeptical of their desires, which might lead them away from the destinies that have apparently been made independently of their own ideas of themselves and their futures. The idea that self-motivated actions are risky because one could potentially miss out on his or her destiny, which is the ultimate form of fulfillment, is one of the most pervasive ideas for critics with this view of Dinesen's attitude towards destiny.

Another aspect of the argument that individuality is a threat to destiny is the evidence that Dinesen advocates assuming a "role" rather than being directed by the self. Characters should be honored that they each have a part to play in the overall design of the story and should therefore embrace the role that is their destiny. Thomas Whissen believes that "characters in Isak Dinesen's tales who attempt to exert their own will on the action, to step outside the story and alter its direction, become victims of their own machinations. What they suffer, above all, is a loss of identity, and this loss comes about by a process which begins when they assume a self-appointed role" (81). Like other critics, he cites a particular passage from *Out of Africa*, in which Dinesen says, "Pride is faith in the idea that God had, when he made us. A proud man is conscious of the idea, and aspires to realize it. He does not strive towards a happiness, or comfort, which may

be irrelevant to God's idea of him. His success is the idea of God, successfully carried through, and he is in love with his destiny" (Dinesen qtd. in Whissen 35). Supported by Dinesen's own direct words, Whissen advocates discerning and accepting a destined role that originated outside of the self.

The idea that destiny is related to a role is connected to Dinesen's views on genre, a major line of evidence for Dinesen's philosophy. Above all, she is a storyteller attached to the oral tradition; and not only the form but also the content of her stories express her preference for the medium, which she opposes on fundamental levels to that of the novel. To illustrate this view, scholars have frequently (if not excessively) cited a particular Dinesen story, "The Cardinal's First Tale" from the collection *Last Tales*, in which the titular character laments that "a new art of narration . . . for the sake of the individual characters . . . will be ready to sacrifice the story itself" (qtd. in Hannah, *Isak Dinesen* 74). The Cardinal rejects the "literature of individuals" (like the novel), which is "a human product," stating, "The divine art is the story" (qtd. in Green 518). As opposed to those of the novel, features of the story supposedly discourage consideration of the characters as individuals. These features include "subordination of character" to plot (Whissen 65) and a "formal unity and purity" (Weed 30), which demands that attention be "focused upon the whole" instead of "directed to the individual parts—such as the characters" (Hannah, "*Isak Dinesen*" 74). Describing the "*märchen* techniques" in Dinesen's work, folklorist Merry Weed observes, "Ultimately the *märchen* figure is pure emblem; he does not exist as a fully differentiated, rounded individual, but as an

embodiment of a role” (34). Thus, it appears that in both theory and practice, Dinesen expresses her belief that individuality, and therefore personal desire, must be sacrificed for the sake of the destinies that comprise the whole.

Connected to the medium of storytelling is Dinesen’s attitude towards the genres of tragedy and comedy. Just as modern readers are more attached to the form of the novel, these modern, bourgeois readers also have a particular view of destiny that translates into their feelings towards genre. Howard Green describes three types of relationship towards destiny:

There is the way of the bourgeois, who fears the unpredictable, who aims to eliminate it and with his systems and methods and sciences to make life secure, orderly and comfortable . . . Then there is the noble way, which embraces this sense of destiny, understands that life must accordingly be tragic and accepts it uncomplainingly as such . . . And finally there is the divine view, which only a few mortals—the true elite can reach and sustain: it goes beyond tragedy and sees the universe as comic, not ‘funny’ indeed, but comic in an ironic sense which subsumes tragedy and makes it ultimately understandable. (522-23)

The destinies attached to roles are tragic, but it is better to accept than ignore them since tragedy gives meaning to life. Because one’s desires would surely lead them away from tragedy, it is logical that desires must be set aside in order for one to accept his or her destiny.

An obvious consequence of what Dinesen supposedly advocates is the loss of agency; but, ironically, critics acknowledge the role of human agency in the stories. Dinesen's characters are human, and the actions and thoughts that supposedly operate against destiny serve a distinct purpose in her writing and therefore need to be taken into account. This particular view of destiny does not provide room for validation of human agency, however; thus, attempts to address the meaning of whatever does not translate into destiny result in somewhat contradictory arguments that can never quite succeed in their attempts to reconcile two points (internal desire and external destiny) that they have positioned as incompatible from the outset.

Critics have rightly been wary of denying that the characters have agency and equating acceptance of destiny with passivity. Thus, they attempt to reframe what is essentially submission to God's will as an active practice by focusing on the element of choice involved. Hannah remarks, "The choice for her figures is not whether they should be in a marionette comedy; they are already in it, by being figures in the stories. The choice lies in whether they should *act* in it or not" ("In Memoriam" 601). He further explains, "This conception of fulfilling one's destiny by playing an allotted role, however, is not one of passive resignation. Although there is little choice of the type of part, nevertheless, the true choice . . . is always one between active acceptance and passive refusal" ("In Memoriam" 602). The problem with this particular construction is that at the same time that it locates agency in choice, it also discounts one of the options as a form of passivity, thereby invalidating the choice as such and eliminating the

possibility for agency. In other words, if the choice itself is the locus of agency, then the options that constitute the choice as such cannot also affect whether a person is active or passive. Furthermore, after it has been established that accepting an externally imposed destiny is the only means of fulfillment, it is challenging to see how acceptance can be active rather than essentially coerced. In fact, as the following analysis shows, many of her characters are already believers of the idea that destiny is fulfillment, in which case it is even more difficult to credit them with agency under the acceptance framework.

Eric Johannesson appears to offer an alternative that resolves certain problems faced by Hannah in his description of an agent choosing whether to accept a given role. For Johannesson, it seems the decision relates to not only choosing to live out a particular role but also choosing which role to play from among a variety of options. He writes about the use of “mask play” in Dinesen, attributing it to “a genuine sense for the multiple possibilities of the self” (20). He continues, “To adopt a mask, play a great role, is the aristocratic way of life . . . leading to an affirmation of destiny. The mask is the destiny which the proud man chooses for himself” (22). If he is suggesting that a person can choose a destiny so long as he or she does in fact choose one, then Johannesson does restore significant agency to Dinesen’s characters. Nevertheless, he also refers to destiny as something to “embrace” (22) and observes that her characters are often “involved in stories in which they learn the art of acceptance” (23). As previously mentioned, the concepts of choice and acceptance are not as compatible as they are assumed to be.

Furthermore, Johannesson does not address the reason a character would choose a particular destiny over others (presumably his or her desires), and the idea of a mask also perpetuates the binary between desire and destiny insofar as masks are meant to allow a person to become what he or she is not. To be guided towards destiny by desire, as this thesis argues is a message of Dinesen's stories, is to be one's genuine self; but Johannesson describes masks as "opposed to the bourgeois virtues: being true to one's own self, sincerity, and security" (21). Perhaps he is right that Dinesen does not advocate attempts to be "true," but this thesis shows that being guided by the self is not discouraged in her stories. The former is perhaps ill-advised because it promotes stagnancy, for if a person is focused on determining what he or she already is, then he or she will not have room to grow. As Johannesson says, "the adoption of a mask is contrasted to the contemplation of the self in a mirror," and "the contemplation of the self is seen as a source of passivity and melancholy" (21). Being guided by one's own desires does not, however, carry this same risk; for desires do not typically need to be discerned, which would require passive reflection, and they are also subject to change.

A more convincing argument is one in which the critic appears to concede that acceptance of destiny itself is passive but suggests that there is still a place for agency elsewhere, in the specific details of God's plan. Unfortunately, this argument comes from Donald Hannah, who already argues that acceptance is not passive, and the two arguments together appear inconsistent and therefore less convincing. According to Hannah, Dinesen "believes that every person has the possibility of improvising the details

of his individual life, of playing his part, and thus of fulfilling his destiny within the general framework provided by God” (“*Isak Dinesen*” 121). Additionally, this case for agency is challenged by the question of whether controlling the details is really sufficient to establish activity rather than passivity.

These arguments struggle to demonstrate compellingly that agency can be preserved under what is here referred to as the acceptance framework, but they do show that agency is meant to be present in Dinesen. It would have been simple enough for critics to dismiss agency altogether, in which case their arguments would perhaps be stronger. It is because of the support in the literature for locating agency in Dinesen’s writings that this thesis attempts to locate it in a different way.

There is already some evidence in the scholarship for what this thesis argues, namely that desire is a necessary component of fulfilling one’s destiny. First of all, there are a number of critics who have challenged the classification of Dinesen as a storyteller, particularly one embedded in the oral tradition. Undoubtedly, she is primarily the creator of stories, but Merry Weed cites manuscripts that “show meticulous written reworking of her material” as evidence that “[i]n method of composition, Dinesen is literary” (29). Weed expresses her agreement with Robert Langbaum, who argues that the “complexity of pattern . . . would make the stories impossible to take in by ear” (Langbaum 25). Furthermore, in her analysis of the inspiration for and composition of “Sorrow-Acre,” one of Dinesen’s most famous stories, Lynn Wilkinson describes the “terseness, plasticity, and emphasis on action worthy of an oral narrative” that is unconventionally

“embedded in a frame narrative reminiscent of the structures of the writerly European novella tradition” (36). If Dinesen is not totally enmeshed in the storytelling tradition, which has been used as evidence of her philosophy of destiny, then perhaps those elements of the novel that she criticizes (like character) are not so irrelevant to her writing after all.

Recent feminist criticism about Dinesen also reflects a related, heretofore implicit claim of this thesis, which is that certain critical views of Dinesen are problematic insofar as they are meant to apply to all of her writing. Such totalizing claims inevitably erase differences, discouraging alternative interpretations. Feminist scholar Susan Hardy Aiken writes of Dinesen’s writing that “what seems most striking is not its simplicity and orderliness but its vertiginous plurality, its refusal or subversion of univocal categories, and its concomitant resistance to stable categorization” (*Isak Dinesen* xxi). Her claim can be applied to both Dinesen’s writing and the criticism about it. In accordance with the oral tradition, Dinesen’s work has been characterized as concerned with unity. Marcia Landy states, “Unswervingly, she pursues meaning, totality, and a vision of life which identifies basic opposing tendencies and which seeks to mediate these oppositions . . . Her treatment of character in the tales . . . are principally concerned with collective truths and with community. She explores the relationship of individuals to each other. She rejects partial truths” (393). For Aiken, on the other hand, it seems that partial truths would be the only type of truth to be found in Dinesen, if any is to be found at all given the “quality of undecidability” (Aiken 50) that permeates her work.

If truths are partial at best in Dinesen's writing, then the criticism that refers to her apparently singular, all-encompassing philosophy of destiny cannot be anything but incomplete. Notably, the project of this thesis is not to offer an alternative philosophy of destiny to replace the one traditionally ascribed to Dinesen. Instead, this thesis is meant to promote readings of Dinesen's work that let the individual stories speak for themselves before they are interpreted in accordance with the presumed, singular philosophy of destiny. Part of this methodology includes readings of stories that are less frequently cited as evidence of the author's view of destiny as something to accept rather than create in accordance with desire. In this case, the stories come from the lesser-known collection *Winter's Tales*, which Derek Roper describes as "Dinesen's favourite among her works" (242). In accordance with Roper's textual criticism, this thesis refers to the British version of the collection, which he considers more authoritative than the American version. Roper reports that the British version incorporates more of Dinesen's revisions and that the stories in the American version are not presented in the intended order.

Aside from the author's fondness, the following analysis of this collection is justified by critics' observations about the strong impression of desire in each of its stories, the notability of which is a testament to the uniqueness of this particular work relative to the rest of Dinesen's writing. In his analysis of the color blue in *Winter's Tales*, Mark Mussari comments on "blue's power to express longing, the emotional state that pervades the collection" (43). Additionally, Robert Langbaum's chapter on the book is titled "Currents of Desire: *Winter's Tales*." For reasons that are unclear, however,

awareness of the conspicuous desires in the tales from this collection has not translated into a special analysis of *Winter's Tales* that could reveal the shortcomings of generalizing philosophies based primarily on passages from other collections.

The main exception is the work of Bo Hakon Jørgensen, which provides the strongest support for both the methodology and the claims of this thesis. More than any scholar mentioned here, Jørgensen acknowledges the role of desire in Dinesen's writing. Commenting on why Dinesen shifted from the marionette play to stories, he writes,

The story takes shape through individuality being propelled through the demand for unity. It is the protest against unity, the interruption of the story, that is gradually forced into place by the story's order, by the storyteller's will . . . But the story itself describes that protest to which it exposes itself at the moment when one begins to apply ideology to it, begins to tell human beings how they are to live according to their destiny. (169)

He attributes her shift to storytelling to "when she realized that it was only by telling the ordered story that it was possible to tell the story of the *break*, of the *individuality*" (169). Jørgensen continues, "Stories were preferable to marionette plays in their capacity to contain, precisely through their apparent order, all the disorderly and rebellious yearnings that arose . . ." (181). The observation that desire is the true focus of Dinesen's writing is one that is reflected throughout this thesis as well.

Jørgensen's views do not directly cohere with the views expressed in this thesis, however. His argument that Dinesen wants to express desire above all is accepted, as is his rejection of an argument from Aage Henriksen, which Jørgensen says "presupposes that a 'definition' is 'implanted' in every human being as a destiny, and that the aim should be to learn to understand this definition in the course of one's story." Jørgensen explains, "The given situation renders this impossible for two reasons: firstly, the definition can only be expressed through the story, and as such is not clear until it ends; secondly, because the definition is not defined in advance as a strict pattern but in the variable forms of desire whose final shape is dependent on the story in which it is involved" (158). The acceptance framework that this thesis opposes is incompatible with Jørgensen's construction of destiny, which does not view destiny as something that a person can possibly discover and therefore accept. The difference between what Jørgensen suggests and what this thesis proposes, however, is that the relationship he describes is one of tension. The "order" of the story, or destiny, reveals the desire that it attempts to (but cannot) suppress. This thesis, on the other hand, shows that the relationship between desire and destiny is actually one of compatibility. Desire constitutes destiny not through tension but its own creative force. Whereas desire for Jørgensen is "excess" (222), here it is considered guidance.

Another way that this thesis both reflects and differs from Jørgensen's work is that Jørgensen also singles out *Winter's Tales* as a unique text but surprisingly does not conduct an in-depth analysis of the tales. He observes that unlike its predecessors, this

collection entails “the ideal project: compassion for humanity as the aim of the tales” (229). Locating compassion in Dinesen is also part of the purpose of this thesis, for the dominant image of a somewhat unsympathetic author simply does not cohere with the impression given by the stories in *Winter’s Tales*. For example, Merry Weed writes, “For Dinesen, life is a tale told by a hard and cruel storyteller” (32). A major motivation for this writing was the difficulty of reconciling this type of claim with the many instances in the stories in which life is not cruel, for the characters’ desires beautifully align with their destinies. The question of Dinesen’s compassion is also addressed by Howard Green. He views destiny as inherently tied to tragedy (although one might embrace the tragedy and therefore make it comic), but he remarks about Dinesen,

We know she is in earnest about the problem of human destiny, but we do not know how much she is in earnest about the terms she uses to work the problem out . . . For in an age of total war and concentration camps, a philosophy whose ultimate wisdom was to look on human tragedy as a divine joke would not only be anachronistic but repulsive, and she was far too perspicacious to be unaware of that. (529)

Even for scholars who advocate the acceptance framework, presenting Dinesen as a compassionate person is important, presumably because there is a quality to her writing that suggests she does view humanity with sympathy. Fortunately, this thesis does not include the same difficulty as Green, for example, because it does not present destiny in Dinesen as a “problem.”

