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| Karen Blixen (1885-1962) |
| Karen Christentze Blixen-Finecke. Pseudonyms: Isak Dinesen, Pierre Andrézel, Osceola |
| Karen Blixen was a singular figure in 20th century Danish literary life. In the 1930s, when Blixen started writing, Danish literature was dominated by social realism centred on the contemporary world. Blixen nourished the myth of herself as the timeless aristocratic storyteller who wrote her works independently of her own historical context. However, by drawing lines to Nietzsche, existentialism, and psychology, Blixen scholars have clearly demonstrated that she belongs to modernism. As her contemporary Samuel Becket, she was a bilingual author (she wrote her works in English and Danish). |
| Karen Blixen was a singular figure in 20th century Danish literary life. In the 1930s, when Blixen started writing, Danish literature was dominated by social realism centred on the contemporary world. Blixen nourished the myth of herself as the timeless aristocratic storyteller who wrote her works independently of her own historical context. However, by drawing lines to Nietzsche, existentialism, and psychology, Blixen scholars have clearly demonstrated that she belongs to modernism. As her contemporary Samuel Becket, she was a bilingual author (she wrote her works in English and Danish).  Karen Blixen’s life can be divided into three different phases: During the first (1903-1913), Blixen studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and wrote her first works under the pseudonym Osceola. The second begins in 1914, when she moved to Kenya (British East Africa) with Bror Blixen. The two were separated in 1921, leaving Karen Blixen to run the coffee farm at Ngong Hills alone until financial problems forced her to sell it in 1932. Finally, in 1931, Blixen returned to Denmark and remained at the family manor Rungstedlund until her death in 1962. During this third phase, Blixen established herself as an author of international stature. After her time in the British colony, Blixen wrote many of her works in English. This applies to her 1934 international debut, *Seven Gothic Tales* (Danish title: *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger*)*,* publishedunder the pseudonym Isak Dinesen. The tale was Blixen’s preferred literary genre and three additional collections followed: *Winter’s Tales* (*Vinter-Eventyr*) in1942, *Last Tales (Sidste Eventyr)* in 1957, and *Anecdotes of Destiny* (*Skæbne-Anekdoter)* in 1958. In spite of her tales’ setting in well-defined 19th and 18th century venues, they are only seemingly traditional realistic narratives. Blixen’s characters are puppets in cosmic dramas with far-reaching existential implications. The characters are often confronted with catastrophic events. Both on the existential and aesthetical level, it is the narrative itself (e.g. a mythological pattern) which gives meaning to an often tragic existence.  File: Karen Blixen 1957.jpg  Karen Blixen 1957  Source: Available at Wikimedia Commons; image in under the Public Domain. Link to image can be found at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karen_Blixen.jpg>  Blixen’s autobiographical writings constitute another important part of her oeuvre. In 1937 she published *Out of Africa*, in which she condensed her almost twenty years in Africa into five representative stories. Through this literary strategy Blixen succeeds in giving a sensual and powerfully personal image of her perception of the African mind set, culture, and nature.  Blixen’s charismatic personality attracted the attention of several prominent intellectual young men in the 1940s and 50s. They saw her both as an inspiring and as a demonic figure, an image that has become a part of the ‘Blixen myth’. The many biographies, dissertations, documentaries, and cinematic adaptations dedicated to Blixen since her death demonstrate the fascination which her life and works continue to exert. Selected List of Works *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934 in USA, 1935 in Denmark)  *Out of Africa* (1937 in Denmark and England, 1938 in USA)  *Winter's Tales* (1942)  *Last Tales* (1957)  *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1958)  *Shadows on the Grass* (1960 in England and Denmark, 1961 in the USA)  *Ehrengard* (posthumous, USA, 1963) Selected Screen Adaptations *Babettes gæstebud*(Eng. *Babette's Feast*). Dir. Gabriel Axel. Nordisk Film, 1987.  *Out of Africa*. Dir. Sydney Pollack. Universal Studios, 1985. Internet Resources Karen Blixen Museum: www.karen-blixen.dk  Karen Blixen website: www.karenblixen.com |
| Further reading:  (Henriksen)  (L. Henriksen)  (Thurman) Documentaries of Blixen (Lichtenberg)  (Thomsen)  (M. Henriksen) |