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Reassessing
Karen Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje* /
The Angelic Avengers:

**A Novel Challenging Gender,
Totalitarianism and Colonial Practices**

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Declaration

This thesis has been composed by the undersigned student, Barbara Tesio-Ryan, and is the student's own work. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Barbara Tesio-Ryan

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to challenge *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* (GV/AA) marginalisation in Karen Blixen's work, by offering a comprehensive and multidimensional reassessment of this text. The thesis explores the novel's conception, reception and context, analyses the novel as a Gothic text, and traces some of its intertextual connections to Blixen's other work. As opposed to the traditional critical reception of this novel as a minor text in Blixen's production, this thesis argues that GV/AA was a text that, by allegorically problematizing the Nazi occupation of Denmark, also expressed some of Blixen's most outspoken concerns regarding totalitarianism, colonial practices and gender. This thesis advances recent efforts made in Blixen scholarship (Stecher 2014, Kastbjerg 2013, Bunch 2017) to re-evaluate Blixen's less canonical works – such as her essays, GV/AA and some of her posthumously published writings.

By contrast to previous analysis of this novel, this thesis emphasizes the connections between GV/AA and Blixen's other work, as well as providing an inclusive study of GV/AA which considers it as a text inextricably connected to the historical context in which it was written. Chapter 1 explores the existing scholarship on GV/AA in order to establish developments in the critical assessment of the novel. Chapter 2 examines the historical context of production of the novel, as well as its publication history in Denmark, United Kingdom and United States, drawing from largely unpublished archival materials, and questioning the assumption of it as a minor text in Blixen's authorship. In Chapter 3 a study of GV/AA's immediate reception aims to answer the questions of why and how this text was so specifically linked to the occupation and post-war circumstances and culture. Chapter 4 traces Blixen's familiar storytelling techniques, examining both the similarities with and departures from Blixen's habitual storytelling style. By contrast, in Chapter 5, by comparing GV/AA to some of Blixen's other texts, this thesis will provide an unprecedented examination of how GV/AA re-elaborates some of Blixen's usual themes, as well as giving voice to some of her most outspoken concerns on the great themes of her century. Finally, in Chapter 6, the close reading of the novel as a gothic text will demonstrate how gothic is the genre that best translates Blixen's conception of life as a dynamic interplay, as opposed to a social system of binary oppositions.

Lay Summary

The aim of this thesis is to challenge *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* (GV/AA) marginalisation in Karen Blixen's work by offering a detailed reassessment of this text. This thesis explores the novel's conception, reception and context; analyses the novel as a Gothic text; and traces selected connections to Blixen's other work. As opposed to the traditional critical reception of this novel as a minor text in Blixen's production, this thesis argues that GV/AA was a text that, by allegorically problematising the Nazi occupation of Denmark, also expressed some of Blixen's most outspoken concerns regarding the most challenging social and historical happenings of her century. This thesis advances recent efforts made in Blixen scholarship to re-evaluate Blixen's less canonical works – such as her essays, GV/AA and some of her posthumously published writings.

In contrast with previous analysis of this novel, this thesis emphasizes the connections between GV/AA and Blixen's other works, as well as providing an inclusive study of GV/AA which considers it as a text inextricably connected to the historical context in which it was written. Chapter 1 explores the existing scholarship on GV/AA in order to establish developments in the critical assessment of the novel. Chapter 2 examines the historical context of production of the novel, as well as its publication history in Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States, drawing from largely unpublished archival materials and by questioning the assumption that it as a minor text in Blixen's authorship. In Chapter 3 a study of GV/AA's immediate reception aims to answer the questions of why and how this text was so specifically linked to the occupation and post-war circumstances and culture. Chapter 4 traces Blixen's familiar storytelling techniques, examining both the similarities with and departures from Blixen's habitual storytelling style. Chapter 5 subsequently compares GV/AA to a selection of Blixen's other texts. This thesis serves as an unprecedented examination of how GV/AA re-elaborates some of Blixen's common themes, as well as giving a voice to some of her most open concerns on the great themes of her century. Finally, in Chapter 6, a close reading of the novel as a gothic text demonstrates how gothic is the genre that best translates Blixen's conception of life as a dynamic interplay, as opposed to a social system of binary oppositions.

To my parents, and to Ciaràn.

With love and gratitude.

[...] Leggere racconti significa fare un gioco attraverso il quale si impara a dar senso alla immensità delle cose che sono accadute e accadono e accadranno nel mondo reale. Leggendo romanzi sfuggiamo all'angoscia che ci coglie quando cerchiamo di dire qualcosa di vero sul mondo reale. Questa è la funzione terapeutica della narrativa e la ragione per cui gli uomini, dagli inizi dell'umanità, raccontano storie. Che è poi la funzione dei miti: dar forma al disordine dell'esperienza.

[Reading stories means to play a game through which we learn to give meaning to the immensity of the things that have happened, are happening, and will happen in the real world. While reading novels we escape the anxiety that strikes us when we attempt to say something true about the real world. This is the therapeutic function of narrative and the reason why men, since the start of humanity, tell stories. Which is then the function of myths: to give shape to the chaos of existence].¹

¹ Eco, Umberto, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi* (Milano: Bompiani, 2011), p. 107, my translation.

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List of abbreviations and *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* plot summary

List of abbreviations for Karen Blixen's works:

GV: *Gengældelsens Veje*

AA: *The Angelic Avengers*

WT: *Winter's Tales*

VE: *Vinter Eventyr*

SGT: *Seven Gothic Tales*

SFF: *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*

LT: *Last Tales*

SE: *Sidste Eventyr*

SA: *Skæbne Anekdoter*

AOD: *Anecdotes of Destiny*

OOA: *Out of Africa*

DAF: *Den Afrikanske Farm*

System of referencing for the correspondence in Karen Blixen Archive:

KBA: Karen Blixen Arkiv

kps: Kapsule (folder)

BtHu: Letter from Blixen to Huntington

HutB: Letter from Huntington to Blixen

BtHa: Letter from Blixen to Haas

HatB: Letter from Blixen to Haas

(so for example a letter would be BtHu,12/2/47, kps53, KBA).

GV/AA Plot summary

GV/AA is an engaging novel, full of intertwined stories and themes. Set in 1840 between England and France, it tells the story of two young women, Lucan Bellenden and Zosine Tabbornor. Lucan is the orphan daughter of a scientist, and Zosine is the heiress of a big

merchant family. The story opens with Lucan flight from her governess position, following her employer, Mr Armworthy, request to become his mistress. Lucan seeks refuge in Tortuga, which is the family home of her friend Zosine. Although the two girls were at boarding school together, they had not seen each other since they both left. Zosine lives in Tortuga with her father Mr Tabbernor and her old nurse Olympia. Lucan arrives in the middle of the preparation of a big ball in honour of Zosine's birthday, which is also a ploy to allow Zosine's father, Mr Tabbernor, to escape from his creditors, as his fortune is now ruined. At the end of the party, Zosine and Lucan find themselves completely alone, and decide to move to London to find an occupation. Here, through an employment agency, they first encounter Mr Pennhallow and his wife. Mr Pennhallow tells the girls that he is a reverend who hosts young girls in need of shelter in his house, after having lost his own child many years before. The girls agree to his proposal and together they travel to France, where the Reverend and his wife have an idyllic pink house called Saint Barbe in the countryside. During their stay Zosine and Lucan are taught by Mr Pennhallow in classical studies, and develop a strong admiration for their teacher. Zosine develops a friendship with Thesèe, a stable boy from the nearby aristocratic manor of Joliet, and Lucan falls in love with Noel, one of Pennhallow's old pupils who comes to visit St Barbe. Noel, however, is engaged to marry, and Lucan mistakenly believes him to be in love with Zosine, and resigns herself to an unrequited love after he leaves to get back to England. After an unsettling conversation with Clon, the boy who helps Saint Barbe's housekeeper Baptistine, Lucan starts to feel that something in Saint Barbe is not as idyllic as it seems. This feeling is enhanced by a visit from Mr Tinchebrai, a policeman, and the judge of Lunel - the nearest town to St Barbe. The judge accuses Mr Pennhallow of trafficking young women. The Reverend's defence is further reinforced by Zosine fiery protective speech for her admired teacher. During the night, however, Zosine realises that the judge's accusations were real, and her suspicion gets confirmed by Lucan's discovery of a letter addressed to the Reverend which describes the assassination of Rosa, one of the girls who was staying at St Barbe before Lucan and Zosine. From the letter, Zosine and Lucan discover that Rosa was killed because she had burned her face with a candle, rather than being sold as a sexual slave. After the dreadful realization, Lucan and Zosine choose to remain at St Barbe, with the purpose of avenging Rosa, while pretending that nothing has changed with their foster parents. The Pennhallows, however, know that they have been found out. They leave St Barbe, and Zosine and Lucan believe that they are

now free to escape. However, after the policeman Mr Tinchebrai comes to visit, they realise that even he is involved in this game of deception and in the trafficking activities, and that the Pennhallows are actually planning to kill them. When they think that all is lost, Olympia, Zosine's old nurse, appears to rescue the girls. Finally Mr Pennhallow comes back to St Barbe for the last confrontation. But when Olympia and Zosine are ready to kill him, Lucan instead begs them to show mercy and let him live. Rather than being saved by Lucan's mercy, Mr Pennhallow chooses to kill himself with the same rope that he had prepared for Lucan and Zosine. The three women leave St Barbe and find shelter in Joliet, where it is revealed that the lady of the house, Madame de Valfonds, is Zosine's grandmother's cousin, and that Thesèe is the heir of the house. At the same time, Lucan finds out that Noel has broken his engagement and wants to marry her. The novel ends with Zosine and Lucan marrying their respective prince charming on the same day.

Introduction:

The case for Pierre Andrézel, or why it matters to reassess *Gengældensens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*

'Oh, that's my illegitimate child!' ¹

Over the last half century Karen Blixen has become one of the most popular Danish authors in world literature. Between 1934 and 1961, under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen, she published four collections of tales, a memoir, a novel, and a collection of essays.² A Danish woman writing in English under a male pseudonym, Karen Blixen's work has proven to be a fruitful field of observations for literary criticism since her debut as a published author. Her canonical works – namely, her collection of tales – have been analysed and dissected under several different critical theories, such as feminist, psychoanalytical, and postcolonial.³

Furthermore, the film adaptation of her memoir *Den Afrikanske Farm/Out of Africa* by Sydney Pollack in 1985,⁴ has contributed to widen Karen Blixen's readership, as well as increasing the interest in her life. In Denmark in recent years, this biographical interest has also been enhanced by the historical biographies on several members of the Dinesen family written by Tom Buk-Swienty.⁵ Despite the everlasting attention to Karen Blixen's work and biography, *Gengældensens Veje /The Angelic Avengers* (GV/AA), her only novel and

¹ Karen Blixen referring to GV/AA in the interview with the *Paris Review* in 1956 where she acknowledged its authorship. Walter, Eugene 'Isak Dinesen, The Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review*, Autumn 1956, No.14, Web source: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4911/the-art-of-fiction-no-14-isak-dinesen>

² *Seven Gothic Tales/Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (Random House: 1934, Gyldendal: 1935); *Out of Africa/Den Afrikanske Farm* (Putnam: 1937, Gyldendal: 1937); *Winter's Tales/Vinter Eventyr* (Random House: 1942, Gyldendal: 1942); *Gengældensens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* (Gyldendal: 1944, Random House: 1947); *Last Tales/Sidste Fortællinger* (Random House: 1957/ Gyldendal: 1957); *Anecdotes of Destiny/Skabne Anekdoter* (Random House: 1958/Gyldendal: 1958); *Skjygger paa Græsset/Shadows on the Grass* (Gyldendal: 1960, Random House: 1961).

³ See for example: Stambaugh, Sarah, *The Witch and the Goddess in the stories of Isak Dinesen: a Feminist Reading* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1998), Juhl, Marianne and Jørgensen Bo Hakon, *Dianas Havn* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1981), and Stecher, Marianne, *The Creative Dialectic in Karen Blixen's Essays: on Gender, Nazi Germany, and Colonial Desire* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2014).

⁴ *Out of Africa*, dir. by Sydney Pollack (Universal Pictures, 1985).

⁵ See Tom Buk-Swienty's *Kaptajn Dinesen, Ild og Blod* (Gyldendal, 2013), *Kaptajn Dinesen, Til Døden os Skiller* (Gyldendal, 2014), and *Tommy og Tanne* (Gyldendal, 2016).

her most widely sold text, still remains the least studied.⁶ Several factors have contributed to its marginalisation in the traditional corpus of Blixen's work, the most striking being her refusal to acknowledge the authorship for twelve years after its initial publication. Although some original analysis of GV/AA has appeared in the literary criticism of Blixen's work,⁷ an inclusive and extensive study of this text has never emerged before.

The aim of this thesis is to challenge GV/AA's marginalisation in Karen Blixen's work, by offering a comprehensive and multidimensional reassessment of this text. Karen Blixen will be considered in her role as the novelist Pierre Andrézel, as opposed to her traditional definition of Isak Dinesen the storyteller. This study explores the novel's conception, reception and context, analyses the novel as a Gothic text, and traces some of its intertextual connections to Blixen's other work. As opposed to the traditional critical reception of this novel as a minor text in Blixen's production, this thesis argues that GV/AA was a text that, by allegorically problematizing the Nazi occupation of Denmark, also expressed some of Blixen's most outspoken concerns regarding totalitarianism, colonial practices and gender.

What is *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*?

Gengældelsens Veje was first published in Denmark by Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag (Gyldendal) on the 2nd of September 1944, and after the war – once the communication with the Allied countries was open again – the book was published in 1947, in England by Putnam and in the US by Random House with the title of *The Angelic Avengers*. These were Karen Blixen's usual publishing houses with whom she was normally published under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen. However GV and AA were published under the unprecedented pseudonym of Pierre Andrézel. Karen Blixen eventually publicly admitted the authorship of the book in 1956, when Eugene Walter interviewed her in Rome for the *Paris Review*.

When GV was first published in Denmark in 1944, despite the challenges faced by the Danish publishing industry during the Nazis' occupation, such as censorship, paper

⁶ In her article 'Genskrivningens Veje – Karen Blixen og massekulturens skabeloner' in *Kultur, identitet og kommunikation*, ed. Hans Jørn Nielsen (Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1988), pp. 71-90, Gunhild Agger notes that: 'romanen *Gengældelsens Veje*, der nok er blandt de mest udbredte, genoptrykte og læste, men sjældnest analyserede i Karen Blixens forfatterskab [the novel GV, which is probably one of the most widely diffused, reprinted and read, but rarely analyzed in Karen Blixen's writing], p. 77.

⁷ See Chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of the previous scholarship on GV/AA.

shortage and general financial difficulties, in the space of three months it sold the remarkable number of 15,594 copies.⁸ Considering the challenging historical circumstances, this allows the text to be considered as a wartime bestseller. In the immediate aftermath of the war in the UK and US, Blixen's other two main countries of publication, AA also sold considerably well.⁹ However, after its initial exploit, the sales of the book dropped quite dramatically, and so did the readers' interest. GV/AA is not only Karen Blixen's only novel, it is also the only published text that she wrote in Danish first and then translated into English. This meant subverting the writing routine that had so far characterized her authorial choices. This thesis investigates the connections between the historical context of production of the novel and the development of its themes. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the impact of the different pseudonym and of the choice of a different literary form on Karen Blixen's authorship.