To illustrate the arguments outlined above, this thesis analyzes four representative stories from *Winter's Tales*. The second chapter is an analysis of "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" that pays particular attention to how questions about motivations (or, by extension, desires) are actually invited through the structure of the story. It considers the series of exchanges of favors and gifts that drive the action forward and accounts for the role of social convention in the relationship between desire and destiny. The third chapter compares "The Invincible Slave-Owners" to "Peter and Rosa" in order to address the epistemological question of how a person can know his or her destiny, a question that plagues previous views of Dinesen. These stories are particularly useful for this analysis since they both center on the destinies of couples with intertwined lives, a factor which adds an additional layer to the epistemic challenge. The fourth chapter analyzes "The Young Man with the Carnation," one of the well-known stories from the collection. This chapter considers what qualifies as an indication of desire and suggests that despite claims to the contrary, the unconscious is relevant to Dinesen's writing. Altogether, these chapters show that *Winter's Tales* interrupts the dominant lines of criticism. As a separate book from the ones most frequently cited, it does not require dismissal of past ideas; rather, it encourages readings that allow for change in Dinesen's thinking over the course of her career. This thesis calls for a reevaluation of not only the content of the author's philosophy, but the very notion of a consistent, generalizing philosophy.

CHAPTER II

TRACING MOTIVATIONS IN “THE SAILOR-BOY’S TALE”

Isak Dinesen’s “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale” is an ideal text to begin a project questioning the image of an external force of destiny overpowering internal desires as this story clearly demonstrates the difficulty of locating the sources of action. In this story, it is not a simple task to say why the characters, particularly Simon the sailor-boy, act the way they do. Although there are certain apparent surface motivations, it is a challenge to determine whether something deeper lies behind them. In particular, this story is characterized by a series of exchanges of favors and gifts that appear to guide the action objectively. However, a closer analysis is necessary to determine whether concepts like social convention and debt, which seem to deserve the credit for propelling the action through further favors and gifts, are in fact manifestations of another, more personal force.

It is logical to approach the question of what, if anything, supports the notion of debt by analyzing the initial act that sets off the chain of exchanges. The story begins with Simon, the sailor-boy on a ship, contemplating the situation of a peregrine falcon that has gotten stuck in tackle-yarn at the top of the mast. The numerous factors presented as part of his decision to help the bird set the tone for the story, calling attention to the complexity of motivations behind actions and thereby casting doubt on the importance of

techniques such as “[m]asks, role-playing, and disguises” (Landy 396) that the author supposedly uses to “deflect the reader from motive onto action” and that are how “she diverts her reader from becoming involved in the individuating aspects of personality” (Landy 396). It is true that limited attention is given to Simon’s personality, but the privileged position of this scene at the very beginning of the story and the British version of *Winter’s Tales*, which presents the stories in the order Dinesen intended (Roper 245, Langbaum 156), implies that motives are, in fact, meaningful to Dinesen’s work.

It is also significant that these motivations conflict, as the tension serves to heighten the reader’s awareness of the character’s interior. As the boy looks up, the reader is told, “Through his own experience of life, he had come to the conviction that in this world everyone must look after himself, and expect no help from others” (7). Yet Simon remembers seeing a peregrine falcon when he was home and, upon considering that it might be the same bird, experiences “a fellow feeling . . . a sense of common tragedy” (7) before deciding to climb up and rescue her. It might appear that Dinesen is opposing experiences and socialization, which could be seen as external influences, to internal personal desires that could indicate some sort of essence. Indeed, these factors appear to be mutually exclusive as they pull the boy in different directions. In this case, it would seem that Dinesen maintains the distinction between inside and outside. However, the internal quality of his longing for home, which appears to prevail over past experiences that would discourage the boy’s action, is complicated by the placement of this desire in the chain of events that ultimately leads to the boy’s destiny, which is

traditionally perceived as an external force. Similarly, it appears that a longing for home competes with the condition of being a sailor-boy on a ship, which through the image of the “entangled” bird who “struggled to get free” (7) is associated with the external force of oppression. Once again, though, the causal relationship between this interaction and the subsequent events of the story troubles the binary.

One might even interpret his decision to save the falcon as a direct affirmation of his identity as a sailor-boy. In this sense, the sailor-boy might be seen as doing that which Dinesen’s critics have stated is her favored course of action: “fulfilling one’s destiny by playing an allotted role” (Hannah, “In Memoriam” 602). Some of Dinesen’s phrasing certainly does privilege the role over the character. She introduces a “small sailor-boy, named Simon” (7) as opposed to, for example, “Simon, a small sailor-boy,” thus emphasizing the role over the person. The title of the story (“The Sailor-Boy’s Tale”) also has this effect. This phrasing could influence interpretations of what the sailor-boy/Simon thinks when he sees the bird: “That bird is like me. Then she was there, and now she is here” (7). By identifying with her based on their shared status of being “here,” he might be seen as embracing his role as sailor through the recognition of the physical and temporal distance between himself and his past life. On the other hand, it could also be the case that the identification occurs based on of both having been “there.” Thus, he might be actually resisting his current state by dwelling on where and what he was—or perhaps what he was not—before this moment. Furthermore, by aligning himself with the falcon, he appears to be distancing himself from his fellow sailors who would “make fun

of him” for saving her (7). Significantly, however, the absence of these sailors factors into his decision. This absence might be interpreted as a protection against distancing himself from the others and, by extension, the “role,” or destiny, of a sailor.

It should be evident that tracing the motivations of a Dinesen character is a difficult task. What needs to be emphasized is that this web is so complex that it cannot be accidental; in other words, Dinesen does appear to care about characters’ interiors, and she does not simply oppose them to external destinies, as destiny is not figured as something entirely outside of one’s self. The situation is complicated even further, however, by Simon’s feelings in the act of saving the bird: “He was scared as he looked down, but at the same time he felt that he had been ordered up by nobody, but that this was his own venture, and this gave him a proud, steadying sensation, as if they sea and the sky, the ship, the bird and himself were all one” (7). If Simon is “ordered up by nobody,” what does this statement mean for desire and destiny, those two concepts that have been traditionally positioned as opposites in the criticism of Isak Dinesen? After all, “nobody” could be interpreted as meaning nobody but Simon, in which case it appears that his desires take precedence, or it could mean nobody including even Simon himself. The latter interpretation appears to be supported by the image of oneness, in which case there is no self whatsoever to be excluded from the term “nobody.” In this case, there is an independent force apparently interfering with Simon’s agency while it guides him towards his destiny, as the bird will return to save his life and help to secure his role/destiny as a sailor. It is necessary to note, however, that in either case there is an

original desire that brings Simon into this situation of agent-less unity. In other words, the agency of desire precedes destiny. Thus, the question becomes: did the boy's desire operate as a function of his larger destiny, or did his destiny come about despite the desire that initiated the action that in turn initiated the entire story?

To answer this question, it is necessary to examine this initial event in a new context—as the first of a series of exchanges of gifts and favors that will determine the course of events for the rest of the story. Two years after this event, Simon lands at a market town, where the “lightness” of the evening appears to him as “a sign of an unwonted goodwill in the Universe, a favour” (8). The good deed of releasing the falcon from the tackle-yarn is apparently matched by his pleasant environment (although one has to wonder the extent to which individual perception is at play, in which case there is not a balance between Simon's giving and receiving—yet). Simon wanders the town, recalling his “good luck” at having recently grown. The reader is told, “He had been in need of such encouragement, for he was timid by nature; now he asked for no more. The rest he felt to be his own affair” (8). He then encounters the girl Nora, whom he will pursue in what is simultaneously a divergence from his life as a sailor and a central part of the events that ultimately confirm that life. It is curious that what is given to him by the universe (growth and confidence) brings him a sense of satisfaction only then to activate the new, related desire of love/infatuation. At the same time that it is his own, insofar as it runs counter to his destiny as a sailor (for the girl is landed), this desire appears to be encouraged by the same universe that is ordinarily understood as the

controlling force of destiny. Again, the undecidable origin of the desire that motivates the actions that unfold into destiny is evidence against the general construction of an external destiny at odds with an internal desire.

Significantly, when Simon meets Nora, he figures her very presence in terms of desire. In the description of the girl standing outside her home, the reader is given no information suggesting that she has any particular motive, yet this description is followed by Simon's inquiry, "Who are you looking out for?" (9). Dinesen thus implies that desire is inevitable and ever-present. There need not be signs for one to know that another desires as it is simply part of the human condition. Indeed, the girl's response confirms his assumption as she tells him she is looking for the man she will marry. Her words are particularly inflected with desire, as romantic love is the desire par excellence, and marriage at the time of the story's setting would be considered the ultimate goal for a woman. Furthermore, marriage typically signifies the fulfillment of multiple desires, such as the material ones indicated by the girl, who says that she "will be exceedingly beautiful, and wear brown shoes with heels, and a hat" (9) as an adult. Recognizing that he could "give her none of the things she had named" (9), Simon does not attempt to divest her of her of material desire; instead, he accepts and engages with her according to the terms of desire, offering an alternative in the form of an orange that he makes an effort to frame as something worthy of being wanted. Specifically, Simon generates value by calling attention to the fruit's rarity and exotic nature, remarking that he ate many in Athens and pointing to the fact that he "had to pay a mark for it" (9). In this passage,

desire is both read (on the “round, clear, freckled face” [9] of the girl) and produced (through the description of the orange), but it is not clear that the desire is quite so one-directional. It could be the case that by inquiring of Nora’s desire, Simon actually constitutes her as a desiring subject rather than merely perceives her as such; likewise, it seems that Simon could only present the value of an object insofar as it had value to begin with. Again, the divide between perception and reality is blurred.

With her interest engaged, Nora notably asks Simon for his name, thereby distancing him from the moniker of “sailor-boy” by which the reader also knows him and which, as mentioned previously, is more closely associated with the concept of destiny. Nora uses his name to ask, “[W]hat do you want for your orange now, Simon?” (9). The use of a name is significant as it reflects individuality, which Thomas Whissen has opposed to identity in Dinesen. Whissen argues that identity comes from the adoption of a role and the acceptance of the status of “character” rather than “individual.” He cites a passage from the story, “The Cardinal’s First Tale,” in which the lady in black describes how the heroines of stories nobly fulfill their roles as “the prize of the hero” (Dinesen qtd. in Whissen 83). In contrast, when there are “no more stories,” a lady who is “disrobed of her story or her epos” will be “all naked, turned into an individual” (Dinesen qtd. in Whissen 83). Whissen writes that “the individual is flat and powerless and exposed, whereas the character has been caught up in a role and has a sense of its power and is protected by the destiny he is fulfilling. The individual is in his own hands and does not know which way to turn. The character is in the hands of the author, and his

turnings are prepared for him” (83). If what Whissen says applies to all of Dinesen’s work (which his argument implies), by using Simon’s name, Nora dangerously figures him as an individual rather than a character and therefore represents a threat to destiny. To her inquiry about what he wants in return for his orange, Simon responds that he would like a kiss, and she agrees before being called into her house by her father. When Simon insists that she keep the orange, she instructs him to return the next day for his payment. At this time, the reader is told, “Simon was not in the habit of making plans for the future, and now he did not know whether he would be going back to her or not” (10).

Once again, his past experience/socialization complicates the direct relationship between desire and action, but there is a difference between his decisions to save the bird and to return to the girl. When Simon rescues the falcon, he does so unaware of the possibility of a return favor. His decision to revisit Nora, on the other hand, must be viewed with respect to the relationship established by the exchange of the orange. Merry Weed’s analysis of Dinesen’s writing style sheds light on the meaning of exchanges in Dinesen. Weed describes Dinesen’s deliberate use of certain techniques of the *märchen* (fairy tale), which “emphasizes surface qualities” (30). One example of how surfaces operate is in the establishment of relationships, which “are made visible in terms of a gift or an exchanged object, a ring, feather, or other token which then symbolizes the friendship or obligation in the external tapestry of the tale. The disappearance or return of the object to its donor signals the termination of the relationship” (30). Simon’s insistence that Nora take the orange, which is in accordance with his personal romantic feelings for

her, appears as an act of destiny insofar as it is part of a larger structure. Simon acts on his desire in a move of apparent opposition to his present role/destiny (for Nora is supposedly looking for a husband, not a sailor), but he does not appear to be challenging the author's will in the way that other willful Dinesen characters do, according to Thomas Whissen. Whissen writes, "In submitting to destiny, man is secure in the knowledge that he is fulfilling the will of God. In submitting to plot, a character is secure in the knowledge that he is fulfilling the will of the author" (85). Whitten equates plot with destiny in Dinesen's writing. If the transfer of an item is a plot device, then Simon appears to be obedient to plot and therefore destiny. However, is it not an independent romantic desire that motivates the transfer more than obedience to an external authority/authoritative structure? It seems that the relationship between desire, will, and destiny is not as antagonistic as critics have claimed.

Simon has established a relationship by giving an object to another, but even as he has in a sense obeyed a certain code and therefore given up a certain degree of autonomy, he still maintains a position of agency through his uncertainty. He does not know if he will return, which means that he does not know whether he will constitute the orange as a gift or as his part of a trade. It is particularly important to note that Dinesen does not refer to this orange as a gift like she does with two other objects that appear later in the story. The explicit construction of those other objects as gifts calls attention to the other position occupied by the orange in the story as not a gift but rather one side of a trade.

For the orange to be not a gift but part of a trade, it is necessary that Simon return to Nora, as he ultimately chooses to do. Dinesen presents a barrier to this decision, specifically that he “had to stay on board, as the other sailors were going on shore” (10). This condition serves to enhance the sense of Simon’s will, although the reader is told that initially “he did not mind that either” (10). However, while Simon is complacently waiting aboard, he plays a concertina, and “his own music began to speak to him so strongly that he stopped got up and looked upwards” at the moon, upon the sight of which “he knew that he must go ashore whatever it was to cost him” (10). If it is his own music that moves him, then it appears that he acts in accordance with the internal force of desire. On the other hand, it is the sight of the moon that appears to be the greatest impetus for his departure of the ship towards Nora. The question is whether what he sees in the moon already exists or if it is projected by Simon’s personal feelings. Does he see what he wishes to see in the moon, willfully interpreting it to cohere with his attitude towards Nora, or does he innocently read what is already written on the moon’s surface?

The question of whether objects passively reflect the feelings of the characters or actively affect them is one that concerns Tamar Yacobi, who argues for the latter. Yacobi asserts that Dinesen levels out the traditional, related hierarchies of “(1) modes of existence (animated, above all human, vs. inanimate); (2) dimensions of existence (time vs. space); and (3) forms of storytelling (‘narration’ or ‘action’ or ‘showing’ vs. ‘description’)” (454). Yacobi states, “Dinesen’s world picture attaches (or myth-like, restores) to spatial objects the same intrinsic value and much the same features as the rest

of existence, humankind emphatically included” (459). According to Yacobi, objects in Dinesen are granted subjectivity and express an “intentional, calculating, goal-directed agency” (461). Yacobi explicitly opposes the view that objects in Dinesen are passive receptors for the character’s projections, in which case the moon would be a full actor, influencing Simon to return to Nora against his independent will. The function of desire in destiny would thus be downgraded unless one emphasized instead the desire of the moon. This would present a problem, however, as there is nothing in the text to indicate the moon’s desire, and what would be the point of crediting Dinesen with leveling the hierarchy between human and object if the objects do not have desires motivating their actions? Furthermore, would it not be worse if the objects did in fact have desires, but only ones that are centered on human characters rather than their own interests?

Yacobi’s argument is still convincing, but there is reason to be skeptical. While the goals described by Yacobi are certainly admirable, it is not clear from “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale” at least that Dinesen quite fulfills them. For example, Yacobi opposes personification, which is “a rhetorical device of limited scope and suggestiveness” in which “the author does no more and no less than describe some inanimate object in terms that ‘properly’ belong to the living realm, particularly that of the human subject” (471). Personification thus maintains the divide between human and object. Unfortunately, the language Dinesen uses to describe the moon suggests personification: “The sky was so light that she hardly seemed needed there, it was as if she had turned up by a caprice of her own” (10). One notable aspect here is the gendering of the moon. The composition of

Winter's Tales certainly predates developments in recent gender studies, but to a modern reader, the application of feminine attributes suggests humanity rather than subjectivity in its own right. Even more suspect for Yacobi's argument are the similarities between the moon and Nora, qualities that have also been noted by Sara Stambaugh. Aside from gender and the causal relationship between Simon's seeing the moon and feeling compelled to go to Nora, certain descriptive words align the two. Specifically, Nora is described as having a "round clear freckled face" on which appears a "presumptuous smile" (9), while the moon is "round, demure, and presumptuous" (10). If the common descriptor of "round" was the only connection, then one might reasonably argue against the equation of Nora with the moon. The repetition of "presumptuous," however, is too deliberate to be ignored. Furthermore, Stambaugh interprets these connections as "hints" that Nora is "the witch in her aspect as maiden" (56), referring to the shape-shifting falcon/woman. Regardless of whether the moon is the girl or the witch, it is not entirely an object. Yacobi includes a defense against such counterevidence, arguing that the "nonverbal context of world-making and plot-making" (471) outweighs particular instances of seeming personification. For the purposes of this analysis of a single Dinesen story, however, it is necessary to focus on the local language rather than the global pattern, particularly as this project seeks to distinguish itself from the typical methodology of Dinesen critics, which involves analysis of Dinesen as a whole. Because this methodology has led to the practically unquestioned circulation of the same few stories and passages, the present approach, which seeks to elevate other stories and

reckon with them on their own terms, is justifiable. Thus, although on a larger scale, it might be appropriate to see the moon as an independent agent, at the level of this individual story, it seems likely that the moon operates as a projection of Simon's desires.

Another question appears when considering the relationship between desire and destiny in this particular passage: namely, who decides whether the author's will/divine plan is represented by the condition of the other sailors' absence, which requires that Simon stay on the ship, or by the presence of this influential moon? A case can certainly be made for regarding both of them as author will/divine plan, given that they are both elements in the author's story, which was, of course, composed with intent. Of course, even Simon's own will would have to be composed by the author, meaning that the author/God rather cruelly holds the characters accountable for not only their own actions but also their own inclinations. In other words, it is somewhat strange that critics have suggested that certain characters are penalized for opposing their destiny, which is the divine plan for their life, at the same time that their opposition was itself divinely planned and, as another chapter will demonstrate, often useful or even necessary to solidify a character's destiny. Penalties make sense when an actor has chosen his or her actions, or, in other words, consulted with his or her own desires first. For Dinesen to communicate the importance of "submitting to destiny" (Whissen 85), she has to frame submission as act of will/desire. However, the problem of knowing which signs point to destiny remains. Whissen says that for Dinesen, "reconciliation of opposites" is "the ultimate effect of art" and that "Acceptance, like faith, precedes reconciliation—just as one

embraces his destiny before he knows what it will be” (116). To say that one should accept one’s destiny before he or she knows it is fine, but how can one know that they are accepting the will of the author if certain components of the story push them in opposite directions?

Dinesen adds yet another layer of complexity to the web of motivations through the means by which Simon acts on the urge to see Nora. After he sets his mind upon going to her, he calls out to a boat with a Russian crew, which stops for him. Here, Dinesen furthers the theme of exchange, as the Russians “first asked him money for his fare, then, laughing, gave it back to him” (10). The return of the fare creates an imbalance that propels the plot forward since the Russians invite him to drink with them, and “he would not refuse because they had helped him” (10). Again, if the reader assumes there is a master plan for the story, which Simon must obey, they are left at a loss by this scene, for who can say whether the Russians represent a barrier to be overcome or an alternative opportunity that Simon should pursue? It is also significant that Dinesen immediately recreates an imbalance between Simon and the Russians, specifically the man named Ivan who “made him a present of a gold watch-chain” (10). Also noteworthy is that this gift inspires Simon to purchase a blue scarf as a gift for Nora, meaning that Simon conceives of the watch-chain in the same way that he does the scarf. In other words, he must feel that the implications for giver and receiver in the exchange between Ivan and himself are the same as those in the anticipated exchange between himself and Nora. Otherwise, Ivan’s present would not inspire Simon’s present. Both of these gifts create an

imbalance, providing the giver with a certain degree of power. They are both necessarily constructed as gifts in response to what might be seen as ineffective exchanges as far as the initial giver is concerned. In Simon's case, the orange is returned by a kiss. The kiss, while certainly a romantic act, closes the exchange, thereby creating a need for something that can provide continuity to the relationship by precluding a terminating object or act of return. A gift, when constructed as such, serves this function. For the Russians, the favor of a ride is countered by the favor of Simon's company, resulting in the need for a gift such as Ivan's.

A prominent theory of the gift comes from Jacques Derrida, and the classification of this act as an imbalance aligns somewhat with Derrida's view, which is that "the gift is the impossible" (7). The paradox of the gift, he argues, is that "there must be no reciprocity return, exchange, countergift, or debt" (12) and yet, at the very least, the recognition of a gift "suffices to annul the gift" because it "gives back, in the place, let us say, of the thing itself, as symbolic equivalent" (13). Worse than this, however, is that the gift "puts the other in debt, with the result that giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm" (12). Derrida says,

From the moment the gift would appear as gift, as such, as what it is, in its phenomenon, its sense and its essence, it would be engaged in a symbolic, sacrificial, or economic structure that would annul the gift in the ritual circle of the debt. The simple intention to give, insofar as it carries the intentional meaning of the gift, suffices to make a return payment to oneself. The simple

consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude. (23)

For Derrida, Simon's recognition of Ivan's watch-chain as a gift, which is evident from the inspiration it provides to him regarding his own purchase of a gift for Nora, is already a form of repayment. However, as Derrida would also seem to argue, the recognition does not equate the value of the gift, which puts him in debt to Ivan. This is part of the reason that it is so shocking when Simon, interrupted by Ivan en route to Nora, stabs and kills him. Not only does Simon kill someone who cares for him, he also renders the imbalance between them permanent. Whereas it would have been Simon's right not to return to Nora, thereby converting the orange into a gift, he did not have the same liberty with respect to Ivan after he accepted the watch-chain.

This scene is uniquely enlightening with respect to the concepts of desire and destiny, as it is one of the few examples in which Simon's will is positioned not (exclusively) against the will of the author/universe/story, but that of another character. It would be challenging to view this scene in the traditional lens of character versus author/God for multiple reasons. First, as previously mentioned, there is a strong sense in which Ivan is not simply a barrier to action but actually an alternative course. Dinesen communicates this view through the invocation of what is most connected to the idea of destiny: a story. Ivan says, "Nothing shall part you and me. I hear the others coming, we

will have such a night together as you will remember when you are an old grandpa” (11). This hypothetical night to be remembered suggests a story through which such remembering would necessarily take place. As Dinesen is an advocate of stories, it seems that the author is in fact giving her blessing to this route, which may be perceived as an alternate destiny. As an alternate, this path suggests the erroneousness of analyses that insist on a dichotomous relationship between a character and his or her desires on the one hand and the author and their plan for the character’s destiny on the other. Desires, reflected in choices, help a character to shape destiny rather than resist or succumb to it.

The second challenge to the traditional view is somewhat more complex and pertains to the way in which this analysis differs from Derrida in its conception of the gift. While Derrida essentially eradicates the distinction (in practice, not theory) between a gift and any other object of exchange, this analysis upholds it on the grounds that Dinesen is careful to mark certain objects/actions as gifts but not others. At first glance, this distinction appears to support the traditional view of character/desire versus author/destiny. This distinction arises because a gift corresponds to a character’s will in a peculiar way, as the giving of a gift may be seen as the intentional creation of debt to ensure a particular outcome, such as a relationship. This surety is at odds with the story, as only the author is truly entitled to it. Exchanges propel the action forward, and therefore operate in the service of the plot and may be seen as acceptable in the eyes of the author. On the other hand, gifts, which are not meant to be cancelled out through an equal return, correspond to a degree of permanence. Howard Green describes Dinesen’s

preference for progression over permanence, quoting “The Cardinal’s First Tale” to argue that in her writing,

we find none of those experiments with time or consciousness or language which abounded in fiction during her lifetime. Not that she is unaware of them. She simply finds they get in the way. They adulterate the Story. ‘The story,’ as Cardinal Salviati observes, ‘does not slacken its speed to occupy itself with the mien or bearing of the characters, but goes on.’ ‘Speed’ is hardly the first word her own stories bring to mind, but, for all their leisurely pace, the narrative momentum is sustained with consistent and notable skill. (520)

Although potentially useful for the story’s plot insofar as they can establish something new, gifts do not “sustain” momentum but rather seek to fix a circumstance. Thus, one could read into “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale” a degree of punishment for the characters who give gifts (Simon and Ivan), since after all, neither of them is able to fulfill the desires which are embodied in the gifts.

Indeed, it may be the case that gifts in practice, in accordance with Derrida’s view, are in fact expressions of entitlement. What does not hold is that the characters are punished for the disobedience/willfulness/arrogance displayed through gift-giving, for although they are faced with negative consequences (which in Ivan’s case is certainly an understatement), these are not punitive in nature. On the contrary, one could say Simon not only could have but even should have stayed with Ivan for the night that would one

day be a story. The reason to say this is that the death of Ivan creates an imbalance, which is a form of stasis, and stasis is harmful to the story. Ivan's death leaves a gaping hole in the center of the story that begs for closure, and this impression is heightened by the fact that Simon never does give his gift to Nora, thus Ivan's is the only real gift in the story. If it is the case that Simon should have stayed with Ivan to prevent the imbalance at the heart of the story, however, then one could not argue with same effectiveness that Dinesen opposes willfulness in her characters. If Ivan's gift was countered with Simon's staying, then Ivan would be rewarded rather than punished for his desire-based action.

After killing Ivan, Simon reaches Nora, who immediately continues the theme by invoking an object of exchange. She tells him, "I have eaten your orange" (12). It is worth noting that she describes the orange as his, for this word choice aligns with the construction of the orange as an exchanged object rather than a gift. Although she has consumed it, the orange is Simon's until she upholds her end of the bargain. When Simon confesses that he has killed a man, she remarks, "Yes, because you must be here in time" (12), further reinforcing that the orange is not a gift. Simon must be on time to receive the kiss, which will provide balance to the equation. There are other implications of "must" that relate to this thesis's central question regarding desire and destiny. On the one hand, the word "must" is strongly suggestive of destiny. Since destiny is generally considered singular and all-encompassing, the imperative tone of Nora's comment seems to indicate that Simon did not have a choice in his actions. On the other hand, one could read an implicit "in order to" after her remark. Simon must be there in time in order to receive the

kiss that he desires. In this case, “must” indicates an exclusive, required means to an end while allowing for personal will, as the ends sought by an individual can be changed according to their wants.

Upon kissing Simon, thereby creating balance where the orange is concerned, Nora makes a promise never to marry, which might be viewed as either once again tipping the scales or providing a final balance in their soon-to-be-ended relationship. Since Dinesen is concerned with balance, it seems likely that this weighty promise is meant to counter the sacrifice made by Simon in his killing of a friend. Having finally settled matters between them, Simon is ironically free to take on the relatively restricting position of a fugitive in earnest. Later, as he hides, he observes that “there was a wide ring around the moon” (14). Given the connection established earlier in the story between Nora and the moon, it is possible to interpret this image as the sign of a symbolic marriage. The ring around the moon is like wedding ring for Nora, who will never marry because she is already bound to Simon.

Simon’s attitude during his flight, which is presented as an admirable one, initially appears to cohere with the view of destiny attributed to Dinesen. As Simon takes refuge in a dance hall, he takes in the environment and feels that these moments are “of great significance” (13). The reader is told, “He himself, felt it, as if during this time he grew up, and became like other people. He did not entreat his destiny, nor complain. Here he was, he had killed a man, and had kissed a girl, he did not demand any more from life, nor did life now demand more from him. He was Simon, a man like the men round him,

and going to die, as all men are going to die” (13). One could argue, in accordance with the sentiments of previous theories, that Simon is admirable because he has apparently been absolved of desire and has chosen to place trust in his destiny. What such an interpretation would diminish, however, is that this state has only been achievable on account of previous desires being pursued and met. He most likely would not have come to such conclusions if he had not taken action to procure the kiss from Nora. In other words, it was precisely “entreating” his destiny that led him to this situation, a major point on the path towards his larger, final destiny.

Furthermore, when the falcon returns in the form of a woman to help him hide from the Russians, it is not as a reward for this attitude, although the sequence of events would suggest such causality. Instead, the woman/falcon is expressing her appreciation for Simon’s first internally motivated action in the story. Because Simon rescued the bird in a probable act of resistance to the sailor life, he is later saved and guided back towards this same life, as the woman secures his transfer back to his boat. Also notable to the theme of destiny is the detail that when the woman takes Simon to her home and tells him to take a seat and gives her his knife, “She was so commanding in voice and manner that the boy could not choose but to do as she told him” (14). In regards to the concept of free will, which this paper has been advocating as compatible with rather than contrary to destiny, this passage might suggest Simon is not a free agent if it were not for the circumstances of how he got into this position, which largely relate to his own decisions.

What matters is that the situation he is in, even if it precludes decision-making, is the result of an initial series of choices motivated by personal desires.

Sunniva's act, like all others in the story, is framed in terms of exchange. As the woman rescues Simon from the dance hall under the pretense of being his upset mother, an onlooker says, "Do not birch our boy too badly, Sunniva" and "He has done no harm, he only wanted to look at the dance" (14). The man insists on a balance between action and reaction, reiterating a central theme of the story. Obviously, there is a touch of irony to this statement, considering that the boy has just killed someone. Nevertheless, it could also be the case that Dinesen wants the reader to consider the extent to which Simon's actions were not harmful (because they were necessary and/or provoked, mitigated a further harm to Nora, etc.). Either way, balance is once again invoked as the frame for the story, encouraging interpretation of Sunniva's action in a corresponding light.