GV/AA is a pastiche of gothic, romance and sentimental novel, set in England and France in 1840. It tells the story of Lucan and Zosine, two young women who due to a series of unfortunate events, end up in the grip of the evil Reverend Pennhallow. As the story unfolds the reader gets dragged into a universe of deceptions, female slavery and darkness. GV/AA differs from Blixen's other work, and at the same time it uses some of the same themes, narrative strategies and techniques. As a result, when compared to her other texts, GV/AA allows us to read some of Blixen's recurring themes – such as women's position, colonialism, political and religious fanaticism – from a different, and refreshing, perspective. As the book was published under a different pseudonym than her usual one of Isak Dinesen, it can also be argued that this allowed her a safer and further level of distancing, and freedom, to develop some of her most outspoken opinions. It also gave her enough space to experiment with genres and forms, such as the novel, that were not her signature style.

Thesis structure and critical approaches

In order to reassess GV/AA, this thesis proposes a variety of approaches to the text, ranging from an exploration of its cultural context of publication, to a study of its

⁸ From the document sent from Gyldendal to Blixen listing the sales of GV/AA, titled "Trykkerisæddel" [Printing list], 28/10/1944, kps 54, KBA.

⁹ See Chapter 2.

intertextual relationship to Blixen's other texts, and concluding with a close reading of the novel as a gothic text. Although each chapter provides a different analysis, exploring the novel from a range of perspectives, the common thread throughout the whole thesis is the acknowledgement of GV/AA as a unique case in Blixen's literary production. This thesis offers an unprecedented study of this text, analysing unpublished archive materials which document the publication history of this text, as well as an original intertextual analysis of GV/AA compared to Blixen's other more canonical texts. For the analysis of the text as a gothic novel, I was inspired from Kristine Kastbjerg's thesis on Danish gothic,¹⁰ which has been the first academic treatment of GV/AA as the most proper gothic novel in the Danish literary context.

The field of literary criticism on Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen is ample, lively and continuously expanding, and in the course of this thesis I have referred to the most established and traditional critical works – such as the works by Robert Langbaum,¹¹ Hans Brix,¹² Judith Thurman,¹³ Marianne Juhl,¹⁴ and Else Brundbjerg.¹⁵ However, for the specific purpose of this study – especially regarding the focus on the dynamic dialectic in Blixen's prose writing and her subversive views of the pillars of Western society – I have referred to Marianne Stecher's most recent monograph *The Creative Dialect in Karen Blixen's Essays*,¹⁶ and to Mads Bunch's *Isak Dinesen reading Søren Kierkegaard: on Christianity, seduction, gender, and repetition*.¹⁷

The historical focus of this thesis is narrowed to the creation, publication and immediate reception of the book – thus from 1940 to 1948 – in Denmark, Britain and America. For the purpose of my analysis, those three countries have been chosen because of their importance in Karen Blixen's publication history. The geographical limit allows this study to focus on the countries that were Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen's biggest countries of publication, and thus the ones that showed the most significant changes in the reception of her books.

¹⁰ Kastbjerg, Kristine, 'Reading the Surface: The Danish Gothic of B.S. Ingemann, H.C. Andersen, Karen Blixen and Beyond' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 2013).

¹¹ Langbaum, Robert, *Isak Dinesen's art, The Gayety of a Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

¹² Brix, Hans, *Karen Blixen's eventyr* (København: Gyldendal, 1944).

¹³ Thurman, Judith, *Isak Dinesen, the Life of a Storyteller* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

¹⁴ Juhl, Marianne and Jørgensen Bo Hakon, *Dianas Havn* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1981).

¹⁵ Brundbjerg, Else, *Kvinden, Kæfteren, Kunstneren, Karen Blixen* (Charlottelund: KnowWare, 1985).

¹⁶ Stecher, Marianne, *The Creative Dialect in Karen Blixen's Essays* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Bunch, Mads, *Isak Dinesen Reading Søren Kierkegaard: on Christianity, Seduction, Gender, and Repetition* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017).

The bilingual nature of Karen Blixen's authorship necessarily requires that both versions of the text are analysed at the same time., but in order not to disrupt the reading flow of this thesis, the English version can be found in footnote.¹⁸ As Poul Berhendt has noted in his work,¹⁹ often when re-writing her texts in Danish, Blixen would slightly adapt and change them to her receiving audience. For example, compared to *Winter Tales*, *Vinter Eventyr* (1942) contains more specifically Danish/Scandinavian cultural references.²⁰ As opposed to Blixen's other works, the case of GV/AA is unique in her writing routine, as the process of self-translation and re-writing goes in the opposite direction from her usual one. When comparing the two versions, the text is almost identical, with some small exceptions that will be signposted throughout the thesis. This study uses Gyldendal & Det Danske Sprog og Litteraturselskab's new critical edition of *Gengældelsens Veje* (2013), and the Penguin Modern Classic edition of *The Angelic Avengers*.

The circumstances of the occupation, such as censorship and the difficulties in travelling abroad, made it difficult to publish anything via her usual publishing houses (Random House and Putnam).²¹ Therefore, GV/AA can truly be considered as the only book she wrote with primarily a Danish audience in mind. It was a text inescapably connected to its historical context, the Nazi occupation of Denmark, and this explained its temporary success as well as its decline in popularity in the following years. GV/AA takes from the war and the occupation the oppressive atmosphere of entrapment, and translates it into a gothic tale of darkness: 'den [...] udviklede sig – under Forholdene vel uundgaaeligt – til en Gyser',²² explained Blixen herself. Most of all, GV/AA re-elaborates in writing the trauma of having witnessed a totalitarian state during Blixen's visit to Nazi Berlin. It warns the audience of the danger of totalitarianism and of the disrespect for human life, allegorically represented in Zosine and Lucan's story of women's slavery and commodification.

¹⁸ I provide my own translations in square brackets where no published English version of a text is available.

¹⁹ See for example 'Efterskrift' in Blixen, Karen, *Vinter Eventyr* (København: Gyldendal & Det Danske Sprog og Litteraturselskab, 2010), pp. 403-464.

²⁰ See Chapter 2, specifically the section 'Life under the occupation'.

²¹ See chapter 2 for an extensive analysis of the publication history of GV/AA.

²² Blixen, Karen, *Skygger paa Græsset* (København: Gyldendal, 1960), p. 111; 'as was probably inevitable under the circumstances – developed into a tale of darkness' *Shadows on the Grass* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 131.

The place of *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* in Blixen's scholarship

Chapter 1 of this thesis seeks to examine GV/AA's position within Karen Blixen's canonical works through a chronological study of the critical attention this text has received over the years. Much of GV/AA's early scholarly reception has been influenced by Karen Blixen's own dismissal of the text, as a book written merely for fun,²³ to entertain herself during the dark years of the occupation. This has led some of Blixen's traditional scholars, such as Robert Langbaum, to consider GV/AA as a book 'with no literary quality'²⁴ reinforcing the idea of it as the black sheep in Blixen's literary career, since it appeared to be perilously close to mainstream or perceived low-brow genres of fiction, such as the gothic novel.

However, a different branch of scholars from the late 1940s until the 1980s – such as Hans Brix, Harald Mogensen and Gunhild Agger – established GV/AA's relevance exactly for its treatment and subversion of those genres traditionally considered as mainstream, understanding it instead as a text that challenges traditional denominations of literary quality and genres. The feminist re-assessment of Blixen's work started in 1981 by Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen, also contributed to new, thought-provoking readings of all of Blixen's stories, and yet remarkably little attention was devoted to the text that contains some of her most blunt positions regarding women's situation. The scholarly treatment of GV/AA in the debate on Karen Blixen's authorship was relegated to brief mentions, and occasionally footnotes. Only since 2012, with Sune de Souza Schmidt-Madsen's chapter on GV/AA in his *En lille bog om Blixen*, Gyldendal's new critical edition of GV curated by Benedikte Rostbøll, as well Kristine Kastbjerg's thesis, a rising interest has been shown in this text. This chapter's analysis of the existing scholarship will demonstrate the need for a more inclusive study of GV/AA, as well as situating this study within an existing and lively scholarly debate.

²³ In the *Paris Review* interview in which Blixen acknowledged GV/AA, she told Eugene Walter that she wrote the book because 'I wanted so to be amused, to amuse myself' (1956).

²⁴ Langbaum, Robert, *Isak Dinesen's Art, The Gayety of a Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 198.

Exploring the context of production

Chapter 2 contextualises GV/AA within its historical context of publication, as well as within Karen Blixen's authorship. To assess the impact of the historical context on GV/AA, the first part of the chapter analyses the historical circumstances of its creation and publication, starting with the examination of Karen Blixen's trip to Berlin in March 1940, as described in her essay 'Letters from a Land at War'. The examination of this text is pivotal in the understanding of GV/AA as a historical product. The discussion and analysis of 'Letters' is divided between Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 as this text foregrounds the main arguments of this thesis. In Chapter 2 'Letters' is used to understand the historical context of production of GV/AA, while in Chapter 5, which is dedicated to the analysis of the intertextual connection between GV/AA and Blixen's other works, the comparison of GV/AA and 'Letters' will demonstrate that it was the encounter with National Socialism and totalitarianism that allowed Blixen to develop the core themes of GV/AA, such as human commodification and the depiction of gender.

In Chapter 2, further attention is dedicated to the context of Denmark during Nazi occupation, in order to understand not only the immediate reception of GV, but also the influence of historical phenomena such as the Danish Resistance movement, in the process of creation of the novel itself, as well as the difficulties in publishing within a Nazi censored market. A comparison with the authorial intentions behind the creation of Blixen's other war book, *Vinter Eventyr/Winter Tales* (1942), will demonstrate that, although in a different form, it shared with GV/AA the same aim of encouraging the Danish audience during the occupation years. This comparison will underline the continuity of the themes that characterized Blixen's writing during the war, indicating that in spite of its different form, GV/AA belongs to the same authorial intention as the more critically acclaimed *Winter Tales*.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the making of GV in Denmark, and of its translation as AA in the UK and US in the immediate aftermath of the war. This analysis is based on archival material from the Karen Blixen Archive held at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, some of which has never been published before. To establish the publication history of GV/AA, the chapter focuses on the correspondence between Karen Blixen and her solicitor Erik Petri in Denmark, and that between her and her American publisher Robert K. Haas at Random House, as well as her British publisher

Constant Huntigton at Putnam. The study of the correspondence debunks the idea of a book written carelessly and just for fun, as depicted by Blixen herself, and instead demonstrates that she was very devoted to the creation of the text. Especially in the creation of the Anglo-American version, the correspondence shows that she was very involved – occasionally to the point of fastidiousness – in the publication process. Her requests and demands, especially regarding the advertising campaign, the book cover and the title, demonstrates her understanding and awareness of the difference between the various contexts of reception.

The immediate reception of *Gengældsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*

The study of the immediate reception of GV/AA in Denmark, the UK and the US, is the subject of Chapter 3, which aims to understand the influence of the receiving context on the definition of the genre of the text, as well as seeking to understand the function of those genre definitions within each cultural context. The study of the reception draws on reviews published in newspapers and magazine reviews of the time, based on findings from the Karen Blixen archive. The first part of the chapter analyses the so called Andrézel affair, namely the lively debate that characterized the immediate reception of GV in Denmark in 1944. In Denmark most reviewers were concerned with unmasking the mysterious Pierre Andrézel, as well as defining what the text was, and in which literary category it could fit. As we shall see, the interest in the elusive author – as well as its many suggested connections to the well-known figure of Karen Blixen – contributed to the explosive success of the book in Denmark. It was also the need for a literature of escapism and entertainment that fostered its popularity in the context of occupied Denmark. The analysis of the Andrézel affair demonstrates that the Danish reviewers did engage with the author in an active debate which discussed not only the definition of literary genres, but most of all the importance of literature in challenging historical times.

The second part of the chapter examines the reception of AA in the Anglo-American context. Just as in the Danish context, also in the British one the success of the novel could be ascribed to the need for a literature of escapism that characterized the post-war period. Furthermore, the British publishing market was characterized by the revival of Jane Austen and nineteenth-century novels, alongside with a social discourse

on gender roles and policies.²⁵ This cultural context was therefore ideal for the diffusion of AA. In the United States, on the other hand, the success of AA could be ascribed to the increasing popularity of paperback novels.²⁶ In America, AA was marketed by stressing its thriller and crime novel aspects, and thus playing on the attractiveness of genres that were very popular both in literature and films during and after the war. This chapter will show that GV/AA was a text that adapted easily to the context of its early reception, providing encouragement and escape when needed, as well as the possibility of being read as an allegory to elaborate the recent trauma of the war.

Isak versus Pierre

The text's flexibility, or adaptability to its reception context and its audience, are the subject of Chapter 4, which traces in GV/AA, Blixen's familiar storytelling techniques, examining both the similarities with and departures from Blixen's habitual storytelling style. The basis on which Blixen rejected GV/AA was also that in its form, a novel, it disagreed with her vocational writing – storytelling. This chapter will explore Blixen's self-representation as a storyteller – in the figure of Isak Dinesen – comparing it to the ideal storyteller as theorized by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Storyteller'.²⁷ The chapter argues that it is not with the performance of Isak Dinesen the storyteller, but through the enactment of the novelist Pierre Andrézel, that Karen Blixen accomplished the main task required by Benjamin's ideal storyteller – namely that of entertaining and encouraging an audience through a challenging time. A storyteller, in the sense Blixen understood it, and in the way Walter Benjamin theorized it, serves his or her community by providing a story that explains the world through universal themes and characters. This is achieved in GV/AA, through techniques of displacement and distancing. The chapter also investigates the implications of storytelling and unreliable narrations within the context of an occupied country, as well as analysing the characters' employment of storytelling in GV/AA.

²⁵ Plain, Gill, *Literature of the 1940s War, Postwar and Peace* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Smith, Erin A. in Vials, Chris eds *American Literature in Transition, 1940-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁷ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973).

Contextualising *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* in Blixen's work

In Chapter 5, by comparing GV/AA to some of Blixen's other texts, this thesis will provide an unprecedented examination of how GV/AA re-elaborates some of Blixen's common themes, as well as giving voice to some of her concerns on the great themes of her century, such as colonialism, totalitarianism and gender. The first part of the chapter will focus on a comparison between 'Letters from a Land at War' and GV/AA, in order to demonstrate that the story of GV/AA, and especially the theme of human commodification and the treatment of gender, were directly influenced by Blixen's first hand experience of a totalitarian state. It is especially her observation of the *Reichsfrauenbund*, and the idea of the creation of a new womanhood, that echoes in Mr Pennhallow's idea of creating a pure womanhood.

GV/AA develops a discourse on gender that characterizes all of Blixen's writing, and the aim of this chapter is to trace it by comparing significant parts of GV/AA to some of Blixen's most canonical short stories, as well as some of her essays. The last part of the chapter identifies in the character of Olympia the culmination of a critical discourse on colonial practices that characterizes Blixen's production from *Out of Africa* to *Shadows on the Grass*. This chapter seeks to investigate whether Karen Blixen's least critically acclaimed novel can actually be considered as the most inclusive of her views on cultural, historical and social aspects of her century, thus challenging further the idea of a secondary text in Blixen's work.