There is a possible exception, however, that resists incorporation into the theory of balance. Sunniva cuts her thumb as a pretense for being angry with (and therefore threatening to) the Russians who visit her home to investigate. She claims that the injury happened as a result of the Russians' frightening screams, so the Russians respond, "We know that you can do many things when you like. Here is a mark to pay you for the blood you have spilled" (15). She spits on the mark, but apparently accepts it. To an extent, this action interferes with the purpose of Sunniva's self-harm. When Simon rescued the falcon from the tackle-yarn, she "hacked him in the thumb," and in return, he "gave her a clout on the head" (8). When they meet again, she informs him that she helped him

because he rescued her and says, “I hacked your thumb, when you took hold of me, it is only fair that I should cut my thumb for you tonight” (15). Later, she says, “And you, you knocked me on the head there, high up on the mast. I shall give you that blow back” (16), and she does so. By accepting the mark from the Russians, Sunniva reduces the impact of her repayment to Simon.

One of the most meaning-laden events in the story also relates peculiarly to the intersection of exchanges and destiny. Sunniva remarks, “So you are a boy . . . who will kill a man rather than be late to meet your sweetheart? We hold together, the females of this earth. I shall mark your forehead now, so that the girls will know of that” (16). The phrasing is notable, as it presents the two options as such and actively calls attention to the role of Simon’s preference. It also has very little to do with the sailor life, which is his destiny. In fact, Simon’s choice to meet his “sweetheart” is a departure from his destined life, which is indicated by both the story’s end and its title.

What distinguishes this action from the others is that Sunniva was not the direct beneficiary of the initial action for which Simon is receiving repayment, unless one interprets Sunniva and Nora as the one and the same, as Sara Stambaugh does. Stambaugh sees Sunniva as the orchestrator of the story’s events, which were meant as a way for Simon to become “initiated to women’s mysteries” (55). Stambaugh’s interpretation is supported by her view of the orange. She writes,

In her story Dinesen specifically contrasts it with cheap gold watches which the sailors know will not run but nevertheless buy. Because the watch is a small machine and the product of a masculine mercantile system, Simon's rejection of it in favor of the orange he buys is another reflection of the feminine system of values the witch formally initiates him into at the end of the story . . . Indeed, before he can win his kiss and the boon Sunniva gives him, Simon must reject the masculine values represented by the Russian sailor. (57)

Stambaugh also suggests that, because of the "homosexual implications" of the interaction between Ivan and Simon, the story "is about natural and proper sexual relations between male and female, but it is particularly a story in praise of women" (57).

Stambaugh's interpretation, while compelling, cannot reckon with the strong impression of loss generated by Ivan's death. As previously mentioned, Ivan represents an alternate story that is regrettably irrecoverable. Furthermore, Simon expresses regret for his actions. When Nora asks why he killed a man, he responds, "To get here . . . because he tried to stop me. But he was my friend." He then exclaims, "He loved me!" and "burst into tears" (12). It seems that the reader is meant to sympathize with his pain rather than view it as a moment of weakness; thus, it is not accurate to say that Dinesen the author/God (through Sunniva) expresses the view that Simon acted as he necessarily should have. According to Stambaugh, Dinesen suggests that he has chosen correctly. She is right to emphasize choice, but the function of choice in the story is not to express right or wrong but rather that most common motivator of choice: desire.

Interpretations which figure the events of the story as “folkloric tests” (Brantly 116) also present a logical problem. If the story is about Simon’s character, then the guidance he receives throughout (the inspiring moon, for instance) lessens the value of the tests. Ironically, positioning Sunniva as the orchestrator in order to argue that the events are a test results in a reduction of Simon’s choice, which in turn negates the test. A similar problem plagues much of the criticism of Dinesen that argues that the author favors those characters who accept their destinies. Eric O. Johannesson writes of certain Dinesen stories that they “are often designed to present them with an insight, and insight which will help them regain their faith in life and embrace their destiny” (22). The trouble is that such encouragements interfere with agency and therefore with the genuineness of their acceptance.

As this chapter has attempted to show, the “acceptance” framework does not suit “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale.” There is nothing in the story to suggest that Simon accepts his destiny. The reader is told that he “did not entreat” it (13), but it would be inaccurate to equate this attitude with acceptance. In the story, desire is not presented as something to be overcome. Rather, it is privileged by the story through the invocation of balance, a concept that actually serves to highlight what is traditionally opposed to it that it cannot contain, namely, desire. Many have identified unity as a key feature of Dinesen’s writing, but it appears that the author utilizes the conventions of gifts and exchanges to generate the impression and expectation of unity specifically in order to attribute a particular meaning to the conspicuous imbalance at the heart of the story. The death of Ivan is

presented as a loss because loss is an indicator of desire, and desire is a subject to be appreciated rather than ignored. Furthermore, even if balance is a guiding force of destiny, there is something else behind the urge to restore balance that is ultimately personal. The drive for unity is therefore the bond between desire and destiny—not that which attempts to suppress desire in the service of destiny.

CHAPTER III
WAYS OF KNOWING DESTINY IN “THE INVINCIBLE SLAVE-OWNERS” AND
“PETER AND ROSA”

One of the central questions affecting an interpretation of Dinesen’s attitude towards destiny is how a person can come to know his or her destiny. If, as critics have argued, Dinesen advocates embracing one’s destiny, is it not necessary that that destiny be obvious so that it might be embraced? The difficulty is that without comprehending the specific nature of one’s destiny, acceptance appears to be nothing more than a vacant exercise. This chapter examines the epistemological question of knowing one’s destiny. It will disrupt the notion of acceptance not by denying that it is a theme, as the previous chapter did, but by challenging the theme on its own terms. The problem of how to know one’s destiny will be best illuminated when applied to stories in which destiny is not as singular as it is in “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale.” In this chapter, “The Invincible Slave Owners” and “Peter and Rosa” are analyzed. These stories are concerned with relationships, and the intersection of multiple destinies presents a particular challenge for the identification of one’s own.

Some critics such as Thomas Whissen and Donald Hannah would dispute the claim that acceptance without knowledge of particular details lacks meaning, for they believe that the meaning comes from the trust and reverence of God/the author. However, further analysis demonstrates that this trust is not possible without a more specific

understanding of the plan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are difficulties with Thomas Whissen's claim regarding "the reconciliation of opposites, which Isak Dinesen considers the ultimate effect of art," which is that "[a]cceptance, like faith, precedes reconciliation—just as one embraces his destiny before he knows what it will be" (116). Whissen writes, "A man has many possibilities, but only one destiny, and he must work at the role he has assumed, it seems, without the assurance, without even the hope, that he has assumed correctly" (37). He also clarifies, "I think Isak Dinesen would distinguish between hope and submission by defining hope as the desire to fulfill one's own wishes as opposed to submission which is the desire to fulfill God's wishes. Hope, which is directed towards some predetermined satisfaction, cannot coexist with submission, which anticipates nothing" (37). Critics who have made similar claims do hint at the need for knowledge at the same time that they promote acceptance of destiny. For instance, Donald Hannah writes, "Behind Karen Blixen's attitude is the firm belief that there is a purpose in life, that we have been created with a particular design in mind. Our function in life is to realize what this design is, and to carry it through. It is also possible, however, to refuse this role, by being unaware of the idea underlying our creation, in which case we lose any sense of purpose in life" (602). Hannah recognizes the importance of knowing one's destiny in order to fulfill it, for he says one has a responsibility to discern what it is. However, his model still requires that one accept the plan before its full discovery is possible. According to Hannah, one rejects his or her role

not because one knows what the role is and does not want it, but rather because one does not realize that there is a divine plan to begin with.

The central recommendation is obscured in Hannah's remarks because it shifts from being the appreciation of the general idea of being planned to the fulfillment of a specific plan for one's own life. This is, of course, not to say that the two are mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they appear inseparable. The issue is rather that they are posited as separate actions when, in fact, they are one. Hannah privileges respect for the condition of having been planned over respect for the plan itself; however, it is clear that knowing the plan is also a crucial component to the overall process of "acceptance." In other words, even if one might be honored by plans in the abstract, one cannot genuinely embrace the creator's intentions without knowing what they entail because acceptance includes execution (or at least genuine attempts towards that end).

There are other reasons that the apparent meaning of uninformed acceptance comes up short. For instance, if the meaning supposedly comes from trust and/or reverence, one could argue that when given freely, these feelings are voided because they are generally earned. Additionally, it is reasonable to wonder if it would not be more meaningful if a character proceeded with a divine plan that he or she understood and had reservations about rather than divesting his or her self of any skepticism, thereby making acceptance easier. Furthermore, one might question how to view a character who accepts their destiny but is misinformed about what that destiny is. Remarking on Dinesen's earlier genre of the marionette comedy, Bo Hakon Jørgensen writes that "the moral of the

play is most probably that we are all players in a marionette comedy, but it is equally certain that the players cannot come to know the direction before the end of the play, and thus it is bound to be full of all their confusions about the author's idea" (156). With all these considerations in mind, the epistemological question of how one can come to know his or her destiny appears highly relevant to any analysis of Dinesen.

Another problem with the concept of "acceptance" of destiny as it is applied to Dinesen's work and criticism is that acceptance implies a certain crossing over to another side. This in turn suggests a future stagnancy, which is contrary to agency as well as the promotion of being an active, dynamic person, a principle that has also been attributed to Dinesen. According to Eric Johannesson, "interdependence" is a crucial element in Dinesen, for whom "it is no solution to the world's ills, but rather an attempt to preserve the tension of opposites which gives order, harmony and value to human relations" (23). Johannesson sees interdependence in the process of accepting destiny, but it is unclear from his observations how this valuable interdependence is preserved post-acceptance. He writes,

Though the great theme of Dinesen's works is the theme of acceptance, this acceptance is usually preceded by rebellion. Her characters are often engaged in discussions like those between God and Job, or they are involved in stores in which they learn the art of acceptance. The God against whom the characters rebel is a God whose nature transcends human imagination, and from whom anything may be expected . . . Dinesen recognizes only a God who is gratuitous,

who acts capriciously, and whose imagination always transcends human understanding, these being the virtues which make him great and set him apart from human beings. Thus the principle of interdependence is preserved in the religious sphere, for the relationship between God and man is one of tension. Man's greatness lies in his proud defiance of God and in his equally proud acceptance and yes-saying to whatever life might bring, in an affirmation of his essentially tragic destiny. (23)

Johannesson appears to escape difficulties faced by other critics by allowing that characters have knowledge of their destinies, for people must know what they are rebelling against in order to enact that rebellion. The trouble is that Johannesson's remarks on man's greatness express not a tension but rather a contradiction. While it is certainly admirable to use a deconstructivist lens and break down the often problematic binary between resistance and compliance, such dissolution does not appear to be supported by logic in this case (although, of course, one might argue that to defer to logic is to miss the point). Defiance and acceptance cannot be reconciled as Johannesson suggests because acceptance as it has been generally discussed in the literature represents a crossing over. Notably, Johannesson remarks that acceptance is "preceded by rebellion," as opposed to, for instance, accompanied by rebellion. The implication is that rebellion ends where acceptance begins. However, if the tension between rebellion and acceptance is a form of interdependence, and interdependence is more or less the substance of life, then it must be preserved in perpetuity. Acceptance must be a never-

ending process rather than a delimited action, an argument that Thomas Whissen recognizes as well. Citing the ideas of Danish scholar Kuno Poulsen regarding Dinesen and the Bible, he writes, “With the coming of Christ and the metamorphosis of God into man, the question of change becomes paramount. Not Who am I? but What can I become? Not What is? but What can be? The question is answered by turning the passivity of identity into the activity of change—by becoming” (Whissen 54). If the value of becoming is to be recognized, then it is necessary to reevaluate the meaning and purpose of “acceptance” of destiny.

This chapter investigates the relationship between resistance and acceptance by considering two Dinesen stories using the following questions: What are the characters’ desires and destinies? Are they interdependent or incompatible with those of other characters? Given the relationships between personal desires and destinies and others’ desires and destinies, how can the characters know when they are resisting or accepting the will of the author/God?

“The Invincible Slave-Owners” is a particularly useful story for this analysis because it contains multiple sets of relationships that are all different in kind. There is a romantic relationship between the characters Axel Leth and Mizzi, a relationship that might also be subcategorized into a separate relationship between Axel in his disguised form as Frantz the servant and Mizzi; and there is a familial relationship between Mizzi and her sister Lotti. Each of these relationships entails a different degree of dependence corresponding to different desires.

The relationship between Axel and Mizzi is by no means as straightforward as “romantic relationship” suggests, in part because some critics do not view it as particularly romantic at all. Susan Brantly remarks of Mizzi, “She stands on a pedestal, out of reach of sexual desire like the stars in the poem by Goethe, quoted by Axel: ‘One does not desire the stars / One rejoices in their glory’” (122). Brantly’s interpretation is supported by this translation of these lines, which are provided by Dinesen in the original German. This translation is provided by Robert Langbaum as well. However, these lines were translated by Edgar Alfred Bowring as “The stars we never long to clasp, / We revel in their light” (47). The difference between not desiring and never longing to clasp can account for difference in interpretations of the nature of the relationship between Axel and Mizzi. The parameters of the action of not desiring are clear; there is no room for romance. On the other hand, never longing to clasp narrows the scope of the action. “Never longing” is applied specifically to clasping, so it is possible that the speaker might long more generally, perhaps in a romantic way. The speaker understands that the stars are out of reach, but recognizing limitations and managing expectations is not the same as ridding oneself of desire. Brantly does provide further textual evidence of an a-romantic attachment, arguing that Axel “thinks of Mizzi aesthetically, comparing her to works of art, and ‘he wished that he were her brother, or an old friend, with a right to help her’” (124). It seems incorrect, however, to equate this wish with the absence of romantic desire for the same reason that it is problematic in the previous example. Axel knows what is possible and adjusts his wishes and actions accordingly. Brantly summarizes

scholarly debate about whether the lack of sexual desire on the part of Axel is “a flaw or an asset” (125), but this debate bypasses the consideration that there is not necessarily a lack of desire but rather simply a recognition of the impossibility of its fulfillment.

Furthermore, regardless of one’s interpretation of the reference to Goethe’s poem, there are several other indicators throughout the story that show that Axel’s attachment is at least initially romantic in nature. It is this initiatory function of desire that merits a reconsideration of Dinesen’s presentation of destiny, which cannot be in opposition to the wants of a character if those same wants set off a chain that leads to the destined end. If Axel’s desire is romantic, then it is significantly more personal than the sort of abstract aesthetic appreciation described by Langbaum and Brantly; thus, there are major implications for the importance of individuals in Dinesen, which have been dismissed wholesale in favor of stock character types on account of a few passages in a few stories. Again, this thesis does not deny or ignore the words of Dinesen; instead, it seeks to identify where conclusions have been too rigid. One indication of Axel’s personal romantic desire is the description of Mizzi’s mouth as “presumptuous” (52), which is conspicuously the same as that of the mouth of Nora, the romantic interest in “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale.” Another passage apparently combines the force of destiny with individual desire, thus breaking down the binary suggested by some critics: “He had been in love before, that had even, in part, brought him to Baden-Baden, and he was so young that he believed he could never love again” (54). The narrator alludes to a force greater than the character by implying the falsity of his beliefs. Thus, at the same time that Axel

appears to betray his destiny through a personal desire that does not correspond to a role—and supposedly for Dinesen’s characters, “[t]heir role is their destiny successfully carried through” (Hannah, “In Memoriam,” 599)—he also seems to be in line with a destiny operating beyond his knowledge. The epistemological question is as relevant as ever, since it is so challenging to determine whether Axel is deserving of credit for accidentally obeying the divine story. Lastly, the most obvious evidence of Axel’s romantic desire is that the reader is explicitly told, “Axel, with some wonder and self-irony, fell in love with Mizzi” (55).

Interpreting Axel’s desire as romantic, and therefore personal, matters because it allows for a different conception of Dinesen’s views of destiny. In order to pursue this line of analysis, it is necessary also to determine the destiny of the people involved in this desire, namely Axel and Mizzi. This task presents a challenge because there are a number of possibilities for what could be considered these characters’ destinies, and it is unclear whether they are necessarily compatible. If destiny is unity, as it has been characterized in Dinesen, then one can assume that the destinies of multiple characters should not compete with each other. Thus, it could not be the case that Axel’s destiny was to be with Mizzi while Mizzi’s destiny was not to be with Axel. While an argument against the notion that destiny is unity might be warranted, this chapter seeks to counter previous critics on their own terms, as previously mentioned, to demonstrate the difficulty (if not impossibility) of knowing one’s destiny.

This thesis argues that personal desires shape destiny. In the case of “The Invincible Slave Owners,” that desire is argued to be Axel’s romantic attachment to Mizzi. Given that Axel does not ultimately pursue Mizzi towards the end of being a couple, one might assume that Axel has abandoned his desires in order to obey his supposedly planned destiny. After all, he does recognize the inflexibility of the situation and considers it to be planned in some way. Axel discovers that Mizzi’s mistress is actually her sister and that the two alternate roles of master and servant because, despite their lack of money, their noble birth requires them to live in this type of relationship. When Axel realizes that Mizzi is not an eligible partner for him due to her economic position and her dependence on her sister for their charade, the reader is told, “He had a good sense of art . . . Never again would he see them separated. Mizzi might twist round her indignant and affrighted young face to him for a moment, but her embrace, her bosom was for Lotti. The idea of making love to one of the two was as absurd, as scandalous, as that of making love to one of the Siamese twins” (61). By viewing the situation as art that he must not disturb, Axel appears to be respecting the divine plan. This respect presumably leads him to develop his scheme to dress up as the servant Frantz, thereby providing Mizzi with an opportunity to live out her supposedly destined role. After his plan has been executed, the story also ends with references to art (abstract) rather than love (personal). Watching a waterfall, he observes,

In the midst of it, there was a small projecting cascade, where the tumbling water struck a rock—that, too, stood out immutable, like a fresh crack in the marble of

the cataract. If he returned in ten years, he would find it unchanged, in the same form, like a harmonious and immortal work of art. But still, each second, new particles of water hurled over the edge, rushing into a precipice and disappearing. It was a flight, a whirl, an incessant catastrophe. (67)

These observations, along with lines quoted from a Baudelaire poem, conclude the story and therefore seem to indicate the prioritization of art for both author and character.

The appearance of Axel's obedience to the plan is deceiving, however, because Axel's initial desire to be with Mizzi—a desire that competes with her role and therefore the divine plan—continues to serve as motivation throughout the entirety of the story (and even if it had dissolved, the initiatory function should not be discounted). For instance, in another of Axel's reflections after the completion of his plan, his appreciation for art is actually framed as a love for others who appreciate art:

What would become, he thought, of the two sisters, who had been so honest as to give life the lie, the partisans of an ideal, ever in flight from a blunt reality, the great, gentle ladies, who were incapable of living without slaves? For no slave, he reflected, could more desperately sigh and pine for his enfranchisement than they did sigh and pine for their slaves, nor could freedom, to the slaves, ever be more essentially a condition of existence, the very breath of life, than their slaves were to them. (67)

Although Axel appears to love the divine plan that has made Mizzi as she is, these words more overtly express Axel's love for Mizzi and her obedience to the plan than for the plan in general.

This passage also shows that Axel is compliant not just because he admires a character trait (in this case, an idealism which seeks to fulfill God's will) but, more significantly, because he recognizes the sheer impossibility in this particular instance of resistance. At the same time that Mizzi's way of being is framed as a choice worthy of praise, it is also emphasized as a condition out of her control and therefore unalterable. Later, after Axel has said his final goodbye to Mizzi, he is described as having a "resigned, fatal state of mind" (66), suggesting that Axel never believed in the possibility that Mizzi could be otherwise. It is important to distinguish love for the plan from acceptance of its unalterable aspects, for there is surely a difference between embracing a situation and being resigned to it. Unfortunately, this distinction has sometimes been blurred in the literature. A summary observation by Donald Hannah about Dinesen's philosophy illustrates the problem: "Through acceptance of the necessity of suffering, man is given the chance to reveal his indomitable qualities and to accept his fate with a defiant pride, sustained by the belief that there is an idea in life, and that his sole aim is to realize it" ("*Isak Dinesen*" 176). The phrasing and sentiment are admirable, but logic (assuming its application is appropriate) does not allow for the combination of defiance against the challenges written into the plan and the pride of having been planned. Logically speaking, a person must be either for the plan or against it.

There is yet more evidence that Axel is motivated by personal desire rather than acceptance of destiny. Near the end of his act as Frantz, Axel “moved and spoke quietly, like a person who knows himself to be the instrument of destiny. Even the approaching separation from Mizzi, which he felt like a physical pain, seemed, strangely, to steady him, and to hold him to his purpose” (64). Although he recognizes the force of destiny, he is, in fact, motivated by his love, which is indicated by the pain he feels at the thought of leaving her. This pain serves as a reminder of his feelings, and the specific reference to how it moves him implies that knowing he is “the instrument of destiny” is not enough. When the act is over, he feels he is “of no consequence to any human being” (66), suggesting that what he did was to be of consequence to Mizzi as a supplement to his impossible desires rather than to help with the divine plan because he is honored to be a part of it.

Thus, Axel’s actions do not seem to be out of respect for the plan. Furthermore, it is unclear how Axel could have respected the plan in the way that critics have described even if he had wanted to. This unclarity is because there is practically nothing in the story that suggests the author’s intentions for Axel’s own destiny. For this reason, one wonders if it is fair to place Axel Leth in such an unfavorable category of Dinesen characters as the one described by Donald Hannah:

Indeterminate figures, taking the colour of their personality, chameleon-like, from their surroundings, lacking any strongly defined character and suffering from a diffusion of self, they are unaware of any purpose or idea in life which

God intended to carry through with them. Instead they meekly accept their own identities according to the ideas other people form of them and their stock at the evaluation others place upon it. (*Isak Dinesen*” 136)

There are two assumptions in Hannah’s remark that deserve further consideration. First, this condemnation depends on the existence of a plan for the characters that they might be “unaware” of. Second, it assumes that a character is blameworthy for this lack of knowledge. It is not obvious, however, that one can reasonably fault a character for their ignorance, particularly if it is not clear to even the reader (who, hearing God/the author’s voice, should have greater insight than the character) what their destiny might be. Eric Johannesson similarly equates Axel with another Dinesen character whom he describes as “an observer of life, contemplating himself thoughtfully in the mirror, wondering about his identity, unable to commit himself to any course of action. The stories in which these melancholy and reflective heroes become involved, or the stories that are told to them, are often designed to present them with an insight, an insight which will help them regain their faith in life and embrace their destiny” (22). If destiny is to be embraced, then it must be understandable. What, then, is Axel’s destiny, and how is he or the reader to recognize it? What is the “insight” presented to him?

There are a few indications of a destiny/plan for Axel, but they are generally much weaker than one might expect. For instance, the reader is told that Axel is recovering from a recent heartbreak and that after his act as Frantz is over, “his cure was finished” (66). One could argue that Axel’s destiny was to move on from a lingering past.

This assertion seems unlikely, however, given the scarcity and brevity of these details in the story. However, there is a planned quality to the balance created by curing love with love. In this sense, the story is circular, suggesting artistic intention. More significantly, it could be argued that Axel was destined to change his philosophy on life; for at the beginning of the story, he does not seem as appreciative of art. Robert Langbaum observes that in the beginning, he “understands that the myth of aristocracy is supported by the corollary myth of devoted servants, but who also understands that the time for such myths has passed that they now seem extravagant, if not a little mad” (164). In this case, Axel comes to see the value of myths. Marica Landy, on the other hand, appears to see the process in reverse. She writes that Axel’s observations of Mizzi give him “insight into the relations between master and slave” (394) which, it is implied, he did not have before. She says, “Axel’s freedom consists in this understanding of mutual dependence. One must be able, like him, to experience and then step aside from the master-slave relationship in order to perceive alternatives. Though he experiences pain and loss as a result of this knowledge, the pain of freedom is preferable to the loss of freedom” (394). Regardless of what exactly he learns in the end, a change of philosophy as destiny makes some sense, given that it would have a lasting impact on his life, therefore providing more weight to the story (after all, destiny corresponds to life as a whole rather than a mere moment). It is odd, though, in the sense that it does not pertain to a role, and Dinesen’s preference for roles and action over mere thought has been argued numerous times in the literature.

The most convincing evidence of a plan is Axel's love for Mizzi, which leads him to develop his scheme that in turn allows him to grow personally and her to be her truest self. Given that the fruition of this love is also prohibited by the plan, which constructed Mizzi as she is, this evidence is ironic. As previously noted, Axel falls in love with Mizzi "with some wonder" (55). The unexpected nature of his feelings could indicate divine intervention. Additionally, when Axel overhears Mizzi and Lottie in the woods and discovers their real situation, he thinks "that it was a good thing, a thing for which one should be thankful to Providence, that it had been him, and not one of the other young men from the Bath who had happened to overhear the conversation in the wood. They might have put down the Laocoon sisters as a pair of adventuresses, who had come to the hotel to captivate a rich husband" (61) whereas Axel understands that their actions are founded on principle rather than opportunism. The author/God places Axel and only Axel in this position because he is uniquely capable and willing to embrace the tragic destiny of loving a person whose destiny prevents their union. One might argue that this passage does not suggest love but rather appreciation for art; but as previously mentioned, this interpretation does not appear to be the case. On the contrary, it seems that Axel's appreciation for art actually derives from his love for Mizzi. The structure of the story suggests this view, as the reader is given little indication of his artistic sensibilities until after he becomes enamored of Mizzi. Either way, there is a hint of a divine plan at work, for Axel has been equipped with the necessary feelings to carry out the plan.

The trouble with the preceding evidence of a plan for interpretations of Dinesen's view of destiny is that it does not exactly indicate a plan for Axel. Rather, it is a plan for Mizzi in which Axel plays a role, presenting the question: how could Axel have the pride that critics describe if he is only an instrument in another's fate rather than his own? If God's plan is that Axel aid Mizzi in her destined role, can one accurately say that God has a plan for Axel? The reader might speculate that Axel has been sufficiently changed by this experience to live life in a new, destined way following the conclusion of the story, but there are no strong suggestions of what that might entail. His musings at the end of the story might lead one to believe that Axel has become an artist, a destiny that is common for Dinesen characters. This argument assumes, of course, that the author would approve of Axel's decision to enable Mizzi rather than pursue her romantically. It seems fair to make such an assumption given that the tone of the story seems more supportive than critical of Axel's decision, and it often appears that the author is speaking through Axel's thoughts. However, one could argue that Axel misinterprets the plan and therefore misses out on his real destiny. Taking this assumption for granted, though, there is still not enough to establish that the events of the story comprise more than a singular, fleeting experience. For instance, Axel's final musings do not have the coming-of-age quality attributed to "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" and do not otherwise mark any obvious change. A further reason to wonder about the prior existence of a plan for Axel, which he would be obliged to enact, is the apparent ingenuity of his actions. While he correctly reads the signs of Mizzi's condition (her idealism and consequent inability to live without

“slaves”), there is little that could be interpreted as a clue from God/the storyteller that he should assist her, let alone disguise himself as a servant. This absence shows his initiative and therefore casts doubt on how his actions could be obedience to the plan.

For the most part, the plan appears to center around Mizzi entirely. Thus, the epistemological question prevails: How can Axel know (and subsequently pursue) his destiny when he appears to have no real destiny of his own? The situation becomes even more complex when one considers the genuine possibility that Axel’s destiny does not encompass the destiny of Frantz, who, albeit momentarily, takes on his own subjectivity. This possibility is suggested to the reader as Axel/Frantz escorts Mizzi at the train station: “During that walk of perhaps a hundred steps, the relation between Axel and Mizzi ripened and set. As they stopped, it was cast in its final and unalterable mould. The figure of Axel Leth was gone, and Frantz, the servant had taken his place” (64). With this description, it is fair to wonder whether Frantz is always Axel, or if he becomes a separate character/subject with his own unique desires and destiny. Although the reader knows on a literal level that Axel and Frantz are one, the grounds for this knowledge are tested. For example, their shared body might be one reason to argue that Axel is Frantz and vice versa; however, the physical transformation from one to the other could be seen as sufficient difference for two separate individuals. Their motivations are also different. While Axel becomes Frantz out of love in order to enable Mizzi, Frantz is simply fulfilling his duty as a servant. Additionally, when Axel becomes himself again, he packs away “Frantz’s clothes” (as opposed to “Axel’s costume” or “Axel’s disguise”) and

hesitates before opening a letter from Mizzi because “[t]he letter, too, belonged to Frantz, and he had no real right to open it, but it might be that it contained a message for Axel Leth, through Frantz” (66). Thus, even the minor sense of a plan for Axel, in which he is destined to be an instrument in another’s destiny, is challenged by the possibility that he is removed even one step further, and replaced by Frantz.

The character of Axel Leth does not correspond well to the type described by critics. However, although Axel is the story’s clear protagonist, Mizzi could instead be construed as the preferred Dinesen character. Remarking on the value of masks in Dinesen, Eric Johannesson writes, “To don a mask is regarded as an aristocratic manner: to play the lover, the hero, the saint, requires the aristocratic virtues of courage and imagination, and a passionate affirmation of destiny. Thus it is opposed to the bourgeois virtues: being true to one’s own self, sincerity, and security” (21). Mizzi plays the role of master (or, at times, servant) even though it is risky and not exactly genuine; thus, she is praiseworthy and emblematic of Dinesen’s philosophy. Mizzi fits the bill insofar as she wears a mask and assumes a role. As previously mentioned, though, defiance/resistance to destiny is a requirement as well. The ideal Dinesen character supposedly sacrifices personal desire in order to honor the plan, which would be the case for Mizzi because she puts aside her love for Axel so that she can live the idealized version of her life, for art is preferable to reality in Dinesen. There is a flaw in this construction, however, because a genuine sacrifice requires that one has given up what he or she would rather have had. In this case, it appears that Mizzi acts not only in accordance with the plan, but with her

own desires as well. Her feelings for Axel are real, and they do cause her distress, but she makes it clear that in the face of abandoning her ideals, they are readily negated. She even states in a voice described as “changed, free, coming from the heart” (59), “I do not love him. One does not love a dupe, a gull. How can one love the people whom one is fooling?” (59). Notably, if Mizzi does understand at the end that Frantz is Axel in disguise (for this point is never clarified, although it is suggested) and therefore that Axel is not a fool and not disqualified from her love, she does not change her preference for the lifestyle over the man. When the barrier to love is removed, she still chooses to live as a “master,” with and through “slaves.”