Reading *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* as gothic

Finally, in Chapter 6, the close reading of the novel as a gothic text will demonstrate how gothic is the mode that best translates Blixen's conception of life as a dynamic interplay, as opposed to a social system of binary oppositions. This reading conveys all the themes discussed in the thesis so far, namely the re-assessment of GV/AA through its contextualisation, reception and intersectional reading into Blixen's historical, cultural and literary context. The chapter analyses the use of gothic in Blixen's writing, and in GV/AA, especially reinforcing the historical context of the production of the text. It seeks to investigate why gothic is the most appropriate genre to express disguised dissent towards the current historical situation of oppression. In GV/AA Blixen employs gothic as a

subversive theoretical tool, inscribing herself into a solid tradition of female gothic writers that had used it for the same purpose.

This thesis positions itself within a wave of Blixen criticism that has sought to re-assess her least canonical texts, such as the work on her essays conducted by Marianne Stecher, which has re-evaluated Karen Blixen's position as an original and subversive thinker. The work of Mads Bunch on the comparison between Blixen and Kierkegaard has further demonstrated Blixen's originality as a modernist intellectual. Hence, it is especially timely now to pursue a re-evaluation of *GV/AA* which reconsolidates the understanding of Karen Blixen as a subversive author, an original thinker, and, against the odds for a writer who represented herself a storyteller, as an accomplished novelist.

Chapter 1:

Situating *Gengældelsens Veje/ The Angelic Avengers* in Blixen's scholarship: a debate on literary quality

Det er ikke nok bare at skrive god litteratur'.¹

Introduction

Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers remains to this day one of Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen's most enigmatic texts. Unusual for its style – the only novel written by an author whose fame was based on her short stories; different for the choice of language – being the only text she wrote in Danish first and then translated into English; and in the aftermath of its publication, debated for its precarious position in the literary canon – suspended in between traditional highbrow and lowbrow literature. The fact that the author herself denied its authorship for several years, and eventually acknowledged it as her 'highly illegitimate child', did certainly not improve its situation in the traditional Blixenian canon. The distance Karen Blixen put between herself and the book is also immediately visible by the choice of Pierre Andrézel – a different and unprecedented pseudonym from her usual and acclaimed Isak Dinesen. Consequently, when approaching the scholarship on Pierre Andrézel, there seems to be two main tendencies. The first one is to loyally agree with Blixen's own judgement of the novel, a trend that has characterized much of the earlier reading of the novel.²

The second trend instead is based on the rejection of Blixen's dismissal, and on the subversion of her statement. Considering the flourishing reviews in the Danish magazines after the publication of GV in 1944, it could even be argued that the scholarship on this novel started as early as that. If a great deal of those reviews focused their attention on discovering the identity of the mysterious Pierre Andrézel, a considerable amount of attention was devoted into classifying the book into a recognizable genre – a discussion that led to question, or establish, its literary value. As

¹[It is not enough to just write good literature (n.b. from here on, all translations in square brackets are my translations)] Agger, Gunhild, 'Genskrivningens Veje – Karen Blixen og massekulturens skabeloner' in *Kultur, identitet og kommunikation*, ed. Hans Jørn Nielsen, Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1988, p. 73.

² Except for Hans Brix's inclusion of GV in his book on Karen Blixen's writing in 1949, as shall be discussed shortly.

will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the initial reception of GV in Denmark represents a truly original reception that distinguishes this book from anything else that Blixen ever published. Despite Blixen's dismissal, GV became a bestseller during the occupation when it was first published in Denmark in 1944, selling 15,594 copies in three months. It benefitted from the same fortune when after the war, it was published in the UK and the US in 1947. However, once the war and its aftermath were over, the sales of the book decreased significantly,³ and so did readers' interest.

Karen Blixen's illegitimate child

The book's negative depiction in the traditional Blixenian canon, and at times its complete removal from it, certainly contributed to its decline. For example, in Gyldendal *Dansk Litteraturhistorie* (first edition 1984) the fairly extensive section dedicated to Karen Blixen's authorship⁴ does not include GV/AA among her works. Exemplary of the first critical inclination in treating GV/AA – namely to agree with Blixen's own dismissal – is its mention in Parmenia Migel's biography *Titania* published in 1967. Migel started working on the book in 1957, while Blixen was still alive and based it upon several interviews with her. As Judith Thurman reports: 'The book was to be obedient to Karen Blixen's own instruction',⁵ and accordingly, and possibly in deference to Blixen, Migel states: 'not even the most ardent admirer of Isak Dinesen can find much praise in this book'.⁶ To reinforce the separation between Pierre Andrézel and Isak Dinesen, Migel writes that 'it is obviously not fair to subject it to the same level of criticism by which one gauges her other books. Tania herself was quite aware of its falling below the lofty standards she set for herself'.⁷ Migel also reports briefly on the genesis of the book – a survival strategy to 'forget the unendurable',⁸ namely the Nazi occupation of Denmark and the country's isolation from the rest of the world, but also reinforces the myth of a book written for fun with an improvised storyline. Quoting Blixen herself she reports 'There were moments of real

³ As shown by the sales documents of Random House and Putnam in kps 51 and 53, KBA. See Chapter 2, pp. 79-81 for a more detailed discussion of GV/AA sales figures.

⁴ Agger, Gunhild et al. *Dansk litteraturhistorie*, 7 vols (København: Gyldendal, 1984), pp. 390-397.

⁵ Thurman, Judith, *Isak Dinesen, the Life of Karen Blixen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 396.

⁶ Migel, Parmenia *Titania, the Biography of Isak Dinesen* (Random House: New York, 1967), pp. 131-132.

⁷ Migel, p. 131.

⁸ *Ibid.*

comedy as this novel progressed',⁹ as the stenographer sent by Gyldendal to help Blixen producing the book would often remark on the incoherence of the plot.¹⁰

The shadow of Blixen's own judgement on GV/AA still influenced the discussion of it in Robert Langbaum's *Isak Dinesen's Art, the Gayety of a Vision* first published in 1964.¹¹ As Parmenia Migel, Langbaum had the opportunity to meet Karen Blixen while she was still alive, and discussed his interpretation of her authorship with her. While his readings of her texts – especially the discussion of Blixen's rediscovery of romanticism in Africa and its impact on much of her writings, to this day remain some of the most interesting interpretation of Karen Blixen, the treatment of GV/AA seems to be still under the influence of Blixen's dismissive approach. Langbaum defines GV/AA as a book 'with no literary value' that nevertheless 'makes good reading'.¹² Despite its lack of quality, Langbaum still finds that the character of the evil Reverend Pennhallow represents one of the most interesting aspects of GV/AA: 'Pennhallow comes off as another one of Isak Dinesen's extraordinarily intelligent characters'¹³ and notes that the dualism of good and evil is treated differently in GV/AA than in Isak Dinesen's other tales. Mr Pennhallow is the main villain of the novel. He is the antagonist of the two main characters, Lucan and Zosine, and he conveys one of Blixen's most complex representation of the dichotomy of good and evil. Both Mr and Mrs Pennhallow represent the schizophrenic effect of religious fanaticism. In the Pastor Pennhallow this is evidently depicted in his double faced personality – his public face is that of a pious reverend, and his private one is that of a people trafficker. The ease with which those two faces coexist in this character is also a representation of Blixen's own beliefs on religions and political fanaticism, namely that any extremes result in the same kind of behaviour, and that good and evil cannot be imposed by institutionalised beliefs, but discerned by human common sense.¹⁴ Significantly, it is none of the Western stereotypical religious or judiciary characters paraded throughout the novel – such as the judge of Lunel, or Father Vadier, or the policeman Tinchebrai – who manages to rescue the girls at the end. It is actually

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'The secretary would arrive in the morning, settle herself rather nervously, and I'd resume dictating: "Then Mr So-and-so entered the room". The poor girl would drop her notes and wring her hands and exclaim: "But you can't do that! You killed him yesterday in chapter twelve!" Blixen qtd. in Migel p. 131.

¹¹ Langbaum, *Robert Isak Dinesen's Art, The gayety of a Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

¹² Langbaum, p. 198.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 for a full discussion on Blixen's debunking of Western Christian ideology.

Olympia, the character who embodies the antithesis to Western patriarchal society.¹⁵ Mogens Pahuus argues that the figure of Mr Pennhallow in GV/AA gives Blixen an opportunity to amply discuss the dichotomy between good and evil: 'Man forstår nu, at bogen sætter et stort spørgsmålstegn ved den ondskab, som skildres. Det betyder naturligvis ikke, at Blixen ikke ser det destruktive i Pennhallows livsholdning. Men hun opfatter ikke ondskab som noget givet, men som noget, der udvikler sig af bestemte grunde'.¹⁶ In the context of the war, the occupation and the resistance movement, this was a very relevant discussion. Langaum also reports that Robert Gorham Davis wrote a review of AA in the *New York Times Book Review* (January 5, 1947) where he pointed out how the book was a political allegory of Denmark under the occupation:

The Danish title would bear, therefore, on the question of retribution for Germany, and the novel might be an answer to the revanchist play, *Niels Ebbesen*, written by the Danish resistance fighter Kaj Munk in 1943. Zosine wants justice, which means the worst possible punishment, for Pennhallow. But Lucan, who speaks for Isak Dinesen, wants mercy. Isak Dinesen intimated to me that she had some such allegorical intention as this.¹⁷

This last sentence, and the implication that Blixen wanted the text to be interpreted as an allegory, would seem to conflict with Migel's report, who had written that 'such had never been her purpose'.¹⁸ The reading of the text as a war allegory was immediately suggested by Constant Huntington, Karen Blixen's British publisher, but strongly discouraged by Blixen – as we shall see in the second chapter of this thesis (in the part dealing with the making of the book). It seems however, that this reading remained attached to the text well into the seventies – in the 1970 edition of *The Longman Companion to Twentieth Century Literature*, *The Angelic Avengers* is defined as 'a symbolic satire of the invaders'.¹⁹

¹⁵ This character will be thoroughly analysed in Chapter 5 and 6.

¹⁶ Pahuus, Mogens, *Karen Blixens livsfilosofi* (Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1995), p. 164, [It is now understandable that the book questions the evil that it depicts. Of course that does not mean that Blixen does not see the destructive in Pennhallow's attitude to life. But she does not see evil as something given, but rather as something that develops for definite reasons].

¹⁷ Langaum, p. 199.

¹⁸ Migel, p. 131.

¹⁹ Ward, A.C., *Longman Companion to Twentieth Century Literature* (London: Longman, 1970), p. 75.

Judith Thurman, in her detailed and hugely popular biography *Isak Dinesen, The Life of a Storyteller* seems to disagree with this interpretation: ‘Several critics did her the honor of discerning a political allegory in it’²⁰ and considers instead the book to be ‘refreshingly silly’.²¹ Thurman also reinforces the idea of GV/AA as book intended for pure entertainment: ‘It was never intended to be a work of literature, but just to give its author ‘a little fun’.’²² Migel, Langbaum and Thurman were all instrumental in establishing Karen Blixen as a recognized author, and their depiction of Blixen contributed to creating the Isak Dinesen myth that characterized much of her reception in the Anglo-American audience.²³ In the creation of this myth, it was essential to portray Karen Blixen as a sophisticated, intellectual figure belonging to a mythical aristocratic past. Pierre Andrézel and his book written just for fun, did not fit well in the picture of highbrow sophistication. However, not everyone agreed with Blixen’s imposition, and even before the establishment of the Isak Dinesen myth, GV/AA had been considered as worthy of critical attention.

Hans Brix, early subverter of the Blixenian canon

In 1949, when Karen Blixen still firmly denied the authorship of GV, Hans Brix, a reputable and authoritative voice in the Danish literary academia, published *Karen Blixen’s Eventyr*²⁴ the first critical monograph on her work. Slightly provocative, the book’s subtitle was ‘Med en excursus on Pierre Andrézel’ [with an excursus on Pierre Andrézel]. Already in 1944 Brix had participated to the ‘Andrézel affair’ debate and published a review of the book in *Berlingske Tidende*²⁵ where he had taken for granted that Blixen was the pen behind Andrézel and that the reason why she had chosen the pseudonym was to be linked to the whole theme of the book – a playful pastiche built on a long literary tradition of masks and pseudonyms. To include Pierre Andrézel in his book meant that Brix considered GV worthy of belonging to the Blixenian canon, and his was the first critical analysis of the book ever to appear. Brix conducts a thorough textual analysis in order to demonstrate that the style is unmistakably Blixen’s, and brings as examples the use of pauses in

²⁰ Thurman, p. 352.

²¹ Thurman, p. 351

²² Ibid.

²³ The concept of the Isak Dinesen myth will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

²⁴ Brix, Hans, *Karen Blixen’s Eventyr* (København: Gyldendal, 1944).

²⁵ Hans Brix ‘Usædvanlig dansk Roman’ i *Berlingske Tidende*, 3 oktober 1944.

dialogues to create suspense – which he defines as a typical Blixenian trait – or the use of the moonlight to set the atmosphere for the romantic scenes.

Brix classifies the novel as a ‘Gyser’ (horror novel) a ‘Mysterie’ (mystery) and a ‘Kriminalroman’ (crime novel),²⁶ and as opposed to other reviewers of GV, he does not imply a judgement on the literary quality of the book when suggesting his genre classifications, but rather explains them in the context of the occupation circumstances. He ascribes GV’s remarkable selling success in 1944 to the ‘boghungrig Tid’ (a book hungry time)²⁷ and also suggests that the content of the book – a battle between good and evil – under the war situation amplified its relevance. The contextualisation of the book, which is perhaps the most insightful trait of Brix’s analysis, also brings him to consider the text as a possible allegory of the war situation – Hitler’s Germany being symbolized by Pennhallow and the opposing forces being impersonated by Lucan and Zosine, England and France respectively. Brix suggests that ‘Bogens Evangelium’ (the book’s gospel)²⁸ and the author’s message, is to be found in Lucan’s solution – to have mercy. Since such an allegorical reading could have been easily and widely spotted in the context of the occupation, Brix underlines that the pseudonym was then chosen to provide the author with some protection. After Brix’s original study, it would take another thirty-five years before other scholars would venture to include GV/AA among their literary criticism on Karen Blixen’s work.

Gengældelsens Veje, genre and popular culture

Perhaps inspired by Brix’s treatment, two other Danish scholars, Harald Mogensen and Gunhild Agger, explored GV and produced two perceptive analyses of it in the context of popular and mainstream culture. In 1983, Harald Mogensen – a pioneer in the study of the Danish crime fiction tradition – included Pierre Andrézel in his anthology *Mord og Mysterier, Den Danske Krimis Historie*.²⁹ Mogensen’s inclusion suggested his chosen genre classification of the text, but also legitimated GV’s presence in the Danish literary canon. The appearance of GV in a text like this reinforces the idea that will be further discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, that the perception of the text changed according to the

²⁶ Brix, p. 232.