It is particularly enlightening to compare Mizzi to her sister Lotti, for the sisters’ conditions are the same, but their feelings are different. Through Lotti, Dinesen emphasizes choice rather than unalterable fate and, by extension, the desire that motivates choice. When Lotti is consoling Mizzi in the woods, she “spoke, with a quiver in her voice, as if she herself realized the temerity of her statement: ‘Perhaps,’ she said, ‘if Axel Leth knew everything he would love you all the same’” (60). Mizzi responds, “I would rather die” (60), showing that she recognizes this possibility as well but is not persuaded by it. One sister (notably the older one, who would presumably be more entrenched in the lifestyle than her younger counterpart) sees a departure from their way of living as a genuine possibility, while the other equates it with death. This exchange should cause the reader to question whether Mizzi’s destiny really is to live her life under the same pretense that sustains her dependence on “slaves.” Furthermore, if Lotti’s suggestion is

preposterous, then that is communicated to the reader through the thoughts and voices of characters. The narrator does not express the same shock, and since the narrator is the creator of the divine plan, the reader would use that voice for cues regarding the characters' destinies. Thus, like Axel, Mizzi does not cohere to what others have described as the ideal Dinesen character.

The epistemological concerns outlined above are perhaps even more pronounced when applied to "Peter and Rosa." Unlike those of Axel and Mizzi, Peter and Rosas' destinies are the same, for the characters both die at sea together. Additionally, they express a conscious concern with their destinies, whereas Axel and Mizzi defer to the guidance of certain limitations on their lives without overtly recognizing these limitations as part and parcel of their destinies. Significantly, Peter voices his desire to obey God's plan for him, while Rosa seeks to escape what she perceives as her destiny. Despite these opposite directions, the two characters end up in the exact same circumstance, which could be seen as either a success or a failure for both.

The reader is first introduced to Peter, who has a strong desire to go to sea, a desire that he frames as a way of fulfilling God's plan for him. He tells Rosa that he has disrespected God by not living up to his full potential since he is occupied in pursuits that do not align with his nature, which has been supplied by God. Because his speech both confirms and contradicts what past critics have said, it is worth quoting at length. He describes marveling at the things of nature and says, "I have seen how well they come in

with the ideas of God, and become what He means them to be” (154). He specifically mentions a fox who he says

does excellently well at being a fox, such as God meant him to be. All that he makes or thinks is just fox-like, there is nothing in him, from his ears to his brush, which God did not wish to be there, and he will not interfere with the plan of God . . . But here am I, Peter Købke . . . God has made me, and may have taken some trouble about it, and I ought to do him honour, as the fox does. But I have crossed his plans instead. I have worked against him, just because the people by me, such people as are called your neighbours, have wished me to do so. I have sat in a room for years and years and have read books, because your old father wishes me to become a clergyman. If God had wished me to be a clergyman, surely he would have made me like one,—it would even have been a small matter to him, who is almighty. (154)

He later pronounces directly, “God means me to be a sailor, that is what he has made me for” (156). At first glance, Peter appears to encapsulate perfectly what critics have described as Dinesen’s philosophy, as he wants to fulfill God’s plan. However, it is necessary to ask how exactly Peter is able to come to his conclusion regarding the plan’s specific contents. Why does Peter take his personality traits as evidence against a destiny as a clergyman when the circumstances of his life could be seen as evidence for this destiny? For example, one could easily say that it is no coincidence that Peter was taken in by his uncle the parson. Similarly, why does Peter make the positive conclusion that he

is specifically meant to be a sailor (which requires even more certainty than the negative conclusion that he is not meant to be a clergyman) as opposed to any other profession? The answer is clearly provided in the text: it is what he desires. The reader is told directly, "Peter wanted to go to sea, but the parson held him to his books" (147). Thus, there is a place for desire in the shaping of one's destiny, unless one thinks Peter was punished with death for running from his true destiny in his uncle's house. However, as with "The Invincible Slave Owners," the tone of the story suggests the ending reflects the will of God/the author. As Donald Hannah observes, "There on the ice-floes they meet their death, but Peter dies rejoicing that, nevertheless, he has succeeded in fulfilling his destiny" ("*Isak Dinesen*" 124). The ending itself may involve misfortune, but that does not mean it is a form of punishment reflecting the creator's disapproval. In fact, according to Robert Langbaum, it expresses the exact opposite. Langbaum remarks, "It is in fulfilling one's destiny that one meets a completely tragic end, which is why traditional tragedy is a triumph not a failure. 'Peter and Rosa' is complete tragedy" (185).

Langbaum may be correct in this view, but it does not escape a problem mentioned earlier: What knowledge is required to fulfill destiny, and how is that knowledge acquired? Peter fulfills his destiny, but what exactly is his destiny, and did he intend to fulfill it? Again, this thesis contends that intention is required for genuine acceptance of destiny (in the way that critics have described it). There are a few options for what one could consider to be Peter's destiny. It could be that he is destined to be a sailor, and he symbolically (or even perhaps literally) becomes one. It could be that he is

destined to be with Rosa, and indeed they are ultimately together. It could even be that he is destined to die, which of course he does. Significantly, though, only some of these options align with Peter's intentions.

An analysis of Rosa's desires and possible destinies will help determine which is most appropriate for Peter, since the two characters experience the same ending. Before that ending, though, Rosa is presented in some ways as Peter's opposite. Although the two are kindred spirits, Peter's actions are motivated (in part) by a wish to satisfy God's plan, while Rosa feels "a particular grudge against fate" (149). The fate she refers to is the one she in fact encounters despite this grudge, suggesting that one does not necessarily need to accept God's plan for it to occur. In the end, when she realizes that the ice floe where she and Peter are standing is drifting from the shore, the reader is offered insight into her attitude: "That fate, which all her life she had dreaded, and from which today there was no escape, that, she saw now, was death. It was nothing but death . . . She did not think much, she stood up straight and grave, accepting her destiny" (169). There is a curious ambiguity in this phrasing that reflects the epistemological questions of this paper, as if Dinesen herself wanted to call attention to the role of interpretation in constructing destiny. Rosa's destiny being "nothing but death" has multiple possible meanings. It could be "nothing" in the sense of being singular and exclusive, in which case other viable options for her destiny, such as ending up with Peter, are discounted. "Nothing" could also serve to minimize the impact of death, making it more bearable. Either way, it is significant that her ultimate "acceptance"

(whether it is considered to be in the form of an embrace or resignation) has no real bearing on her destiny. Although critics have described destiny as something that can be missed if not pursued, Rosa arrived at this point precisely by rejecting her fate. Her acceptance gives the story a certain beauty in the end, but it would not have propelled the action forward to this ending.

This complication notwithstanding, if Rosa's destiny is death, does that mean Peter's destiny is also death, since they share fates? If Peter's destiny was death, then despite his proclamations, he does not obey God's plan, for he pursued the sailor life. The above question contains another question within it: can the same event represent different destinies? Could the ending be metaphorical for Peter, so that he becomes a sailor, but literal for Rosa, who simply dies? Given the many tones present throughout the story, it seems impossible to decide definitively one way or the other. The ending is tragic yet rejoiceful, and to decide whether it is literal or metaphorical is perhaps not only challenging but also unnecessary. That Dinesen can contain such strong and contradictory emotions within one moment is compelling evidence for the often contradictory claims that critics have made with respect to Dinesen's philosophy of destiny, such as Donald Hannah's remarks about a character's "defiant pride" in God's plan ("*Isak Dinesen*" 176). Dinesen has, in fact, given readers reason to confound (or depending on one's perspective, to deconstruct) passivity and activity, resignation and acceptance. When Peter first confronts the challenge of simultaneously wanting to go to sea and to be with Rosa, the reader is told, "Under ordinary circumstances the two ecstasies would have

seemed incompatible. But tonight all elements and forces of his being were swept together into an unsurpassed harmony” (158). Later, after he discovers that the ice floe has broken away, “just as dream and reality seemed, on the floe, to have become one, so did the distinction between life and death seem to have been done away with” (170). These are moments of “the reconciliation of opposites” (Whissen 116) that encourage a certain way of thinking about “acceptance” of destiny. Additionally, although Peter claims that he wants to fulfill God’s plan, he thinks, “In regards to the world, mankind in general and his own fate, he was from now on the challenger, and the conqueror” (158). In this remark, Dinesen certainly does give the impression that one can (and perhaps must) be both submissive and dominating towards destiny and therefore God.

The evidence is in the text; thus, what critics have said is supported and understandable. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ask if what the author says, particularly through characters, is what the author means. Does Dinesen argue for Hannah’s “defiant pride,” or does she mean to demonstrate its impossibility? After all, her chosen vehicle for these messages is an adolescent boy. Perhaps she intends to suggest the naiveté of believing one can simply accept and then pursue one’s destiny, in which case can Dinesen really have the expectations attributed to her regarding a character’s attitude to destiny if she herself is calling attention to the contradictions? Of course, there is the alternative interpretation in which Dinesen is not intentionally highlighting these contradictions. In this case, they are present despite her efforts to resolve them. Perhaps

the truth is that both the beautiful writer and her critics have done what this thesis criticizes: reinforcing the very terms that one means to deconstruct (or “reconcile”). One should consider, for instance, Donald Hannah’s observation that the “conception of fulfilling one’s destiny by playing an allotted role, however, is not one of passive resignation. Although there is little choice of the type of part, nevertheless, the true choice . . . is always one between active acceptance and passive refusal” (“In Memorium” 602). He positively reframes acceptance as something active; but in doing so, he maintains the binary between passive and active. How, then, does Dinesen’s writing (intentionally or otherwise) offer an alternative? The answer is that Dinesen is constantly reminding her readers of her characters’ desires. As something coming from within while being shaped from the outside, desire cannot be categorized as passive or active. Furthermore, the way that the characters’ desires intersect with the plot causes one to question what has often been taken for granted, namely that Dinesen suggests there is a prior destiny/plan for every character to either accept or reject as an act of agency.

From the above analysis of “Peter and Rosa,” it is apparent that what the characters perceive to be their destiny (and how that perception translates into action) matters as much as what their actual destiny is, if not more. Perception, as the above analysis demonstrates, is determined by desire. Marianne Juhl has also made a similar observation with respect to “Peter and Rosa.” Regarding Peter’s speech about the fox (quoted earlier), she writes, “Just so should a human being follow his own nature, and the way to do that is by *following one’s desires*. It looks so simple in Peter’s case because he

knows what he desires, which is to go to sea. There are no doubts in Peter's heart and no hesitation, he wants to act now, and Rosa is to help him" (79). Interpreting the story from a feminist perspective, Juhl shows how Rosa is denied this certainty because of a division within herself between a desire for independence and a desire for love. Juhl argues that much of Dinesen's writing is intended to reveal this division, particularly common to women of Dinesen's era, which she describes as a tension between one's inner Artemis and Aphrodite. If Juhl is correct that desire is a guide for destiny and that Dinesen aims to highlight the problem of women's conflicting desires, then what critics have said about the importance of accepting one's destiny (apparently in lieu of following one's desires) is questionable. Otherwise, it would appear that women, who are uncertain, actually have an advantage over men, in which case the social commentary would be lost.

Juhl's analysis shows Dinesen's concern with the experiences of women, an issue that includes not only social inequality but also the less obvious epistemological implications. Marilyn Johns Blackwell takes a different stance on Dinesen's treatment of women, arguing that "Dinesen's vision of the world is deeply and fundamentally androcentric" (63) because "[i]n Dinesen's tales, women have virtually no function outside of the roles they play in men's lives, to inspire, to prod, to bear children, or to serve as a symbol for man's eternal striving" (59). Juhl acknowledges how Peter, who compares Rosa to the figurehead of a ship, sees her as "not so much Rosa" as "his concept of 'life and death, the adventure of the seafarer, destiny herself' gathered into a girl's form. As such she can slip easily into his plans without disturbing or changing them

in the least” (78). However, while Blackwell finds that Dinesen perpetuates harmful stereotypes, Juhl credits Dinesen with consciously identifying and displaying a problem faced by women of her generation. Dinesen thus presents women as symbols to call attention to the way they are constructed as symbols by society. Ultimately, Juhl’s argument is more compelling, but it is worth noting that the epistemological difficulties faced by Rosa are also faced by male characters such as Axel Leth, who lacks a clear destiny. In this sense, perhaps Dinesen is worthy of credit for humanizing women (rather than rendering them symbols) by showing how women’s experiences intersect with a problem common to all of humanity.

Although this thesis argues that desire actually has a part in constructing destiny, “Peter and Rosa” shows that at the very least, desire affects the pursuit of destiny because desire is presented as a way of knowing. Whether something in the characters’ surroundings is a barrier to their destiny or a sign guiding them towards their destiny is based on their (and the readers’) subjective interpretations. It is not possible to accept God/the author’s plan without using one’s desires to imagine what that plan might be, and as both stories show, the situation is complicated even further when others’ intersecting desires and destinies are taken into account. If the argument that Dinesen advocates acceptance of destiny is to be preserved, then it must acknowledge the epistemological question at its core. Ultimately, however, Dinesen’s writing instead supports a rethinking of the framework of “acceptance.”

CHAPTER IV

UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE IN “THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CARNATION”

In certain ways, “The Young Man with the Carnation” bypasses problems encountered in the other stories analyzed in this thesis. The question of how to know one’s destiny so that one may fulfill God’s plan for his or her life is answered explicitly and definitively by the very being in the position to provide the necessary guidance. On the surface, the story clearly supports arguments that Dinesen privileges destiny over desire, encouraging her characters (and by extension, readers) to discover and “accept” the creator’s path for them even if doing so requires sacrifice of their individuality. The protagonist, Charlie Despard, learns directly from his creator that he is meant to be a writer, and he agrees despite appearing to have spent the majority of the story resisting this destiny. A closer look at the story, however, shows that Charlie does not “accept” a destiny that contradicts his desires because, in fact, he is clearly motivated by his wish to write all along. Additionally, the significance of God’s intervention has been overstated. Ultimately, “The Young Man with the Carnation” shows the role of desire not in the interpretation of destiny but rather its creation.

There is certainly an abundance of evidence that Charlie does not want to be a writer, and this evidence centers around an unusually clear message in this particular Dinesen story: in order to be a writer, one must give up a degree of actually living. Genuine experiences are exchanged for accounts of those experiences. The story begins

with Charlie's feeling that he "had been trapped, and had found out too late" (16). He has written a highly successful book "from his own experience" (16) about poverty, and the book ironically served as his introduction into bourgeois society. As he walks to the hotel where his wife, a society woman, is waiting for him, he carries the manuscript for his new book and feels that it is "nothing but a pile of paper that weighed down his arm" (16). Having already used what he knows as material for the first book, he struggles to write another that will live up to the reputation that he now experiences as a curse. Overall, being a writer is presented as a negative condition from Charlie's perspective, regardless of whether the reader is taken in by his negativity.

Perhaps the main deterrent for Charlie's continued occupation as a writer is his relationship to God. Like Peter from "Peter and Rosa," Charlie wants to please God. Unfortunately, he perceives "that God had turned away from him" because of his actions as a writer. He thinks, "It was no wonder that God had ceased to love him, for he had, of his own free will, exchanged the things of the Lord, —the moon, the sea, friendship, fights, —for the words that describe them" (22). He regrets the connections he has made with people "who wanted books, and to obtain their end would turn a human being into printed matter," feeling that "they had made him sell his soul at a price which was in itself a penalty" (22). To once again gain God's favor, Charlie resolves to abandon writing.