²⁷ Brix, p. 233

²⁸ Brix, p. 251

²⁹ Mogensen, Harald, *Mord og Mysterier, Den danske krimis historie* (Århus: Centrum, 1983), pp. 82-90.

reception context – in this case Denmark in the eighties. This was a time that saw a revival of Karen Blixen, in popular culture – mainly due to Sydney Pollack’s semi-biographical movie *Out of Africa* (1985), and at the same time literary criticism was experiencing a gradual legitimization of genres that had otherwise been excluded from the canon as too low-brow – such as crime fiction. Accordingly, Mogensen writes that ‘Litteraturhistorien oplyser os beredvilligt om, at Karen Blixen (1885-1962) også lod sig inspirere af ‘mindre lødige’ forfattere’.³⁰

Mogensen plays with the dichotomy of crime-fiction as the low-brow genre par excellence and Blixen’s self-representation as the incarnation of the ‘high-brow author’, who descending from her pedestal ventures into the forbidden territory of popular culture. And in GV, as Mogensen notes, she widely uses all the most audience appealing tricks and strategies, borrowed from the most successful mainstream genres such as horror, romance and thriller. It is relevant to observe here that when disputing with Robert Haas, her American editor who wanted the ending of *The Angelic Avengers* to be edited to make it more of a proper mystery story, Blixen justified her refusal to edit the ending of the book by explaining that she did not intend the story to be ‘an orthodox crime novel, where the whole plot finishes with the discovery or punishment of the murdered. I see it more as a kind of ‘hold-all’, where romance, crime, and idyll are all blended’.³¹ This would suggest that pastiche in GV is the intentional main feature of the text, and Mogensen notes that the inspiration for the text comes from both extremes of high and low brow literature, having drawn topics and themes from ‘Biblen, Shakespeare, verdenhistorien og Odysseen’.³² Despite its inclusion in an anthology on crime fiction, Mogensen underlines that the main inspiration of GV is the gothic genre, but this does not affect the legitimacy of its inclusion in the canon of Danish crime fiction, as the gothic has to be considered as ‘en forløber for krimien med momenter af mystik og opklaring’.³³ To justify the affiliation with a Danish tradition of the genre, Mogensen maintains that the theme of white slavery often appears in Danish crime fiction ‘et emne som ofte dyrkes i vor genre’³⁴ and brings as an example Niels Meyn’s *Den Røde Vampyr* in the series

³⁰ [The history of literature obligingly informs us that even Karen Blixen allowed herself to be inspired by ‘less worthy’ authors] Mogensen, p. 82.

³¹ Karen Blixen to Robert Haas, 8/3/1946, kps 51, KBA.

³² [the Bible, Shakespeare, world history and the *Odyssey*] Mogensen, p. 82.

³³ [a precursor of crime fiction with elements of mystery and detection] Mogensen, p. 82.

³⁴ [a subject that is often discussed in our genre] Mogensen, p. 84.

Gentlemandetektiven, where the story is about young girls being sold in South-American brothels.³⁵ Interestingly, this series – a perfect example of *kjoske litteratur*³⁶ – was sold between 1942 and 1947, confirming Brix's concept of a 'boghungrig Tid' and demonstrating that there was a flourishing market for that kind of literature and themes.

Mogensen notes that the inclusion of names such as Poe, Stein Riverton and Stevenson on the back cover of the first edition of the book was an intentional strategy to underline the book's affiliation to the tradition of gothic and crime fiction. He also underlines that the initial epigraph in GV informing the reader that the novel is based on a true story found in the French Police Annals, is a technique that had been used previously by writers belonging to the Victorian gothic such as Wilkie Collins or Mary Elizabeth Braddon.³⁷ He suggests that: 'Blixen var belæst i alt dette. Fra sin ungdom var hun er flittig låner i Kvindelig Læseselskabs bibliotek – der fulgte godt med hvad angår nyheder på mystery – crime og detective-feltet'.³⁸ Mogensen also considers the context in which the text was conceived – occupied Denmark, Blixen's uncertain income and debilitating illness – as contributing to the gothic atmosphere of the book which he defines as her 'gotiske mesterstykke [gothic masterpiece]'.³⁹ Even if GV is a text that differs from her other works, mainly because of the style and the choice of language, Mogensen however underlines that it still is a very Blixenian text: 'Inden for den gotiske formular promenerer hun figurer og manøvrer, der i forvejen er kendt fra forfatterskabet. Her afhandles emner, holdninger og følelser, som vi genkender'.⁴⁰

After Mogensen, the discussion of literary quality and popular culture was developed in Gunhild Agger's paper 'Genskrivningens Veje – Karen Blixen og massekulturens skabeloner'.⁴¹ Agger's aim is to understand Blixen's writing, and in particular GV, in the context of popular culture and mainstream literature:

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The term 'kjosklitteratur' as used in *Dansk litteraturhistorie* (Agger, 2000, p. 559) refers to paperback publications, entertaining, mass market literature. See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a more developed discussion on the term.

³⁷ Mogensen, p. 84.

³⁸ [Blixen was well read in all that. Since her youth she had been a diligent borrower at the Women Readers Library that covered very well what was new in the field of mystery, crime and detective fiction] Mogensen, p. 85.

³⁹ Mogensen, p. 86.

⁴⁰ [Within the gothic formula she parades figures and manoeuvres already known by her authorship. Here are discussed issues, attitudes and feelings that we do recognize] Mogensen, p. 86.

⁴¹ Agger, Gunhild, 'Genskrivningens Veje – Karen Blixen og massekulturens skabeloner' in *Kultur, identitet og kommunikation*, ed. Hans Jørn Nielsen (Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1988), pp. 71-90.

En analyse af *Gengældelsens Veje* må kunne give nogle fingerpeg om, hvor grænserne går mellem det 'finkulturelle' og det 'massekulturelle'. For hvor hendes fortællinger, *Den Afrikanske Farm* og *Skygger på græsset* i varierende grad er accepteret inden for begge kredsløb, er der en klar tendens til at udgrænse *Gengældelsens Veje* fra det egentlige, 'seriøse' forfatterskab'.⁴²

Published in 1988, Agger starts her discussion by acknowledging how Karen Blixen 's work benefitted from a revival in the eighties, thanks to Judith Thurman's biography and Sydney Pollock's movie *Out of Africa*. According to Agger, those two productions reinforced the creation of a Karen Blixen myth that would be more accessible to a wider audience⁴³ and that heavily relied on a romanticized stylization of certain aspects of her life, and to support her statement she brings as an example the back cover for the first edition of Thurman's book that stated: 'Myth-spinner and story-teller famous far beyond her native Denmark, Karen Blixen lived much of the Gothic strangeness of her tales... This remarkable biography paints Karen Blixen in all her sibylline beauty and magnetism, conveying the intense delight and terror she inspired and the pain she suffered'.⁴⁴

According to Agger, the eighties were the ideal time to revisit Blixen's authorship – while the previous decades would have been characterized by different ideologies that identified with political and social struggles, the eighties reacted by engaging a more inclusive debate with popular culture and different forms of entertainment.⁴⁵ Agger notes that Blixen's aversion to GV as a text not conforming to her usual highbrow authorship was somehow contradictory to the choices she made during her writing career. Her usual choice of writing and publishing in English, for example, signalled the intention to reach for an audience far wider than the Danish community. This need to reach for an inclusive readership is also demonstrated by her determination to publish some of her tales in various mainstream American magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal* and *Harper's Bazaar*.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the use of the gothic genre, underlines Agger, characterizes many other

⁴² [An analysis of GV should give some clues on where is the line between 'highly cultural' and 'mass cultural'. Because while her tales, *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass* are accepted inside both circuits, there is a clear tendency to exclude GV from the actual 'serious' authorship] Agger, 1988, p. 77.

⁴³ Agger, 1988, p. 72.

⁴⁴ Thurman qtd. in Agger, 1988, p. 72.

⁴⁵ Agger, 1988, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁶ Agger, 1988, p. 72.

authors of mainstream literature – such as Daphne du Maurier, or Barbara Cartland. According to Agger, this is a conscious authorial decision that makes the continuous dialogue with a varied tradition of entertainment literature, the most interesting feature in Blixen's authorship. GV is therefore for Agger the exemplary text to test her theory:

Vi kan også konstatere, at der er et enkelt værk fra hendes hånd, der opfylder alle betingelserne samtidig, nemlig romanen Gengældelsens Veje, der nok er blandt de mest udbredte, genoptrykte og læste, men sjældnest analyserede i Karen Blixens forfatterskab.⁴⁷

To demonstrate GV's affiliation with mainstream entertainment literature, Agger maintains that it fulfils all the requirements stated in Peter Larsen's definition of what makes a bestseller, which he published in an article in the Danish newspaper *Information* in 1982. According to Larsen bestsellers are 'bøger der opstiller utopier,– bøger der fremstiller udbredte fantasier om seksuel og social tilfredsstillelse,– bøger der gennemspiller velkendte konflikter mellem lyst og tvang – men også bøger der bearbejder den herskendte frygt og elendighed'.⁴⁸ Agger also refers to another article on defining bestselling literature by Erik Skyum-Nielsen which reports several features that she considers to be relevant to Blixen's authorship and GV in particular. Skyum-Nielsen writes that a bestseller must establish, through its form, content or style, a conversation with the cultural tradition of entertainment.

Agger underlines how the creation of a bestseller is something that requires a certain expertise: 'Det er ikke nok bare at skrive god litteratur'⁴⁹ – the creation of a bestseller requires the understanding of the audience's expectations, and the ability to fulfil them, as well as a certain control over the production and publication of the text. This last aspect, as we shall see in the chapter of this thesis dedicated to the making of GV/AA, is exemplarily represented in Blixen's relationship with her publishers where, especially for the English and American edition of her book, she actively participated in

⁴⁷ [We can also observe that there is a single work from her hand that meets all the conditions at the same time, namely the novel GV, which is probably one of the most widely diffused, reprinted and read, but rarely analyzed in Karen Blixen's writing] Agger, 1988, p. 77.

⁴⁸ [Books that creates utopias,– books that produce widespread fantasies about sexual and social satisfaction,– books that play well-known conflicts between desire and constriction– but also books that manipulate dominating fears and miseries] Larsen qtd. in Agger, 1988, p. 73.

⁴⁹ [It is not enough to just write good literature] Agger, 1988, p.73.

the editing of the text and in the organization of the advertising campaign. Agger underlines that the reasons why GV has been fairly neglected by scholarship is because Blixen herself denigrated it in the first place– and she suggests that the reason for this conflicting relationship is precisely because the novel ‘på sin vis passer perfekt ind i underholdningslitteraturens main-stream’.⁵⁰ Agger’s analysis traces in GV all the features that show a constant dialogue with a literature of entertainment, and suggests that the appropriation of the same strategies, themes, and features in GV goes hand in hand with the novel’s main theme of duplicity. If GV is based on the constant dualism of light and darkness and on the idea of masking and unmasking, the use of stereotypes borrowed from the tradition of entertainment literature are meant to be considered in the same ambiguous way. On her use of mainstream literary stereotypes in GV, such as romance, suspense or thriller, Agger notes that ‘hun giver dem en lille drejning, pirker lidt til dem, viser dem fra en anden side, igen i stadig dialog med dem: hvad viser de egentlig – og hvad viser de, hvis man ændrer dem lidt?’.⁵¹ Far from considering GV as a secondary text in Blixen’s authorship, Agger maintains that GV ‘diskuterer identitetsproblemer gennem sit maskespil, den diskuterer moralske problemer gennem sit plot og sine modsætninger, og den diskuterer litteraturens eksistensmodus gennem sine stiliseringer’.⁵²

Feminist approaches

The revival of Karen Blixen’s life and work in the eighties also meant that other original readings were applied to her writings. In 1981, Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen published *Dianas havn: to spor i Karen Blixens forfatterskab* where they presented an unprecedented feminist approach to her tales. Although the book omits GV from its discussion, it opened the path to new ways to explore Blixen’s writing. A feminist approach to her writing had previously been discouraged by Blixen’s own alleged distancing from the feminist movement in her essay ‘Oration at a bonfire’⁵³ where she

⁵⁰ [in its way fits perfectly into mainstream entertaining literature] Agger, 1988, p. 88.

⁵¹ [she gives them a little spin, pokes them a little, show them from another side, again in a steady dialogue with them: what do they actually show – and what do they show if you change them a little?] Agger, 1988, p. 87.

⁵² [discusses identity issues through its mask game, it discusses moral problems through its plot and contradictions, and it discusses the existence of literature through its stylizations] Agger, 1988, p. 87.

⁵³ Dinesen, Isak, *Daguerreotypes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

had provocatively stated ‘I am not a feminist’.⁵⁴ This is a misconception that only recently has been debunked by Marianne Stecher in *The Creative Dialect in Karen Blixen’s Essays*. According to Stecher, the infamous statement can be confuted on two levels – firstly by contextualising it in the original Danish transcription: ‘Oration’ was part of a series of Radio programmes that Karen Blixen broadcast in 1953 on Danmarks Radio, the Danish national radio.⁵⁵ ‘I am not a feminist’ is the English translation of ‘Jeg er ikke Kvindesagskvinde’,⁵⁶ and Stecher notes that this refers to the women’s movement that represented the early, suffragette phase of Danish feminism. With this statement Blixen intended to distance herself from that specific phase of feminism, and went on demonstrating in her essay her own thoughts on feminism and gender. Secondly, the statement could be part of Blixen’s dialectic strategy, ‘a rhetorical device intended to win over listeners and readers, rather than a position intended to alienate them by means of reactionary views, as has often been surmised by critics’.⁵⁷ Stecher’s recent study, based on Blixen’s less conventional texts, such as her essays, confirms the need in Blixenian studies to rethink and challenge what has constituted the Blixenian canon so far, and the aim of this dissertation is to apply the same principle to GV/AA.

Before Stecher’s systematic revision, however, *Dianas havn* had opened the path to several feminist re-readings of Blixen’s work, especially in American academia. In 1988, Sarah Stambaugh published *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen: A Feminist Reading*.⁵⁸ Stambaugh here defines GV/AA as the ‘allegorical novel she [Blixen] wrote to relieve her feelings during the Nazi occupation of Denmark’⁵⁹ and notes that GV/AA elaborates a fine criticism on the hypocrisy of traditional male views of prostitutes. Despite providing an undoubtedly relevant observation on GV/AA, Stambaugh does not develop her analysis of it on the basis of the text being ‘written carelessly’ and often reversing ‘the imagery Dinesen uses in her serious work’.⁶⁰ In spite of being still influenced by the dichotomy of Blixen’s serious work versus GV/AA, Stambaugh observes that it ‘includes some of Dinesen’s most outspoken statements about the position of women’.⁶¹

⁵⁴ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ Stecher, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Blixen, Karen, *Essays* (Rungstedlundfonden, København: Gyldendal, 1965), p. 73.