There are also substantial indications of the alternative life that he desires instead, and apparent longing in one direction certainly furthers the sense of distaste for the other

direction. Instead of being a writer, Charlie seeks to experience life. He aspires to be like the young man (with the carnation) whom he encounters at the door to what he erroneously believes is his own hotel room. This man inspires Charlie with the “radiant” expression on his face. The reader is told, “An angelic messenger straight from Heaven could not have displayed a more exuberant, glorious ecstasy. It made the author stare at him for a minute” (21). The reference to Charlie as “the author” emphasizes that being a writer is what prevents him from being like his opposite counterpart. He does not only seemingly have a disliking for his profession, however; he also supposedly has the positive desire to go to sea in the ships that are “porters of destinies” (23). He declares, “From now on I shall speak no more, but I shall listen to what the sailors will tell me . . . I shall go to the end of the world, and hold my tongue” (23).

Despite the appearance that Charlie does not want to be a writer and instead wants to be at sea or otherwise exploring, Charlie in fact never ceases to desire the activity of writing. Although he later feels that God is disappointed in what his writing has required of him, he feels at first that God is upset precisely because he is failing at being a writer—not because God did not want this life for him. He laments because “if he were not a great artist, who was he that God should love him? Without his visionary powers, without his retinue of fancies, jests and tragedies, how could he even approach the Lord and implore Him to redress him?” (18). He is pushed into an aversion towards his writer status by the very desire to be a writer—a desire that, through frustration, produces the appearance of its opposite. Ironically, his new (false) sense of wanting to abandon writing

is also that which causally leads to the evening's inspirational experiences, his conversation with God, and the continuation of his occupation. His true desire (which he struggles to fulfill even though it coincides with his destiny) leads him to a false desire that in turn leads him back to his true desire.

The constancy of Charlie's desire to write is ironically hinted at by critics who use this story as support for their claims that Dinesen views destiny as something opposed to the individual and his or her personal aspirations. The main indication of Charlie's consistent desire is his abandonment of actual lived experience when presented with the opportunity. Thomas Whissen summarizes the situation:

The Lord explains that it was Despard himself who made the choice, who jumped out of a woman's bed to pursue that glimpse of a lost involvement with life which he had observed in the face of the young man with the carnation. That, the Lord implies, was the moment of choice, and it was Despard's own choice, but he cannot have it both ways. Either he could remain with the woman and be one with common humanity, or he could abandon her in favor of the love story about her.

(50)

Whissen does suggest a degree of inconstancy insofar as he describes a choice, which by nature suggests the perception of a viable alternative. However, what he describes does not actually seem to be a choice at all since, at least at the unconscious level, Charlie always wants to be a writer, which is reflected by the very actions Whissen describes. Furthermore, it is perplexing to suggest that he has chosen both to pursue life and to

exchange humanity in favor of stories since he supposedly does the former in an attempt not to do the latter. This circumstance essentially invalidates the choice as such. Instead, it seems appropriate to say that there never really was a “choice,” not in the sense of determinism but insofar as Charlie’s desires remained the same throughout the story despite appearances. Similarly, Bo Hakon Jørgensen says of Charlie, “his mode of thinking and expressing himself bind him fast to the writer’s life. Each time something happens to him he thinks in terms of fate or story and thus goes away from the world of hating and loving, although he would prefer to stay in it” (226). It is unclear, however, how his habitual way of being can be separated from his desires and why his actions should be interpreted as against his will when the path of least resistance is to question his consciously-stated desires.

If Charlie’s desire to be a writer, which motivates his actions, is consistent, then what is the significance of the story’s events, especially given the observation that Dinesen’s stories are “designed to present [her characters] with an insight” (Johannesson 22) to reconcile the characters to their destinies? What is their purpose, and who is responsible for their effect? If Charlie’s desire is never truly interrupted, it does not seem plausible to say that God gives him the experiences that guide him towards his destiny, for his destiny was never in jeopardy. It is not even clear that his experiences should be attributed to God at all since they are so dependent on Charlie’s own initiative.

In many ways, the typical critical view coheres with what the text suggests, at least on a certain level. There is undoubtedly a correlation between the night’s events and

Charlie's conscious realization that his destiny is to write. What this apparently direct correlation conceals, however, is the degree to which Charlie is not simply experiencing these influential moments but also generating them. What ultimately feels like God's plot cannot accurately be described as such due to Charlie's agency, which does not compete with the supposed plot but is instead instrumental to its fulfillment.

Charlie's first significant experience directing the development of the story is his mistaking the unnamed woman's hotel room for that of his wife. This event is a prime example of an ambiguity affecting the entire story (and perhaps any story about destiny); it prompts the question of how to locate responsibility (or perhaps more accurately, to provide credit)—should the reader attribute this moment to God's interference or Charlie's inattention, which is the result of the emotional distress that is itself an effect of his frustrated desire to write? God certainly claims responsibility at the end for this experience, which is enlightening for Charlie precisely because it is an experience ultimately unclaimed. In this case, putting Charlie in this situation allowed God to prove God's point and consequently persuade Charlie of his destiny. Undoubtedly, God's plan succeeds in bringing Charlie's unconscious desires to the level of his consciousness, although it is not clear that this event is the only one that would have worked. What is inconsistent, however, is that God suggests a valid choice that is in fact invalidated by Charlie's lack of knowledge about the woman's true identity. He never knows that he is with this woman, so how can he really "leave" her? Furthermore, he could not reasonably and ethically have had any romantic or otherwise genuine experiences with this woman

even if he did know her, for she was waiting for another man, and it is highly doubtful that she would have embraced Charlie instead. Of course, it is possible that God's point is already illustrated by the fact that Charlie would leave a woman whom he believes is his wife, for perhaps his wife also has the potential to provide him with authentic life moments if he would only let her do so. However, this possibility cannot account for the inclusion of this event in God's plan for the night. If it did not serve a distinct purpose, then why have it at all instead of simply showing Charlie that leaving his own wife is also a form of choosing writing? Robert Langbaum writes of this scene, "Charlie is to be, as God points out, the man who, when he has beside him the lady of the sky-blue room, jumps out of bed to seek his happiness at the end of the world" (159). He specifically refers to "the lady of the sky-blue room," not a lady in general, and he appears to be with the majority in seeing this particular woman as essential to the revelation. Thus, framing this event as a moment of choice is questionable given Charlie's lack of the requisite knowledge for an informed—and therefore valid—decision.

Charlie's interaction with the young man with the carnation, which occurs only because he is in the wrong room, affects Charlie insofar as it pushes him to action, although it builds on emotions that were already stirring at the beginning of the story. It is also worth noting that the young man with the carnation, after whom the story is named, is only present for the span of two paragraphs and speaks only once. For the most part, he is only described, and in a narrative voice that reflects Charlie's own interpretation of the man's appearance and general demeanor. The reader is told about the happiness in the

young man's face but is not directly granted access to the young man's emotions, thereby leaving open (or rather, calling attention to) the possibility that Charlie is projecting his own feelings onto the young man. Perhaps God knew that he would; either way, Charlie's feelings are the driving force.

Charlie leaves his room with the intention of becoming like the young man with the carnation; but as critics such as Whissen and Jørgensen have observed, he almost immediately betrays this wish. Instead, he pursues his (temporarily) unconscious desire to write, or more specifically, to make stories about life. He meets a group of sailors whom he initially views as his point of entry to the life he thinks he wants, but he proceeds to interact with them as a storyteller rather than a fellow adventurer. His reverence for the sailors and their lifestyle, which he aspires to emulate, translates into detached observation. From the outset, he distances himself from the sailors by drinking coffee rather than the rum he buys for the rest of the group. Even more tellingly, he proceeds to invent a story about a bet he has taken to explain his behavior in a way that will allow him to fit in.

This story is the first of many instances in which Charlie exchanges experience for stories despite his explicitly-stated intention not to do so, as it immediately transitions into yet another story about a monkey from a brothel who dies because "the English food did not agree with him, nor did the English Sunday" (25). Susan Brantly compellingly describes this story as a metaphor for Charlie's anxiety about his recently adopted bourgeois lifestyle (105), and she reads his next story as a parallel for his life as well.

Known as “the blue story,” it tells of a woman named Lady Helena whose ship caught fire, causing her to spend nine days in a lifeboat with a sailor who presumably became her lover. After their rescue, the sailor is sent away by her father. Lady Helena then sails across the world in search of a piece of china in a particular shade of blue, convinced that “[s]urely there must be some of it left from the time when all the world was blue” (28). At the end of her life, she finally finds a jar in the right blue and passes away. According to Brantly, “Since a reunion with the sailor is impossible, Lady Helena must content herself with symbols, not the real thing, and requests to have her heart buried in the blue jar. This tale echoes the plight of Charlie who will also learn to content himself with symbols and vicarious experience, rather than with the adventures of real life” (104). The parallel is certainly valid insofar as it shows that Charlie considers writing as a substitute for living, but the fact of his telling the story (rather than the content of the story) is just as significant, for it shows that despite his stated views, he still prefers stories to life.

Robert Langbaum has a somewhat different view of the blue story, which he says brings together the story’s “themes of the sea, love, art, and the quest for the ideal” (161). Focusing on the ideal could allow for an interpretation of the story that parallels Lady Helena’s fixation on the blue color with Charlie’s preoccupation with producing a second novel worthy of God’s admiration. It would therefore not be the case that, as Jørgensen writes, “it must be possible for Charlie to rediscover the ecstasy expressed by the young man and which he himself has lost by becoming a writer” (227), because Charlie is

instead attempting to recover precisely what he gained when he wrote his first novel.

Langbaum also writes of the story that it highlights

the dream of imagination as the force that resolves the story's antinomies. The imagined blue brings together the sea and blue china, nature and art, and wipes out the distinction between moral up and down, heaven and the sea. Dream or imagination is the theme in *Winter's Tales* that resolves the antithesis between the themes of nature and art (or civilization) announced in the first two stories. (161)

The tension between life and words is resolved through storytelling, an approach that means that Charlie's stories are not just a consolation or a substitute.

In his next significant experience, Charlie even more overtly enacts the central tension of his destiny, albeit still unwittingly. Charlie encounters a woman, presumably a prostitute, whom he also sees as an opportunity to experience life in the way of the young man with the carnation and the sailors. After approaching her, Charlie "put his hand in his pocket, but found only one shilling left there" (30). He asks if he can have "a shilling's worth" and kisses her hand before returning to the hotel. This experience is significant as it serves as part of God's evidence of Charlie's destiny. Charlie asks God, "am I, while I write of the beauty of young women, to get, from the live women of the earth, a shilling's worth, and no more?" (34), to which the Lord replies "Yes" and adds that he "is to be content with that" (34). Again, this event is difficult to classify and, as such, demonstrates the problem of locating agency which is at the heart of any discussion of destiny and which has generated contradictory views regarding Dinesen in particular.

For instance, is it appropriate to say that Charlie has exchanged the woman in the hotel room for a shilling's worth when he was not aware that he would only have one shilling in his pocket?

The answer to this question hinges on the larger question of whether the night's events were orchestrated by God to illustrate to Charlie that, regardless of his desires, his destiny is to write in lieu of fully living or whether God intended to shed light on Charlie's frustrated and therefore suppressed desires to write by placing him in situations that resist the self-denial that initially moved him away from his destiny. God's statement that Charlie "is to be content" with his lot leaves open both possibilities, since it could be interpreted as an instruction or an objective statement of facts about the future. Another instance of ambiguity that serves to steer the reader away from the view that God is telling Charlie his destiny (rather than opening Charlie's eyes to the personal desires that constitute his destiny) is the description of the woman outside the hotel, who is never explicitly established to be a prostitute. The evidence is circumstantial—it is late at night, she is "walking up and down in front of the inn" (30) and she provides Charlie with a verbal "invitation" (30). However, there is much left unsaid. The contents of the invitation are never revealed, and when Charlie asks, "Will you let me have a shilling's worth?" (30), the reader is only told, "She stared at him, her face did not change as he took her hand, pulled down her old glove and pressed the palm, that was rough and clammy as fish-skin, to his lips and tongue" (30). The lack of expression may be a sign of how accustomed the woman is to this type of interaction, suggesting that she is, in fact, a

prostitute. Nevertheless, the focus of this passage seems to be on her relative passivity to Charlie's action. Charlie knows what is meant by "a shilling's worth," while her lack of response suggests that she does not. While there is not much reason to doubt her implied profession, for there are not many other ways to explain the details that are provided about her, it is telling that Dinesen chooses to leave open the possibility for alternative explanations. It is very possible that she does so for the sake of propriety; but for an author who is so often distinguished by her love for roles, it is curious that she does not name this one. One possible reason for the selection of details provided and omitted in this passage could be that it creates the impression that Charlie is projecting onto his surroundings, or in other words, storytelling. Thus, one could credit God for cleverly giving Charlie one shilling in order to set up the future revelatory moment, or one could attribute agency to Charlie, who learns about his destiny to write after having time and again displayed his inclination to do so.

This event also demonstrates the relativity of destiny, which this thesis argues depends on desire. When Charlie sees the woman, he compares her to the ships that he admires because "[t]he ships were superficial, and kept to the surface, therein lay their power, to ships the danger is to get to the bottom of things, to run aground" (23). Looking at her, he thinks, "Within her many good seamen, who escaped the deep, have been drowned. But all the same, she will not run aground, and if I go with her I shall still be safe" (30). This observation is ironic given Marcia Landy's accurate observation that, in contrast to his wife, Charlie "is eager to escape the restraining and cloying aspects of

predictable bourgeois behavior” (400) and Johannesson’s comparison of Dinesen’s favored “aristocratic virtues of courage and imagination, and a passionate affirmation of destiny” to “the bourgeois virtues: being true to one’s own self, sincerity, and security” (21). Oddly, whereas Charlie might want a way out of his safe, bourgeois life, he still frames his pursuit of risk in terms of safety. If safety is to be avoided, and falling into the trap of being a writer who does not experience life is dangerous, then it seems that Charlie should be a writer. Alternatively, this passage might show that Charlie’s true desire is to be safe, in which case writing is his destiny, since desire constitutes destiny. Either way, the passage suggests that the path to destiny must be individualized since the significance of events and actions is not universal.

When Charlie returns to the hotel, the meaning of the night’s events is revealed to him, but the revelatory quality of the scene does not necessarily signify that Charlie has had no role in the construction of that meaning. Initially, however, the scene does give a strong impression that Charlie was a passive player in another’s plan as he remarks, “Almighty God . . . as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are Thy short stories higher than our short stories” (32). He also refers to his experience as a “test” (33) and even observes that his wife has also played a part, for she is like “[t]he firm, majestic lighthouse that sends out its kindly light. To all ships it says: ‘Keep off.’ For where the lighthouse stands, there is shoal water or rocks. To all floating objects the approach means death” (31). Robert Langbaum writes, “Even Charlie’s wife is fitted into this new reconciliation. She is to be the lighthouse who, by keeping him from approaching and

therefore from achieving satisfaction in love, keeps him on his course as a writer” (159). What is hidden by this statement (which incorrectly describes the ending as one of “reconciliation”) is the way in which his wife only serves this function insofar as Charlie does not feel a strong romantic attachment to her. It is Charlie’s own personal feelings as opposed to an innate quality in his wife that puts her in this position; thus, once again, God is not to be given all the credit for setting up Charlie’s situation so that he will “accept” or be “reconciled” to his destiny.