⁵⁷ Stecher, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Stambaugh, Sarah, *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen: a feminist reading* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Stambaugh, p. 35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Two years later, Susan Hardy Aiken in *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*⁶² relegates the discussion of GV/AA in a footnote, but nonetheless observes:

Following Dinesen's wry designation of the novel as her 'illegitimate child', critics have tended to dismiss it, but it deserves serious attention for its ground-breaking reading of female sexual slavery as both logical consequence and hyperbolized synecdoche of a phallogocentric order. Connecting the traditions of sentimental bourgeois fiction, the texts of pornography, and the daughter's desire for the father(s), Dinesen anticipates Lynda Zwinger's observations of female masochism.⁶³

Moving from Hardy Aiken's brief but piercing observation, Dag Heede in his *Det Umenneskelige, Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen* underlines the intertextual connections between the treatment of women's commodification in GV and in the 'Somali Women' in *Out of Africa*: "Teksterne kritiserer således ikke først og fremmest den patriarkalske objektgørelse af kvinden, men snarere dens inkonsekvens og for ringe vurdering af kvinden. Dette er grundtema i Gengældelsens Veje, som på forskellige måder tematiserer kvindens pris".⁶⁴ According to Heede, both the use of the theme of white slavery and the controversial happy ending serve the purpose of criticizing the normalization of the trafficking of women on which Victorian society was based.⁶⁵ All these approaches provide challenging and thought provoking observations, but it remains surprising how little attention has been given to a text that could have reinforced the studies on feminism and gender representation in Blixen. However, promising progress on the reassessment of GV/AA has been done in recent years, as we shall see in the next section.

⁶² Hardy Aiken, Susan, *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁶³ Hardy Aiken, footnote nr.1, p. 310.

⁶⁴ [Thus, the texts do not criticize primarily the patriarchal objectification of the woman, but rather its inconsistency and the poor evaluation of the woman. This is the fundamental theme in GV/AA, which in several ways discusses women's price]Heede, Dag, *Det Umenneskelige, Analyser af Seksualitet, Køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2001), p. 135.

⁶⁵ Heede, p. 135.

New perspectives

In 2005, Grethe Rostbøll published *Mod er svaret*,⁶⁶ where she presented a thorough analysis of the correspondence between Karen Blixen and her publishers in the UK and the US. Rostbøll considers the relationship between Blixen and her English and American publishers, Constant Huntington and Robert Haas, pivotal in the development of her authorship, and often to her personal life as well. As already observed by Gunhild Agger, Rostbøll demonstrates through the study of the correspondence that since the start of her writing career Blixen had aimed to be published in mainstream American magazine, and according to Rostbøll this was not purely for financial reasons, but also with the intention of reaching for a wider audience.⁶⁷ *Mod er svaret* includes an entire chapter on the correspondence regarding the English and American edition of *The Angelic Avengers*. Rostbøll discusses the making of AA in UK and US through some extracts of the letters between Blixen, Robert Haas and Constant Huntington. The chapter reports the main events regarding the publishing history of AA in England and America, such as the problems with the royalties given the use of a different pseudonym, and the selection for the Book of the Month Club. Rostbøll seems to focus more on the biographical aspects, such as the personal relationship between Blixen and the publishers, rather than on the function of the correspondence itself in the complex transition of GV to AA and its preparation for the different markets. It provides nevertheless a good starting point for this thesis' discussion of the creation of AA, which aims to offer a more inclusive and contextualised picture of the publication history of the book.

GV earns a whole chapter also in Sune De Souza Schmidt Madsen's *En lille bog om Blixen*,⁶⁸ published in 2012 and meant to serve as an introduction to Karen Blixen's authorship. Madsen considers the book to be an important milestone in Blixen's writing:

Den viser hendes imponerende spændvidde som forfatter – fra den komplekse kunstprosa i *Syv fantastiske fortællinger*, over den sarte menneskelighed i *Den*

⁶⁶ Rostbøll, Grethe, *Mod er svaret: Karen Blixens udgivelser i USA og England* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ Rostbøll, 2005, p. 13.

⁶⁸ De Souza Schmidt-Madsen, Sune, *En lille bog om Blixen* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2012).

afrikanske farm og de ensomme, frostklare *Vinter-eventyr*, til den bredt appellerende romangener. Det er en kæmpebedrift at kunne spænde så vidt.⁶⁹

Madsen observes that GV contradicts Blixen's statement in an interview in 1942, where she had declared that she could never write a novel. Blixen's explanation was that she could only write tales, because her inspiration came from the tradition of storytelling. Madsen comments that, interestingly, GV turned out to be 'en mundlig roman', an oral novel, since she had dictated it entirely to her stenographer: '*Gengældelsens Veje* er derfor noget så sjældent som en fortalt roman!'.⁷⁰ Madsen's theory regarding Blixen's conflictual relationship to the novel is that GV is actually plagiarised. According to Madsen, GV presents many similarities with Daphne Du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn*, for example in both novels the main villain is a priest, and their main antagonists are young women whose place and role in society is not yet defined. Madsen's claims that in pastiching *Jamaica Inn* Blixen would have intended to play an intertextual game with Du Maurier. This would have referred to the accusation of plagiarism Du Maurier received in regard to *Rebecca* from the Brazilian author Carolina Nabuco, who claimed *Rebecca* was copied from her own *A Successora*. Madsen suggests that Blixen might have therefore written GV as a way of retribution towards Du Maurier 'Kan *Gengældelsens Veje* være Blixens gengældelse over for Daphne du Maurier?'.⁷¹

However entertaining this theory could be, it is hard to find a foundation for it. It is more plausible that Blixen was inspired by Du Maurier, and indeed, as Madsen notes, the copy of *Jamaica Inn* at Rungstedlund in Blixen's private library is full of her notes and scribbles. GV is intentionally built as a pastiche of several famous and mainstream novels – such as *Jamaica Inn*, *Jane Eyre*, *Northanger Abbey* and many more. As noted before, the use of pastiche defines its willingness to establish a dialogue with that literary tradition. Madsen concludes his analysis by observing that whatever the reason, GV remained a

⁶⁹ [It shows her impressive range as an author – from the complex artistic prosa in *Seven Gothic Tales*, the delicate humanity in *Out of Africa*, and the frosty *Winter's Tales*, to the widely appealing genre of the novel. It is a huge accomplishment to be able to span so wide] Madsen, p. 110.

⁷⁰[GV is therefore something as unique as a told novel!] Ibid.

⁷¹ [Could GV be Blixens retribution towards Daphne du Maurier?] Madsen, p. 123. See also Chapter 3 of this thesis for more discussion on intertextual similarities between GV/AA and Daphne Du Maurier, pp.113-117.

trauma for Blixen: 'Det er tankevækkende, at der efter *Gengældelsens Veje* skulle gå 13 år, før Isak Dinesen skrev en bog igen'.⁷²

Completed almost at the same time as Madsen's publication, one of the most interesting treatments of GV can be found in Kirstine Kastbjerg doctoral thesis 'Reading the Surface: The Danish Gothic of B.S. Ingemann, H.C. Andersen, Karen Blixen and Beyond'.⁷³ The aim of Kastbjerg's thesis is to establish a proper Danish gothic tradition within the realism prone Danish literature. Kastbjerg underlines that in GV Blixen 'both upholds and dismantles the tradition of the Female Gothic novel'⁷⁴ and presents an analysis of the book that focuses on the idea of masks, and identity performativity. This last concept, recurring in most of Blixen's stories, 'demonstrates the performative, non-essentialist aspect of identity as a set of manipulated codes, props and costumes'.⁷⁵ Kastbjerg also observes that the use of gothic in Blixen 'destabilizes all kind of boundaries, allowing her to critique constructions of masculinity and femininity'.⁷⁶ Together with Agger, Kastbjerg's represent to this date the most interesting analysis of GV.

In 2013, Gyldendal issued a critical edition of GV in the collection of Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, marking, GV's official admission in the Blixenian and Danish literature canon. The edition was curated by Benedikte Rostbøll who also wrote the afterword. Here she presents an overview of the Andrézel affair in order to explore the immediate reception of the novel in Denmark in 1944. The afterwords offers an excellent introduction to the novel, discussing the major themes of masks, genre and war entertainment.⁷⁷ GV/AA has undoubtedly sparked curiosity, a lively interest in its deviations from Karen Blixen's usual norm, and in the possible hidden meanings of its plot and themes. As shown by the recent critical edition, by Sune de Madsen's inclusion of the novel in his *En lille bog om Blixen* and Kastbjerg's PhD thesis on Danish Gothic, there is a rising interest in a work that has not always been the primary choice of Blixen's

⁷² [It is thought-provoking that after GV thirteen years would pass before Isak Dinesen wrote a book again] Madsen, p. 125.

⁷³ Kastbjerg, Kristine, 'Reading the Surface: The Danish Gothic of B.S. Ingemann, H.C. Andersen, Karen Blixen and Beyond' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 2013).

⁷⁴ Kastbjerg, p. 338.

⁷⁵ Kastbjerg, p. 328.

⁷⁶ Kastbjerg, p. 342.

⁷⁷ Benedikte Rostbøll 'Efterskrift' in Blixen, Karen, *Gengældelsens veje* (København: Gyldendal & Det Danske Sprog og Litteraturselskab, 2013).

scholarship. This is possibly also a consequence of the latest trend in Blixen studies, which, as seen with Marianne Stecher's book, has seen a growing attention to Blixen's less conventional works.

Concluding Remarks

The existing scholarship has provided valid and important approaches for the analysis of *GV/AA* that this thesis will develop. It is interesting to notice that while the approaches showed so far have varied in methodologies and perspectives, some elements are a common thread that runs throughout the diversity of approaches. For example, while this text has gained the label of the black sheep in Blixen's production, it seems to have been unavoidable in most cases to compare it to Blixen's other texts in order to show its difference. It is undeniable that this text is different from Blixen's other production, however, the comparison with her other texts also demonstrates that it shares, and develops, the main themes of her most critically acclaimed production, as shown, for example, in Hans Brix's pioneering study. This aspect of continuity and disruption is probably the most challenging and interesting of *GV/AA*, and it will also inform the analysis that this thesis aims to produce. Especially in Chapter 5 of this work, *GV/AA* will be linked to Blixen's other works, both narrative and prose, demonstrating that this text is indeed different, but that it also establishes a lively intertextual dialogue with her previous stories, as well as providing fertile ground for her future essayistic production.

Another common thread in the discussion of *GV/AA* has been to recognize the unique criticism it develops on the position of women, as pointed out by Brantly, Heede, Stambaugh, and most of all, Kastbjerg. It is especially in Kastbjerg's work that this discussion is developed, where she considers gothic as the ideal discourse to establish a criticism of constrictive gender roles in bourgeois society. This analysis will be developed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, with the difference that gothic will be linked to Blixen's own dualistic discourse and view of life. Most importantly, this thesis considers *GV/AA* as inextricably connected to its historical context of production. Interestingly, this is another factor that many analyses of this text seem to have pointed out but never developed further. The historical context, as pointed out in Brix, has been utilised to explain the book's immediate success, linking it to the need for entertainment in a difficult historical time. A contextualisation of *GV/AA* in the historical context of production, as well as in

the context of Blixen's own authorship, will demonstrate that *GV/AA* developed from Blixen's observation of a totalitarian society, as she experienced it in Berlin during her visit in 1940, and in Denmark after the Nazi occupation. The following chapter seeks to explain this further by analysing the historical context of production, as well as the publishing history of the novel. The latter will be informed by an analysis of the correspondence between Blixen and her Danish, British and American publishers.

Chapter 2:

A Wartime Book: The Making of *Gengældelsens Veje* and *The Angelic Avengers*

*'This book was written to provide me myself and my countrymen with a bit of fun in a, to say the least, fun-less time.'*¹

Introduction

At the outbreak of the war in 1939, having established that 'Bevidstheden om Indespærring blev mig uudholdelig',² Karen Blixen managed to obtain a travel grant from three main Scandinavian periodicals³ in order to travel as a correspondent to European countries involved in the war. The episode is described in her essay 'Breve fra et Land i Krig' / 'Letters from a Land at War': 'D.3die September kørte jeg til København, gik op paa "Politiken"s Kontor og bad Redaktør Hasager om at give mig et Arbejde som Journalist, af hvilken Art som helst og hvorsomhelst udenfor Danmark'.⁴

From her own report, it would appear that the trip had happened quickly and spontaneously; however, as Marianne Stecher has underlined in her recent study on Blixen's essayistic production, the truth is that she had been wanting to get more involved in the precarious happenings in Europe since the Italian fascist regime had started its colonial war invading Abyssinia in 1935. She and her solicitor had tried to arrange a trip outside of Denmark several times and through various sources.⁵ Her involvement in the question of the war in Abyssinia was certainly justified by a genuine interest in the fortune of the continent where she had spent almost twenty years; yet another reason for wanting to arrange a visit to the countries affected by the war was also a certain curiosity for meeting Hitler in person.⁶ As controversial as this may sound, as Stecher argues, one must bear in mind that:

¹ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA

² *Essays*, p. 118 / 'the awareness of being confined in Denmark became insufferable' *Daguerrotypes*, p. 89.

³ Danish *Politiken*, Swedish *Bonnier* and Norwegian *Tidens Tegn*. *Essays*, p. 118 / *Daguerrotypes*, p. 89.

⁴ *Essays*, p. 118 / 'On the third of September I drove into Copenhagen, went to the office of the newspaper *Politiken*, and asked the editor, Mr Hasager, to give me an assignment as a journalist of any kind at all in any place outside Denmark' *Daguerrotypes*, p. 89.

⁵ Stecher, p. 100.

⁶ Other Danish authors had been fascinated by Hitler. A good example is Kaj Munk, Danish pastor and poet who was actively involved in the resistance movement under the occupation. At the start of the thirties, Munk was deeply fascinated by the figure of Hitler as a charismatic leader. However, when Nazi

In the summer of 1938, Blixen, like the vast majority, had no premonition of the terrible course which anti-Semitism was to take in Germany [...] Karen Blixen's vague interest in the figure of Hitler was characteristic in a way for the time. The führer aroused curiosity and fascination, he was admired initially by many Europeans and Americans as a reformer.⁷

According to what Blixen reports in 'Letters' the meeting never actually happened:

Hvis jeg havde været virkelig Journalist vilde jeg have modtaget Det Tredje Riges gentagne Tilbud om at se dets store Personligheder Ansigt til Ansigt [...] En enkelt Gang svarede jeg ja, og sendte senere med en Undskyldning Afbud. Noget i Tanken maa have været mig i for høj Grad imod.⁸

Once her travel arrangements were planned, she managed to spend a month in Berlin, arriving on the 1st of March 1940 and returning to Rungstedlund on the 2nd of April 1940, less than a week before Denmark was occupied by Nazi forces. Her initial plan was to continue her journey to Paris and London, but after the 9th of April 1940, for her and the Danish population, travelling around Europe became more difficult than it had been.⁹

Her experience in Berlin under the Nazi regime is reported in 'Breve fra et land i krig'/'Letters from a Land at War', which although written in 1940 during her stay in Germany and intended to be published after her return to Denmark, could only be published in 1948 in the newly founded Danish literary journal *Heretica*. Some scholars, such as Martin Günter,¹⁰ have suggested that 'Letters' was heavily edited before being published in 1948. In his article 'Karen Blixen i Hitlers Berlin' Günter claims that there is a discrepancy between the actual text and how the whole trip was planned, and he

antisemitism became obvious, Munk vigorously distanced himself and spent the years under the occupation preaching against Nazism. He was shot by an SS squad in 1944. See Hæstrup, Jørgen and Kjærsgaard, Erik *Besættelsen 1940-45, Politik, modstand, befrielse* (København: Politikens Forlag, 197, Bindtitel:1)p. 322.

⁷ Stecher, p. 103.