Observations by Bo Hakon Jørgensen about this part of the story most closely resemble the present interpretation of “The Young Man with the Carnation” and Dinesen’s philosophy of destiny as it is represented in the collection *Winter’s Tales*. Regarding Charlie’s realization about the night’s events and his intention to write a love story, Jørgensen writes,

Instead of deducing the meaninglessness of life from this chance happening his writer’s mind gets busy on it . . . But on the other hand this means that the story, the plan, the pattern, the destiny, that he is going to write, conceals the fact that life is without plan. The story’s order is seen from the aspect of ‘later on’ and on another level than that in which one has a momentary concrete sensual experience of significance and plenty. (227)

The idea of no plan is radical in a critical field where not only the existence of a plan for Dinesen’s characters is taken for granted but also the belief that a character’s main purpose is to determine and fulfill the plan. Jørgensen’s observation allows for the

distancing necessary for the argument this thesis proposes: reevaluating the concept of a plan so that a plan may still exist while being neither completely external nor completely prior to the subject. In other words, rather than discarding plans entirely, it is perhaps more appropriate to imagine plans (or destinies) that have the potential to be flexible, responding to the desires that appear to guide the characters to their destinies rather than threaten their fulfillment, as critics have suggested, particularly in the case of the young Charlie Despard. Even the notion of guidance deserves evaluation, as it presumes a prior, planned destiny. Instead, desires shape destiny, and as the former is subject to change, so too is the latter. Thus, when reviewed from the future, a destiny will appear fixed even though it never was, but it will also never have been the case that a destiny did not exist, for just as one will always have desires, so too will they always have a destiny.

Although Jørgensen offers a view of destiny that is different from that of the dominant conversation, in which destiny is assumed to be fixed and generated by the author/God rather than the character, he does not depart from the mainstream insofar as he still sees destiny in opposition to desire. He remarks, “Charlie is justified in complaining about having to be the sort of link in God’s stories that renders his own life meaningless in the ordinary sense of the word. In compensation he is equipped with God’s viewpoint and his glorious ecstasy is transformed illuminating his own life to becoming instead an *insight*” (228). He compares Charlie’s feelings to what he views as Dinesen’s own, writing that through him, she “relinquished the possibility of improving or changing her life, of finding her way back to the sweetness from the time when the

world was still blue, when life held enterprise and spontaneous meaning. She takes up an attitude of sour satisfaction with *insight*" (228). By framing the positive aspects of being a writer as "compensation" or "sour satisfaction," he suggests that destiny prevents the fulfillment of desire. Otherwise, there would be no reason to make up for what is supposedly lost by the desire's frustration.

A close analysis of Charlie's conversation with God reveals that Charlie's destiny to write does, in fact, correspond to his desire, which is also to write. However, one's first impression of this exchange between God and Charlie could easily and understandably be that God convinces Charlie to accept his destiny to be a writer in spite of his real desire to experience life firsthand. As previously mentioned, God tells Charlie he is "to be content" with getting only "a shilling's worth" (34) from women, who in this case symbolize life in general. Even more apparently commanding is God's remark, "But you are to write the books . . . For it is I, who want them written. Not the public, not by any means the critics, but Me, Me" (34). As with the previous comment, though, his words may be interpreted not as a command but rather a prediction or statement of the future, in which case they do not interfere with Charlie's agency and instead leave room for his own desires to influence his actions. Telling Charlie that he should write for God could be seen as merely reassurance in light of his previous apprehensions about going against God's wishes. Based on the Lord's words, it is not even necessarily the case that Charlie should do what the Lord wants, for it is still possible that the Lord wants nothing in particular. Because Charlie previously expressed his desire to do what the Lord wants

him to do, God's words may be seen as simply the removal of a perceived barrier rather than a genuine indication of God's wishes. In other words, it might be that God goes along with the terms established by Charlie himself in order to accomplish the goal, which is not to tell Charlie what his destiny is but rather to reveal to Charlie his true (albeit temporarily repressed) desire to write—a desire that in turn generates his destiny to be a writer. After all, it seems somewhat odd that God would plan out the elaborate night and its several potentially transformational moments when the conversation alone would do the trick, so to speak, of convincing Charlie to write given his stated wish to comply with God's will in order to be worthy of the love he feels he lost. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the night served a different purpose.

The dominant view, however, is that God sought to persuade Charlie to “accept” his destiny. For instance, Donald Hannah writes,

At the end, God speaks to [Charlie] in the same terms as he spoke to Job and reveals the fullest extent of his imaginative design; Charlie is reconciled to his lot and understands God's purpose—but only because his own imagination has been re-awakened. Similarly, Isak Dinesen believes that the questioning of God's purpose by Job is caused by a lack of understanding resulting from a failure of the imagination to comprehend God's ways with mankind. (*Isak Dinesen*” 102)

For Hannah, the purpose of the night was to garner appreciation from Charlie for the state of being planned. Through that appreciation of destiny as an abstract concept, he becomes willing to accept his particular destiny to be a writer even though it means being

somewhat divorced from life. Like others, Hannah believes that Charlie does not actually want his destiny (or at least does not want it until the very end), since he needs to be “reconciled” to it. This interpretation cannot account for the evidence that Charlie has always wanted to be a writer given his many actions consistent with that desire. Furthermore, it is not clear from the story that Charlie really did need to understand “God’s purpose,” especially given the desire for God’s love that is established very early on and that motivates the entirety of the story.

Such presentations of the story’s events as God’s method of persuasion give credit to God that should instead go to Charlie, who perpetually proves that he does, in fact, want to write and to follow his destiny (and even more to his credit, that he wants both independently of each other). Moreover, he holds these desires regardless of the many drawbacks that (again to his credit rather than the reverse) Charlie is acutely aware of, creating an even stronger case for why it is not God but Charlie who is the agent of his destiny. Crediting Charlie for his behavior and feelings leads to an unconventional interpretation of his response to God’s question, “Are you going . . . to thank Me for what I have done for you tonight?” (34). Charlie simply says, “I think . . . that we will leave it at what it is, and say no more about it” (34), thus ending the entire conversation. Thomas Whissen comments on this exchange with particular reference to God’s promise to Charlie not to “measure you out any more distress than you need to write your books” (34). Whissen writes of his “reluctance to thank the Lord for what the Lord has agreed to do” and observes, “In not allowing Despard to show gratitude to God, Isak Dinesen is, in

effect, denying the artist the comfort of common piety. What she implies is that the distresses measured out to the artist balance out any rewards. One does not show gratitude, she seems to say, for a dearly purchased gift” (27). Whissen somewhat inaccurately presents God’s inquiry as related to their “covenant” and therefore the future rather than events of the previous night, which partly accounts for his interpretation of the conversation. Considering the question in its original context, it makes more sense to say that “one does not show gratitude” when one is primarily responsible for what has taken place. God’s role was minimal when compared to Charlie’s actions. God helped Charlie to see what Charlie felt all along but had suppressed due to a misunderstanding of God’s will. Thus, it is only logical that God would do that which is in that context a simple act of clarification.

A final reason to be skeptical of past representations of this conversation is that not enough attention has been paid to the way in which it is somewhat anomalous in Dinesen’s writing. No other story in *Winter’s Tales* has such a straightforward representation of destiny. Charlie can know for certain that his destiny is to be an author because he is told directly by God, who does not appear in anywhere else in the collection. The story’s meaning is so clear relative to the meaning of the others, and the conspicuousness of this difference almost seems to invite questioning. In particular, the presence of God is suspect. Other critics have apparently attributed this peculiarity to a case of relatively ineffective writing. Robert Langbaum refers to the conversation between God and Charlie as “a rather awkward colloquy” (159) and says that the story

“is marred by more prolonged introspection than Isak Dinesen usually allows her characters” (159). Donald Hannah expresses a similar sentiment, calling the interaction “a rather obtrusive colloquy” (94) before remarking that the story “has certain radical flaws” such as “a disturbingly high degree of contrived ingenuity” and a plot that “is more like the preliminary sketches for a story one finds among Isak Dinesen’s manuscripts” (95). Their comments hold less weight, however, if one reads purpose into the “awkward” and “obtrusive” exchange. Perhaps it is precisely as it should be because the qualities identified by Langbaum and Hannah are meant to communicate a meaning such as, for instance, that the conversation is not all that it seems. It could be that Dinesen does not want the reader to view God’s presence literally, although the rest of her work establishes grounds to believe in the reality of supernatural occurrences in her stories. More likely, in accordance with the preceding analysis, the meaning is that God’s presence is somewhat superfluous, since Charlie is primarily responsible for the insight that God is credited with providing him.

At this point one might object that at best the previous argument shows that Charlie’s desires conveniently coincide with a destiny that was always in place and always would be, independently of whether Charlie decided to pursue it. However, the agreement between his desires and his destiny is not simple luck. Rather, there can be no destiny that does not cohere with a character’s ultimate and most genuine desire. Charlie is not wrong in his description of the night as God’s “test” if one thinks of it as a diagnostic exam rather than a challenge. When Charlie asks how he could write a love

story without wanting “the softness and warmth of a young woman’s body in my arm,” the Lord responds, “I gave you all that last night . . . it was you who jumped out of bed, to go to the end of the world from it” (33). The traditional view would be that the Lord gave him this opportunity with the knowledge that Charlie would not take it, but there is just as much reason to think that the Lord gave him to the opportunity so that he might take it if he so desired.

The stance taken here is a more optimistic one than that of critics whose arguments about destiny are founded on the assumption of loss and frustrated desire. However, Bo Hakon Jørgensen does manage to suggest both loss and a degree of optimism. Comparing *Winter’s Tales* to Dinesen’s previous writings, Jørgensen writes, “Describing the coming into being of identity, and its explanations of why things happened as they did, provides the possibility through the delineation of a character of going beyond the storyteller’s self to a greater degree of general experience, which again is replaced by compassion for human beings. Compassion becomes the actual project of the tales” (228). Jørgensen is certainly right that there is compassion in the tales, but whereas he seems to see Dinesen as sympathetic to sacrificing desires as part of the process of forming an identity, this thesis argues that Dinesen compassionately figures desire as a function of destiny. There is no need for “reconciliation” or “acceptance,” for destiny is the fulfillment—not the sacrifice—of desire.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis shows that, at the very least, past conclusions about Dinesen's philosophy of destiny are faulty for their assumed applicability to all of her work. Whether those particular claims still relate to the stories they appear to have originated from is beyond the scope of this thesis but is worth considering in the future. It is very possible that those claims do apply to those stories, though, for there is substantial support in Dinesen's own words for a construction of destiny that is opposed to individuality and personal desires. Thus, this thesis proves that Dinesen's views evolved more over the course of her particularly eventful life than past critics allow. That being said, it should be evident that there is still much content in Dinesen's own words from even the stories in *Winter's Tales* that would allow for the continued application of Dinesen's supposed philosophy of destiny. There are a couple of ways to account for these instances. Perhaps more problematically, one might say that despite her own intentions, Dinesen expresses the opposite of her own consciously held philosophy. Thus, at the same time that she means to present destiny as requiring sacrifice, she unconsciously suggests that destiny is aligned with characters' desires. Another view would be that Dinesen's characters are characters, and their speech does not necessarily represent the views of the author, as past critics have often argued. If one were to give

more credence to the implicit than the explicit, he or she would see that it is not the author but the characters whose beliefs are challenged by the story.

Above all, this thesis has been concerned with questioning that which is here referred to as the acceptance framework. It should be clear that the word “acceptance” has serious implications for constructions of the concept of destiny. Whereas others have viewed desire as something to be passed through or overcome on the journey to acceptance of an externally imposed destiny, the stories analyzed here show that the notion of accepting destiny is impossible. One cannot accept a destiny that is, in fact, internal; and desire is never a form of resistance. Instead, desire is a form of guidance and a way of knowing. The characters’ purpose is not to discern the destiny provided to them by the author/God; instead, their purpose is to live according to how they were made so that they can create their own destinies. Thus, one cannot miss out on the destiny he or she should have known and followed, as critics have suggested. What matters is not correctly identifying destiny but living in such a way that one can be said to have had a destiny.

A passage from *Out of Africa* cited in the introduction can be fruitfully revisited here. Dinesen writes, “Pride is faith in the idea that God had, when he made us. A proud man is conscious of the idea, and aspires to realize it. He does not strive towards a happiness, or comfort, which may be irrelevant to God’s idea of him. His success is the idea of God, successfully carried through, and he is in love with his destiny” (Dinesen qtd. in Whissen 35). In light of the arguments presented in the previous chapters, the

potential meaning of God's "idea" is expanded. Ideas can be specific, but they can also be vague. They can also relate not to expectations for final outcomes but rather to the seeds planted in the early stages. Perhaps God's idea is better constructed not as the accomplishment of destiny, but the desires given to people through the circumstances of their lives—desires that encourage agency in the development of one's destiny.

Thus, in her writing, Dinesen is sympathetic not only to her characters but also to her readers who, inspired by her words, might not understand how to follow her advice if that advice was to discover God's plan for them. A reading of her work that privileges desires also privileges a practical application of the theory embedded in her stories. A reader who feels that he or she must figure out what God planned for him or her would, ironically, most likely be immobilized by the pressure and the lack of instructions for how to obtain that information. On the other hand, a reader who sees his or her own desires as constitutive of their destinies is spared the anxiety of misunderstanding God and is therefore encouraged to continue to act and grow.

Dinesen is more sympathetic than critics have presented her as being, but they are not wrong that her stories are tragic, and that tragedy is a part of destiny. They are right that tragedy is alleviated by recognition of a plan. Hannah Arendt quotes Dinesen's expression, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them," remarking, "The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings" (xix). Stories provide the comfort of meaning. However, fulfilling God's plan alone would not suffice. It is in seeing their own actions,

which have been motivated by their own desires, as part of the overall story that allows characters to find consolation in tragedy.

The four stories examined in this thesis all involve characters who face tragedy but are aided by the sense of their agency. Simon the sailor-boy laments killing Ivan, but he experiences a feeling of oneness with the universe that is connected to his sense of responsibility for himself. When he is in hiding, the reader is told that he “became like other people . . . Here he was, he had killed a man, and had kissed a girl . . . He was Simon, a man like the men round him, and going to die, as all men are going to die” (13). His own initiative is the reason for his sense of connectedness. Axel Leth faces the tragedy of saying goodbye to a loved one precisely because he acts in accordance with his romantic desires, which require a sacrifice for the sake of his beloved’s well-being. It is because he acts on his desires that he can be content with being “the instrument of destiny” (64). Rosa from “Peter and Rosa” is at peace in the end not just because she can see the story around her tragic death but, more precisely, because she sees how her desires and actions have helped shape the story into what it is. When she realizes she will die, “a great calm came upon her” (169). She observes, “Peter now would never know that she had betrayed him. It did not matter any longer either, she might quite well tell him herself. She was once more Rosa, the gift to the world, and to Peter too” (169). She is a gift because by following her heart, she led Peter and herself to their destinies. Lastly, Charlie Despard is tragically destined to miss out on certain life experiences, but he chooses to follow this destiny because it aligns with his ultimate desire to write. These

four stories involve tragedy that is bearable because it is part of a destiny/story. However, although destiny provides meaning, it is desires that make up destiny. Thus, destiny cannot be accepted or rejected. If one is guided by desire, then one will find destiny.

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