⁸ *Essays*, p. 121/ 'If I had been a real journalist I would have accepted the repeated offers from the Third Reich to allow me to meet some of its great personalities face to face [...] A single time I said yes, but later sent my regrets. The thought must in some way have been too repugnant to me.' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 91.

⁹ Stecher, pp. 100-101.

¹⁰ Martin Günter, 'Karen Blixen i Hitlers Berlin', *Cras: Tidsskrift for kunst og kultur* 42 (1958): 57-72.

considers suspicious the fact that *Politiken* paid the amount due for 'Letters' but never actually published it. However, the suggested discrepancy between the text and the travel itinerary is hard to support when looking at the correspondence between Blixen and her solicitor Erik Petri during her stay in Berlin. In a letter dated 12th March 1940, Blixen writes:

Jeg naaede ikke selv at komme paa Propagandaministeriet, før jeg rejste til Bremen, men de har sat sig i Forbindelse med mig her. Jeg spiste igaar med Dr Patzold fra Propagandaministeriet, og har i dag haft besøg af en anden ung Dr Klein, og af en Dame fra Kvindeforbundet, der har lovet at vise mig, hvad jeg vil se herved, og nu udarbejder et Program for næste Uge for mig. De skaffer mig ligeledes Billetter til Theatre og Koncerter, som ellers siges at være svære at faa, og har stillet sig til min Disposition paa alle Maader.¹¹

The letter does actually list all the activities and trips described in 'Letters', such as the trip to Bremen, the visit to the Women's League, and the itinerary prepared for her by the Propaganda Ministry.

Günter's article does raise interesting questions regarding the authenticity of the published text of 'Letters', however the lack of reference and of actual documentation regarding a hypothetical other version of 'Letters' make it hard to follow his lead. Investigating further into the matter, Stecher disputes Günter's claims by closely examining the three typescripts of 'Letters' held at the Blixen archive in the Royal Library of Copenhagen.¹² Two of the typescripts, dated 1940, consisting of the four short essays that composes 'Letters' – and matching the period Blixen was actually travelling in Germany – are individually paginated, suggesting they were actually intended as individual publications for the Scandinavian periodicals Blixen was travelling for. The third set of typescripts consists of the same text with the four essays paginated together, ready to be

¹¹ Lasson, Frans and Engelbrecht, Tom *Karen Blixen i Danmark, Breve 1931-62* (Gyldendal: København, 1996), pp. 321-322, [I did not manage to get to the Propaganda Ministry myself, before travelling to Bremen, but they have been in touch with me here. Yesterday I ate with Dr Patzold from the Propaganda Ministry, and today I had a visit from another young Dr Klein, and from a Lady from the Women's Federation, who has promised to show me what I have to see here and is now preparing a program for me for next week. They are also getting me tickets for the theater and concerts, that are otherwise hard to get, and they have put themselves at my service in any way].

¹² Stecher, pp. 107-110.

published as a whole in a literary journal. The text in all three typescript matches the one eventually published in *Heretica* in 1948. Although in her introduction to the text published in *Heretica* Blixen claimed that she had forgotten she had ever written her war chronicles,¹³ Stecher notes that the typescripts held at the archive contain pencil annotations that instead suggest that the papers were specifically intended for one of Denmark's leading literary journals – *Frie Ord* (Free Words) after the war. This journal was only published between 1946 and 1948 and discontinued due to the sudden death of one of its main founders Vilhelm Grønbech. While both *Frie Ord* and *Heretica* 'sought to promote a form of cultural debate and opposition to ideological dogmatism',¹⁴ 'Letters' ended up being published in the newly founded *Heretica* as its agenda 'was rooted in a more aristocratic conception of the artist' and more closely matched to Blixen's own art philosophy.¹⁵

The aristocratic social background of Blixen, her Nietzschean inclinations,¹⁶ and the perceived neutrality of 'Letters', might encourage the opinion of her as Nazi sympathizer. This is possibly what Günter suggests in his article, when maintaining that the published text of 'Letters' would be a heavily edited version of another hypothetical one that could have been more Nazi partisan. However, it is not only the lack of proof of such a document that discourages this reading – it is mostly through a close reading of 'Letters' that the attentive reader finds that the text is actually debunking Nazi ideology by demonstrating its ontological faults. 'Letters' do not appear to be so heavily neutral when one reads its criticism towards the grounding concepts of Nazi ideology – such as the concept of will and race. The historical context must also be considered. Since the text was written during Blixen's stay in Berlin and intended for immediate publication, it is very probable that Blixen knew that she was being constantly observed and controlled. Reading the aforementioned letter to her solicitor from Berlin, how enthusiastically she refers to the courtesy she was met with – 'jeg er blevet mødt med en forbavsende Venlighed her' – and the care she takes in showing her eagerness in starting her tour – 'Jeg kan forstaa at her er meget at se, og glæder mig til at komme ind i de forskellige store Foretagender, som jeg hører fra alle Kanter'¹⁷ – one can also argue that she was aware

¹³ Blixen, *Daguerreotypes*, p. 91/*Essays*, p. 120.

¹⁴ Stecher, p. 110.

¹⁵ Stecher, pp. 109-11.

¹⁶ See p.51 of this chapter for more discussion on Nietzsche's thought's influence on Blixen.

¹⁷ Blixen in Lasson, p. 321-322 [I was met with astonishing kindness here]/[I understand that there is much to see here, and I am looking forward to get in to all the various big initiatives, as I hear from all sides].

that even her correspondence would undergo censorship, and therefore was very cautious in what she would write.

As shall be thoroughly demonstrated in Chapter 5, through an inter-textual close reading and comparison of *GV/AA* and 'Letters'- the encounter with National Socialism, and the observations on it as a historic phenomenon, will have a deep impact on the elaboration of *GV/AA*, inspiring its themes, the conceptualisation of gender and the representation of some of the characters. *GV/AA* represents not only a book of emergency, but also a text that, through the mode of gothic storytelling, elaborates the trauma of war, of the occupation, and of the encounter with totalitarianism. To understand the impact of the historical circumstances on *GV/AA*, this chapter will contextualise its creation and publication, as well as situating the text in the chronology of Blixen's authorship. The historical circumstances will therefore be presented alongside with Blixen's own working patterns under the years of occupation, in order to understand the novel as a product of war – by which I mean, a text inspired, influenced and written under difficult circumstances and intended for precisely the audience that lived them. In Blixen's own words this book was written 'to provide myself and my countrymen with a little bit of fun in a fun less time'.¹⁸ The second part of the chapter aims to debunk the perception of *GV/AA* as the black sheep in Karen Blixen's oeuvre, by questioning the concept of 'fun' and by exploring the process of the creation of the text through the correspondence with her publishers in Denmark, the UK and the US. To understand Blixen's position under the occupation, the following part of the chapter will analyse her first encounter with Nazism through introducing the core themes of 'Letters from a Land at War'.

¹⁸ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

Part 1: Situating *Gengældelsens Veje*

The (not too) neutral storyteller and Nazi Germany

The opportunity for Karen Blixen to travel to Nazi Germany had already arisen in 1938, when her English publisher, Constant Huntington, had proposed the idea to her. Karen Blixen was by then widely recognized as Isak Dinesen the storyteller, due to the success of *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) and *Out of Africa* (1937), and Huntington's idea was to have her reporting from what he considered her distinctively neutral perspective: 'the word of a famous neutral author like yourself would carry more weight than anything an English or American observer could say. In fact, you are the ideal author for the purpose'.¹⁹ Although the trip was eventually arranged and funded by the aforementioned Scandinavian periodicals, the role of the apolitical and neutral storyteller suggested by Huntington was the one chosen by Blixen. She writes in the introduction to 'Letters' that when talking with the editor of *Politiken* :

Jeg sagde til Redaktør Hasager at jeg paa ingen Maade af Naturen var Journalist. Jeg havde ingen Indsigt i Politik og ingen politisk flair. Men jeg var et ærligt Menneske, og maaske kunde ogsaa en fordomsfri Lægmands Optegnelser fra en politisk mægtig bevæget Tid engang i Fremtiden faa en Slags Interesse som document humain.²⁰

While very aware of the contemporary historical events, Blixen never aligned herself with current political ideologies – her own idealism is represented in the fictional temporality of her narrative universe. However, her ideals were deeply influenced by the Nietzschean currents that were very popular in Scandinavia in the late nineteenth century, especially as filtered and presented by the Danish influential intellectual Georg Brandes.²¹ As Stecher

¹⁹ HutB, November 29th 1938, in *Karen Blixen i Danmark, Breve 1931-62*, ed. Frans Lasson (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996), vol1, p. 287. See also Stecher, p. 105.

²⁰ *Essays*, p. 119/ 'I told Mr Hasager I was in no way a journalist by disposition. I had no insight into politics and no political flair. But I was an honest person, and perhaps an unprejudiced layman's notes from a politically turbulent time would have in the future a certain interest as a *document humain*' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 89.

²¹ Georg Brandes is one of the most influential figures in Danish cultural history. Through his widely attended lectures in the late 1880s he introduced Nietzsche's philosophy in Scandinavia, underlying especially the concept of 'aristocratic radicalism'. See Asmundsson, Doris R. *Georg Brandes, Aristocratic Radical* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

writes, the concept of living dangerously and the figure of the aristocrat defying bourgeois morality, which constitute a major part of Blixen's writing, can be unmistakably connected to Nietzsche's thought.²²

It is relevant to note that Blixen's own aesthetic ideals regarding the idea of the warrior and the concept of war are openly expressed in GV, where a distinction is made between 'adelig/aristocratic' and 'borgerlige/bourgeois' courage: 'Det ene Slags Mod har den mand, der ikke frygter Døden selv, naar det gælder, hvad han har kært. Den anden Slags Mod er at elske selve Faren'.²³ As shall be demonstrated by the close reading of GV and 'Letters' in Chapter 5, this conceptualization of courage will be informed by Blixen's encounter with Nazi society during her Berlin trip, as well as the situation of Denmark as an occupied country. The link between the figure of the aristocrat and the freedom to express one's own individuality is ever recurring in Blixen's authorship – the aristocrat is not only to be linked to a social class, but mostly symbolises the personality who stays true to its own individuality, no matter what the circumstances, without denying life's necessary dualism or the co-existence of light and darkness. As shall be discussed further in this thesis, GV/AA celebrates the concept of plurality in its structure and characters, and most of all, in its choice of a dualistic gothic discourse, as a reaction to Nazism's degradation of individuality. Similarly, Stecher notes how those concepts 'have direct implications for an understanding of her attitude to Hitler's Germany and her reaction to the Occupation'.²⁴ 'Letters' strives to analyse totalitarianism from an aesthetic and philosophical point of view, and despite its professed neutrality – such as Blixen's explanation 'I had no insight into politics and no political flair' –²⁵ it manages to deliver a subversive criticism of Nazism. Blixen herself wrote in the introduction to the essay published in 1948:

Maaske vil Læserne ogsaa finde at jeg har udstrykt mig urimelig snørklet hvor jeg kunde have talt lige ud. De maa da tage i Betragtning at Brevene er skrevet inden

²² Stecher, pp. 116-7.

²³ GV, p. 168./'The bourgeois courage belongs to the man who, without trembling, will give his life to a cause dear or sacred to him. But the aristocrat loves danger for its own sake' AA, p. 203.

²⁴ Stecher, p. 116.

²⁵ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 89.

Besættelsen. Danmark var dengang endnu neutralt, og der var Hensyn at tage som siden faldt bort.²⁶

This apology to the reader could also express the underlying feeling of unease that she shared with most Danes at the end of the war, as the country's main policy had been that of adapting to the occupiers, rather than staging an active resistance.²⁷

'Breve fra et Land i Krig/Letters from a Land at War' consists of four short essays: 'I. En gammel helt i Bremen'/'I. An Old Hero in Bremen', recounting Blixen's visit to her old friend General Von Lettow-Vorbeck; 'II. Store foretagender i Berlin'/'II. Great Undertakings in Berlin' describing social institutions of National Socialism such as the *Reichsfrauenbund*; 'III. Kraft og glæde'/'III. Strength and Joy' discussing the concept of will in the Reich; and 'IV. Skuepladser'/'IV. The Stage' concluding the essay with a description of the theatre scene under the Reich. 'Letters' does not follow Blixen's journey into the Reich as a chronological report, it is instead structured according to very specific themes. The essays start with a recollection of what Germany used to be, continue with the description of its present state, and conclude with the representation of its form of politically structured entertainment.

The first essay, 'An Old Hero in Bremen', with its discussion about Von Lettow's old battles and war strategy, could initially appear out of place in a collection of essays dedicated to the description of Nazi Germany, however, in the narrative economy of this collection – as generally in all of Blixen's writing – what seems superfluous actually serves a definite function in the overall structure of the text. Blixen reports Von Lettow's war memories: 'Jeg havde det Held [...] at være med i en Krig af den gamle Slags, hvor Modstsnderne kender hinanden af Udseende og ved Navn, og man ved, hvad hver enkelt er i Stand til'.²⁸ It is relevant for the dialogic structure of 'Letters' to report a quote that celebrates people's personal abilities and achievements, before the subsequent essays, where the representation of Nazi society will focus on the regime's attempt to kill people's

²⁶ *Essays*, p. 121/ 'Perhaps my readers will think that I expressed myself with unreasonable indirection, when I could have been straightforward. They must bear in mind that the letters were written before the Occupation. Denmark was then still neutral and there were matters to be taken into account which later disappeared' *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 91-92.

²⁷ Nonetheless, as we shall see, Karen Blixen had been involved in some ways with the resistance movement by lending her house as a refuge to some of its members and, most importantly, by hiding Danish Jewish fugitives before their escape to Sweden.

²⁸ *Essays*, p. 126/'I had the good fortune [...] to be in a war of the old kind, where adversaries knew each other by sight and name, and one knows what each man is able to do' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 96.

individuality. Even more relevant is the fact that this quote comes from a German voice. Throughout the entire essay, Blixen would constantly report the point of view of German people, striving to give a representation that challenged the contemporary perception of them as ‘the enemy’. For example, Blixen would report that during a blackout ‘Det jævne Folk er i Bremen, som overalt i Verden, ubegrænset hjælpsomt. Der var en gammel Drager, som af ren Menneskekærlighed tog sig af mig, vi gik Haand i Haand gennem de mørke Gader’.²⁹

The idea of human solidarity, so crucial in the context of the whole essay and as the leading theme of GV/AA, is reiterated in Blixen’s reflection on Von Lettow’s character: ‘Man træffer jo ikke i sin Levetid paa mange saakaldte store Mænd – de, som jeg personlig har kendt til, har været tilbageholdne Folk [...] de har i hele deres Optræden en ualmindelig Beskedenhed og Hensynsfuldhed overfor deres Medmennesker tilfælles’.³⁰ Blixen’s essayistic production uses the same strategies that she uses in her fiction writing – such as employing a classic dialectic strategy that displays both sides of the subject matter before offering a synthesis. The tendency to abstract from the present, the continuous reference to ahistorical concepts and ideals, like that of human solidarity – so very characteristic of Blixen’s fiction – is also striking in those essays, whose topic is a very specific historical time. As Stecher has noted ‘In contrast to their addressing contemporary concerns, Karen Blixen’s essays also frequently offer transhistorical and mythic perspectives on human society and culture’.³¹ While in her fiction this tendency serves the storyteller’s purpose of creating universal models easily recognizable to her audience in order to appropriate and understand their meaning, in her non-fiction this tendency to relativize specific historical circumstances seems to have the function of reassuring the readers of their transitivity, encouraging them to resist: ‘At the same time, the chronicles from Berlin demonstrate how Blixen ‘historicizes’ World War Two (along with fanatic ideologies such as Nazism) as an inevitable conflict, part of the ongoing

²⁹ *Essay*, p. 130/‘In Bremen, as in every other place in the world, the ordinary people are boundlessly helpful. An old porter helped me, out of pure spirit of humanity; we walked hand in hand through the dark streets’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 101.

³⁰ *Essay*, p. 125/‘During one’s life one does not meet many so-called great men; those whom I have known personally have been reserved people [...] they have in common in their deportment an unusual modesty and thoughtfulness towards their fellow human beings’ *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 95-96.

³¹ Stecher, p. 17.

dialectical process of human history'.³² This same idea of encouragement will characterize the storytelling strategy of GV/AA, as shall be analysed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

When comparing GV/AA with 'Letters', the similarities extend to some structural and atmospheric aspects of both texts. For example, the underlining, anxious atmosphere of being constantly watched that in GV/AA dominates the last two thirds of the story, can also be lead back to Blixen's own feeling as a visitor in Berlin. Although in a privileged position, being a recognized and famous author whose articles the regime probably aimed to use as propaganda outside of the Reich, it can be argued that Blixen still felt ill at ease with the situation. For example, when in the start of the essay she writes that 'jeg var fra Morgen til Aften i Hænderne paa Propagandaministeriet', she also underlines that 'denne Omsorg [var] mig alt andet end velkommen'.³³ Despite the efforts made by the Propaganda officers chaperoning her around to demonstrate the success of National Socialism, it appears that Blixen still found the whole system disturbing. She reports that when attending a concert where Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is played, one of her guides admonishes her that the symphony is 'de højeste Udtryk for den tyske Sjæl'.³⁴ To that Blixen reflects that 'Jeg hørte da Symphonien anderledes, end jeg nogensinde før har gjort det. "Sæledes banker Skæbnen paa Døren," sagde Beethoven. Vi ved ikke, om det er en Forjættelse eller en Trusel'.³⁵ 'Letters' ends with what would seem like a prophetic quote. As mentioned earlier, Blixen returned to Denmark a week before the country was occupied by Nazi forces and 'Letters' was set aside for eight years before being published. For Blixen, as for most Danes, travelling outside Denmark became much more difficult, and publishing anything abroad in the following five years virtually impossible. The product of those five years is GV, the most unusual of her books. To fully understand the context in which GV was produced, the following part of the chapter will provide an outline of the occupation in Denmark, pinpointing the most relevant happenings and policies.

³² Stecher, p. 151.

³³ *Essays*, p. 120/'from morning to evening I was in the hand of the propaganda ministry'/'this concern was anything but welcome to me' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 90.

³⁴ *Essays*, p. 163/'the purest expression of the German soul' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 134.

³⁵ *Essays*, p. 163/'I then heard the symphony differently than I had ever heard before. "Thus fate knocks on the door", Beethoven said. We do not know whether it is a promise or a threat' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 134.

‘Thus fate knocks on the door’ – the Nazi occupation of Denmark

Denmark was occupied by Nazi forces on the 9th April 1940, the main reason being its value as a stepping stone for the invasion of Norway, whose geographical location made it of much higher strategic value in Hitler’s war plans. The occupation started in the early hours of the day, so most Danes woke up to the sound of Germans airplanes hovering over their houses and tanks in the streets. As the writer Tage Voss recalls ‘They occupied us, easily and elegantly while we napped’.³⁶ The Germans presented the invasion as a measure to protect Denmark’s neutrality against Anglo-French aggression. The Danish foreign secretary, Peter Munch, was informed by the German Ambassador Cecil von Renthe-Fink of the occupation early on April 9th.³⁷ Munch had just enough time to arrange a meeting with the King, the Ministry of Defence and military commanders where it was quickly agreed upon the futility of an armed self-defence.³⁸ Denmark was considered by the occupiers as a protectorate and allowed to keep its main institutions functioning. This included the King, the parliament, the police and local government. Conscious about the impossibility to resist or fight back against the powerful occupier, the Danish government opted for a policy of adaptation and diplomatic collaboration in order to keep the country’s life as normal as possible. As the historian Niels Wium Olesen has observed, the government’s intention to safeguard Danish sovereignty often led to some of ‘the most painful moral and political dilemmas of the occupation’.³⁹ This meant, for example, that since the start of the occupation, because of its peculiar situation, Denmark had to balance between attempting to maintain its institutions intact and adapting to the occupying forces, even if this meant punishing its own citizens against any act of dissent towards the occupier. As Olesen underlines ‘the survival of Danish democracy was now dependent on the government’s ability and willingness to prevent its citizens – endowed by the constitution with the right of freedom of speech – from protesting against a

³⁶ Tage Voss in Hong, Nathaniel, *Occupied* (Copenhagen: Frihedsmuseets Venners Forlags Fond, 2012), p. 31.

³⁷ Olesen, Niels W., ‘The Obsession with Sovereignty: Cohabitation and Resistance in Denmark 1940- 45’ in *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy: the Consequences of the German invasion for the Scandinavian countries, then and now* ed. by John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 47.

³⁸ However, some resistance was made in Jutland at the border with Germany, where 16 Danish soldiers lost their lives. Denmark was mainly unprepared for armed self-defence, having relied on the same position of neutrality kept during WW1. See I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot. *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁹ Olesen, in *Hitler’s Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 46.

dictatorship's occupation in violation of international law. The paradox could hardly have been more striking'.⁴⁰ In such a climate, Blixen's own ideals of aristocratic bravery, courage and vitality, hardly fit in with the government policy of adaptation. Reflecting on the occupation experience later in her life, she wrote in *Skygger paa Græsset/ Shadows on the Grass*: 'Kongens Proklamation havde paalagt os at opretholde Ro og Værdighed, der var under Forholdene Præmie paa at ligge død og Bødestraf for at være i Live'.⁴¹

Immediately after the occupation the then Danish Prime Minister, Thorvald Stauning, 'in an attempt to stabilize the country after the shock of the occupation',⁴² created a coalition government that included all the variety of the parliament – hence members of his own party, the Social Democrats, as well as the Conservative Party, the Liberal Agrarians Party, the Communist Party and even the Danish Nazi party. The last never became a real threat for Danish institutions, even during the occupation, as showed by the results of the 1943 election, the only one during the occupation years, where it received a mere 2.1 %. In the same election, the coalition government, on the other hand, received 95% of the votes, showing that despite its contradictions, Danes continued to support their government's efforts.⁴³ The votes also mirrored the general patriotic feelings that had risen in Denmark since the start of the occupation, expressing themselves in the various phenomena such as the Alsang manifestations or the diffuse displays of the Danish flag. One of the main preoccupations on the agenda of the Danish government immediately after the occupation was the financial situation, since literally overnight Denmark had lost its main trading partner– the UK. For the next five years Germany became Denmark's only trade partner, to whom it provided 10% of its consumption of meat and dairy.⁴⁴

Another pivotal necessity in this peculiar situation was that of controlling the media, and consequently, to orient the public opinion. This was a concern for both the German occupiers and the Danish government in the execution of their policies. Among German demands at the outbreak of the war, was the requirement that the Danish press should encourage the citizens to stay calm and stop any form of anti-German propaganda.

⁴⁰ Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 49.

⁴¹ *Skygger*, p. 110/'The King in his proclamation had enjoined us to maintain an attitude of calm and dignity, a prize was set on lying dead, a penalty on being alive' *Shadows*, p. 131.

⁴² Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 50.

⁴³ Hong, p. 154.

⁴⁴ Dear, I.C.B., p. 228.

Because the main newspapers were linked to the main parties, and thus to the coalition government, they supported its policies and adopted a self-imposed form of censorship.⁴⁵ During the occupation, all news were filtered by the Danish Press Bureau, who had to establish rules and directions on how news had to be presented, and what could be published. As Olesen notes, ‘another striking paradox of occupied Denmark, the press was subject to censorship in order to continue to be ‘free’.⁴⁶ After the summer of 1943, when Danish institutions were not allowed to function anymore, censorship fell directly into German hands. Already from the start of the occupation, the German press attaché Gustav Meissner made sure that journalists, editors and authors that expressed anti-German points of view, were ostracized or removed from their positions.⁴⁷ The same criteria were applied to other aspects of the public life: between autumn 1940 and the start of 1941, four leading politicians were expelled from their posts – John Christmas Møller, Minister of Trade and former chairman of the Conservative Party; Hartvig Frisch, Social Democratic ideologue; Hans Hedtoft, chairman of the Social Democratic Party and H.C. Hansen, secretary of the Social Democratic Party.⁴⁸ Møller would later become a leading figure of the Resistance movement, as well as the illegal press, co-founding the paper ‘De Frie Danske’ together with other leading public figures gone underground.

Although the legal press still had a function during the occupation – despite the censorship it was in fact allowed to discuss Danish internal policies – it soon became evident that for accessing unfiltered news, alternative channels must be sought. If censorship was inflicted upon on the press and publishing industry, radios were not confiscated under the occupation, so a fundamental source of external information became the BBC. As Blixen notes in her essay ‘Gensyn med England/Reunion with England’, published in 1948 ‘Jeg har gennem fer Aar søgt B.B.C.s Stemme i Æteren,

⁴⁵ However, it appears that the self-imposed censorship on the press was a phenomenon that had already started at the outbreak of the war. In his study of the history of the Danish newspaper ‘Børsens’, (*Børsens Danmarkshistorie ved Henning Fonsmark*, København: Børsen Bøger, 1996) Henning Fonsmark writes that as early as the 3rd of September 1939 the Ministry of Trade and Maritime Affairs had sent out a circular to the Danish newspapers forbidding them to explicitly refer to ships positions and movements. A few weeks later the Prime Minister sent another warning to the newspapers encouraging them not to refer to any news regarding import-export policy and trade. Fonsmark claims that the press censorship was exactly the same that had been imposed, or rather self-imposed, during WW1, when Denmark had pursued the same policy of neutrality that she had attempted before the occupation (see Fonsmark, pp. 120-121).

⁴⁶ Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 54.

⁴⁷ Hong, pp. 48-50.

⁴⁸ Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 56.

ventet paa den og lyttet til den'.⁴⁹ Another pivotal source was the illegal press, which after 1941, when the Danish Communist (DKP) party was made illegal, was mainly dependent on the DKP. According to Nathaniel Hong, a scholar devoted to the study of the illegal press in Denmark under the occupation, the illegal press actually had a crucial function in changing the public opinion regarding the resistance movement, and therefore, the course of the occupation. He points out that:

The illegal press grew from 7,000 copies of the communist DKP newspaper *Land og Folk* (Country and People) produced in October 1941 to over 100,000 copies of 31 different newspapers in November 1942 [...] From its start in October 1942 through August 1943 the underground newspapers focused on changing public opinion against the coalition government's adaptation to occupation and later in that period building understanding and support for sabotage as a resistance tactic.⁵⁰

Life under occupation– Winter's Tales

While an effective and organised resistance movement did not appear in the first two years of the occupation, a general feeling of patriotism and nationalism had spread among Danes since 1940. As W. Glyn Jones observes: 'a feeling of Danishness akin to the great Romantic patriotic upsurge in the nineteenth century had made itself felt in the country during the course of 1940, replacing the sense of despair and disillusionment which had come immediately after 9th of April'.⁵¹ Danish flags became a staple in all households and patriotic songs were sung in large numbers. This last phenomenon, *Alsang*, is particularly representative of the kind of passive resistance the Danes were able to demonstrate under the first two years of occupation. *Alsang*, gatherings of people singing patriotic Danish songs, were not forbidden and they became extremely popular and widely attended.⁵² This feeling of nationalism could even rise to the point of slight exaggeration, for example when the leader of the party 'Dansk Samling' (based on a Christian form of nationalism)

⁴⁹ *Essays*, p. 167/'For five years I have sought the voice of the BBC in the ether, waited for it and listened to it' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 138.

⁵⁰ Hong, p. 135.

⁵¹ Jones, W. Glyn *Denmark, a modern history* (London : Croom Helm, 1986), p. 157.

⁵² *Ibid.*

commented that ‘mirakelt er sket. Det danske Folk har fundet sig selv’.⁵³ Generally, before the ultimatum of 1943 and the consequent fall of the protectorate system, the vast majority of Danes expressed their solidarity with the coalition government and demonstrated resistance to the invading forces through those national representations of Danishness such as the *Alsang*.

This need to rediscover the nation’s roots and values found expression in the cultural life as well. As Andrew Buckser has noted when studying the sociology of the unique rescue of Danish Jews under Nazi occupation,⁵⁴ the war years saw Denmark experience a revival of Grundtvigianism, the movement that most of all had shaped Denmark’s modern identity since late 19th century. The founder of this movement, Nikolai Frederik Severing Grundtvig, was a Danish priest and poet whose influential ideas shaped the Danish modern consciousness ‘The power of Grundtvig’s thought stemmed in large part from the connection he drew between Christianity and Danish culture [...] Grundtvig contended that every people was characterized by a distinct folk spirit (*folkeand*), one which found expression in the culture and folklore of rural society’.⁵⁵ The movement therefore celebrated anything Danish and Nordic alike, such as dialects, costumes and North mythology. Grundtvig’s vision influenced the perception Danes had of their nation as a community that shared values and traditions, rather than a political union.⁵⁶ This discourse, as Buckser observes ‘became one of the bases for claiming Danish sovereignty during the German occupation’.⁵⁷

The revival of Grundtvigianism during the occupation was mainly due to the Grundtvig lectures given by the theology professor Hal Koch at the University of Copenhagen,⁵⁸ where he argued that through Grundtvigianism, and therefore through the rediscovery of Denmark’s folk culture and traditions, Denmark would be able to survive the Nazi subjugation and maintain its national integrity. For the cultural market, this translated into a considerable rise in the interest of Danish history book. Significantly, it is during the first half of the forties that the main Danish publishing houses launched

⁵³ Agger, 2000, p. 548, [the miracle happened. The Danish people rediscover itself].

⁵⁴ Buckser, Andrew, ‘Rescue and Cultural Context during the Holocaust: Grundtvigian Nationalism and the Rescue of Danish Jews’ in *Shofar: An interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Volume 19, number 2, winter 2001, pp. 1-25.

⁵⁵ Buckser, p.19.

⁵⁶ Buckser, p.18.

⁵⁷ Buckser, p.2.

⁵⁸ Agger, 2000, p.559.

their specialised series on Danish history, such as *Danmarks historie* by Schultz publisher or *Saxos Danmarkshistorie* by Saxo publisher.⁵⁹ This cultural climate is particularly well illustrated by one of the most popular illegal texts of the time, Kaj Munk's play *Niels Ebbesen*, which tells the story of the popular Danish hero famous for having killed the German count Gert in the 14th century.⁶⁰

This motif of the revival of Danish cultural and historical heritage can also be found in Karen Blixen's work during the first two years of the occupation, namely *Vinter Eventyr/Winter's Tales*. Started soon after the publication of *Out of Africa*, *Winter's Tales* was eventually published in 1942, two years after the occupation had started. In order to publish the book abroad, Blixen had to travel to the neutral Sweden and send WT to Putnam and Random House via the British Embassy:

Den 26. april 1942 rejste Karen Blixen med de færdigskrevne *Winter's Tales* til Stockholm, hvor hun opholdt sig til den 10. maj. Her fik hun på ny kontakt med Bonniers, og gennem den engelske legation lykkedes det hende at få manuskripterne sendt af sted til Putnam i London og Random House i New York. Det havde voldt stort besvær at skaffe visum til rejsen. Danmarks grænser var lukket under besættelsen, og der skulle gå mere end tre år, før hun erfarede, hvordan hendes nye samling af historier var blevet modtaget i de engelsktalende lande.⁶¹

Blixen also reported this experience in a letter to her aunt Karen Sass dated 20th of April 1942:

Jeg rejser til Sverig paa Søndag, for at se at faa mit Manuskript sendt til Amerika. Det har været meget besværligt, da det skulde gaa gennem Udenrigsministeriet her og gennem den tyske Kultur-Afdeling, som skulde censurere det. Scavenius har

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Agger, 2000, p.570.

⁶¹ Lasson, *Breve*, p. 344-345, vol.1, [On the 26th of April Karen Blixen travelled, with the completed manuscript of *Winter's Tales*, to Stockholm where she stayed until the 10th of May. Here she got in touch with Bonnier, and through the British embassy she succeeded in sending the manuscript to Putnam in London, and Random House in New York. It had taken quite an effort to get the visa for the travel. Denmark's borders were closed during the occupation, and it would take more than three years before she could hear how her new collection of stories had been received in the English speaking countries].

maget venligt bistaet mig, og jeg var selv oppe med Manuskriptet hos den højeste tyske Kultur-Myndighed. Det var sletikke hyggeligt.⁶²

Blixen managed to publish the book simultaneously in Denmark, the UK and the US in 1942. As Svendsen and Lasson write in *The Life and Destiny of Isak Dinesen*,⁶³ *Winter's Tales* shifted the focus of her writing to themes closer to her youth, but one of the most evident features of WT is the focus on Scandinavian themes, myths and places. WT moves from the surreal gothic atmosphere of *Seven Gothic Tales*, and the exotic landscape and nostalgic pastoral mood of *Out of Africa*, to a more sober and defined epoch and place. In WT, Blixen dealt with moments of the Danish historical and cultural background that she felt were almost as challenging as the current one – for example the Dano-Prussian war that lingers upon the lives of Jensine and her husband in 'The Pearls'. Although not professedly Grundvigian, it can be argued that the aim of WT was to encourage, especially her Danish readers, to engage with their own past and heritage in order to understand how to deal with their own difficult present. As Judith Thurman argues, WT 'grew out of a feeling of Danish solidarity'.⁶⁴ In the interview with the *Paris Review* in 1956⁶⁵ where Blixen eventually admitted the authorship of GV, she also tells the story of WT, of how she got it to Sweden and how, after it was published as Armed Forces Editions in the US, she gave a copy to the King of Denmark when the war was over: 'I gave one to the King of Denmark and he was pleased to see that, after all, some voice had spoken from his silent country during that dark time'.⁶⁶

Winter's Tales is a book that was most definitely influenced by the historical circumstances of the first phase of the occupation. As Poul Behrendt has noted in the afterword to the recent critical edition of *Vinter Eventyr*,⁶⁷ the title refers to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, and specifically to the quote 'a sad tale, best for winter'(Act II, Scene I).

⁶² Lasson, p. 343. Karen Blixen letter to Karen Sass, 20/4/1942, [I am travelling to Sweden on Sunday, to try and get my manuscript sent to America. It has been very difficult when it had to go through the Foreign Ministry and through the German Culture Department which had to censor it. Scavenius has very kindly assisted me, and I went myself up with the manuscript to the highest German cultural authority. It was definitely not pleasant].

⁶³ Svendsen, Clara and Lasson, Frans, *The life and destiny of Isak Dinesen* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁶⁴ Thurman, p. 338.

⁶⁵ Eugene Walter 'Isak Dinesen, The Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review*, Autumn 1956, No.14.

⁶⁶ Walter, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Behrendt, Poul, *Efterskrift* in Blixen, Karen *Vinter-Eventyr* (København: Gyldendal & Det Danske Sprog og Litteraturselskab, 2010).

Behrendt also notes how ‘winter’ is a metaphor that refers to the condition of Denmark under the occupation; he reports Blixen’s comment on the book’s title when it was published in Denmark: ‘Vinteren er inde, nu kan vi ikke komme ud mere, det er ligesom på Shakespeares tid. Nu sidder vi inden døre og fortæller eventyr, alt mens vi *længes* ud igen’.⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, Karen Blixen’s life and art philosophy were mainly characterized by the ideals of aristocratic courage and it clashed tremendously with the accommodation policy of the Danish government in the first two years of the occupation. *Winter’s Tales* thus conveyed not only the tragedy of having her country occupied and of being isolated at Rungstedlund, it also expressed a deep feeling of humiliation for being unable to fight back. *Winter’s Tales* and GV/AA are both products of war; they mirror the dark circumstances in which they were composed. They were both written for an audience during the war, and they shared the same aim – to encourage. However, although *Winter Tales* was published abroad during the war, in an attempt, perhaps, to remind the world of Denmark’s moral tradition and ideals throughout history in spite of their tragic political condition, GV/AA was specifically created for the Danes during the war. It entertained them and encouraged them, telling a story of resistance from the perspective of two seemingly hopeless heroines. It carried the darkness of the war, but also the belief that there would be hope – necessarily achieved through solidarity.

Then again, through the gothic mode of displaying binary oppositions and conflicts, GV/AA encouraged the reader to consider the creative force of subverting those same oppositions. If GV/AA represents this concept in every aspect of the text (plot, characters, gothic mode, structure), WT is a more reflective product. It doesn’t have, and doesn’t claim to have, the dynamism of GV/AA. It is instead pervaded by the stillness of the historical period of which it recounts the stories; as most of Blixen’s work it is a pictorial text, and it enwraps the reader in its landscapes – WT has the stillness of the Nordic world, the long nights, and the white light:

Den vidtstrakte, bølgende danske Egn var blikstille og sval, forunderlig lyvsvaagen i den tidlige Morgentime, inden Solopgang. Der var ikke en Sky paa den perleblege Himmel, ikke en Skygge langs de dæmrende Højdedrag, Skove og Marker. Taagen var ved at lette fra Lyninger og Dale, Luften var kølig, Græs og Løv drivvaade af

⁶⁸ Behrendt, p. 403, [Winter is here, now we cannot get out anymore, it is like in Shakespeare’s time. Now we are sitting indoors and tell each other’s stories, all while we’re longing to get out again].

Dug. Uset at Mennerskers Øjne, og uforstyrret af deres Færden, hvilede Landet i sig selv, og aandede et Liv uden for Tiden, som Menneskers Sprog ikke har Ord for.⁶⁹

It is an homage to the Nordic people and heritage, to their stories of courage, their stoicism, and their battles:

De Guder, som vore danske Forfædre dyrkede, stod i sand Værdighed lige saa højt over dem, som Druiden staar over Auguren. Thi de blonde Guder i Asgaard besad høje menneskelige Dyder,— de var trohjertige, retsindige, og vennesele, i deres Heltekraft kendte de til Mildhed og Medlidenhed, og i en fjern, barbarisk Oldtid, kendte de til Ridderlighed.⁷⁰

WT aimed to serve as a reminder for Blixen's contemporaries, where the past could become an inspirational model for a difficult present. The work on the English edition of WT occupied her for five years,⁷¹ and once the English edition was published, she could focus on the Danish one. It is relevant to underline that WT was published when Denmark had already been occupied for two years. When she started working on GV in 1943, the political panorama had changed quite dramatically.

Werner Best's ultimatum – Starting Gengældesens Veje

After the initial two years of occupation the tension in the precarious political situation in Denmark had started to escalate. An outlet for this strain became the so called 'telegram crisis'. In 1942 Hitler sent a telegram to the King congratulating him on his birthday to which the King answered with a brief routine telegram, which infuriated the

⁶⁹ VE, 'Sorg-Agre', p. 217/ 'The low, undulating Danish landscape was silent and serene, mysteriously wide awake, in the hour before sunrise. There was not a cloud in the pale sky, not a shadow along the dim, pearly fields, hills and woods. The mist was lifting from the valleys and hollows, the air was cool, the grass and the foliage dripping wet with morning dew. Unwatched by the eyes of man, and undisturbed by his activity, the country breathed a timeless life, to which language was inadequate' WT, 'Sorrow-Acre', p.172.

⁷⁰ VE, 'Sorg-Agre', p. 225/'The gods of our Danish forefathers are as much more divine than they as the Druid is nobler than the Augur. For the fair gods of Asgaard did possess the sublime human virtues, they were righteous, trustworthy, benevolent and, even within a barbaric age, chivalrous' WT, 'Sorrow-Acre' p. 178.

⁷¹ Behrendt, p. 404.

Führer.⁷² The telegram crisis was clearly just a pretext to express his discontent with Denmark's situation; as Olesen notes, by then the reports that Hitler would receive painted a fairly negative picture: 'the population was said by German officials to be anti-German, the press was uncooperative, the civil service was deprecatory and the government was hesitant and opportunistic'.⁷³ The crisis became an excuse for the Nazi government to reassess the privileged situation of Denmark as a protectorate, it was solved over two weeks of diplomatic work, and it ended up with a significant shift in the political powers. Abandoning the pretence of sovereignty, Werner Best was appointed as a plenipotentiary, which meant that he was invested with full powers from Hitler to act as his delegate, rather than having any sort of diplomatic mediations with Denmark.⁷⁴ Although Denmark was at this point still allowed to keep its own government, the Prime Minister was chosen by Hitler, who selected Erik Scavenius, former Foreign Affairs Minister. Scavenius represented for Germany the ideal candidate to restore order in a country that was starting to manifestly rebel against the occupation. Since the start of the occupation, in his role of Foreign Affairs Minister, he had been encouraging an active policy of adaptation which meant to propose projects of cooperation with Germany, rather than waiting for their requests. Scavenius role as a Prime Minister was, however, a brief interlude. Keen to still keep the façade of protectorate intact, in 1943 Best allowed national elections to be held, a unique case for a Nazi occupied country. He was aiming for the Danes to show the support for the existent coalition government, so that the policy of adaptation would continue more or less efficiently. As mentioned above, the results showed that the vast majority of Danes trusted in their government and 'the elections became a popular manifestation of national identity and unity, not unlike the King's birthday and All Sing gatherings in the first year of the occupation'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, in the summer of 1943, a general feeling of unrest spread through Denmark, triggered by the belief that since Mussolini's removal, Germany as well would be losing the war soon. Supported by SOE British forces, strikes had exploded so angrily and so diffusely, and sabotage had increased so dramatically, that the situation had started to be uncontrollable. Being under pressure from Hitler to bring an end to the unrest, on the 29th August 1943

⁷² Hong, p. 147.

⁷³ Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Hong, p. 154.

Best gave the Danish government an ultimatum: the chaos had to end by declaring a state of emergency and introducing death penalty for saboteurs. The government didn't agree and the day after the constitutional government and the King ceased to function.

In this extraordinary circumstances, Karen Blixen started to work on her most unusual book - *Gengældelsens Veje*. Mirroring this unstable climate, in her memoir about her work as Karen Blixen secretary, Clara Svendsen reports the meeting that established their collaboration on GV:

Samme sommer [1943] skete en spændende og oplivende ting: Karen Blixen satte mig stævne på a Porta's fortovsrestaurant og ville tale med mig om en særlig plan. Det var romanene *Gengældelsens Veje*, det drejede sig om. Vi indgik en hemmelig arbejdsaftale. Bogen skulle ud under et nyt og ukendt pseudonym, og mit navn skulle stå som oversætter for at tjene som yderligere camouflage. Der var meget at drøfte.⁷⁶

It is interesting to notice in Svendsen's report the use of a vocabulary and imagery of clandestineness – such as the secret meetings, the fake names, and the camouflage. It would almost seem that the creation of GV was so deeply immersed in the historical context that it had absorbed the behaviours of its most significant representatives: the underground resistance movement.

The Danish resistance movement had started being a more structured and conscious movement when the Danish Communist Party (DKP) went underground. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the DKP was made illegal and all communists and Soviet citizens in Denmark were to be interned, according to German demand. 300 were caught up and interned, the rest went underground. By this stage it was still the Danish police who were in charge of this operation, therefore they were able to intern the communists on Danish ground into Danish camps, rather than German ones. If by 1942 a feeling of unrest towards the government's policy of adaptation had started to spread among the population, sabotage and resistance

⁷⁶ Svendsen, Clara, *Notater om Karen Blixen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1974), p. 18, [The same summer something exciting and exhilarating happened: Karen Blixen gave me an appointment at the Porta's restaurant and wanted to talk to me about a certain project. It was about the novel GV. We had a secret work-meeting. The book had to be published under a new and different pseudonym, and my name should appear as the translator, to add some further camouflage. There was a lot to discuss].

movement were still considered as dangerous and anti- governmental, Olesen notes that ‘studies of public opinion during the occupation of Denmark are in no doubt that sabotage was considered highly dangerous and undesirable by the vast majority of the Danish public in 1942 and certainly well into 1943’.⁷⁷ During the first years of occupation, the resistance movement carried out mainly isolated acts of sabotage, but after 1943 it was reorganized into the Freedom Council, a body that included all the resistance movement organizations. The government, formally no longer functioning, started secretly funding the resistance movement, and the Army, disarmed by the Germans and loyal to Danish politicians, started supporting the resistance movement as well. For the last two years of the occupation, it was the Freedom Council that effectively led the country. The Danish resistance’s most successful operation, was certainly to coordinate the rescue of the Danish Jews. In October 1943 Best launched an operation to round up Danish Jews, but thanks to a joint effort from the population, 95% of the Jewish population in Denmark was rescued.⁷⁸ This meant that out of about 7000, 481 ended up in concentration camps. This extraordinary rescue operation happened through sailing overnight to neutral Sweden, and the involvement of most of the population, including Danish institutions and police, represents the changing scenario in Denmark in the last two years of the occupation.

Blixen offered her own explanation on how influenced GV was by the historical circumstances in her essay ‘Echoes from the Hills’, where she wrote:

Mens jeg sad og saa paa Bogens første hvide Blad havde jeg intetsomhelst Begreb om hvad der skulde staa paa dette eller de følgende. Med den tog af sig selv Fart og udviklede sig – under Forholdene vel uundgaaeligt – til en Gyser. Dog, da i Efteraaret i 1943 Jødeforfølgelserne og Danmark satte ind og Villaerne langs Strandvejen kom til at huse forfærdede Flygtninge paa Vej til Sverige, gik Arbejdet næsten istaa, det blev for mig en uhyggelig og uværdig Opgave for Spøg at kappes med Virkeligheden i Gru og Brutalitet. Ved denne Tid begyndte da ogsaa

⁷⁷ Olesen, in *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Hong, pp. 192-212.

Modstandbevægelsen at tage Skikkelse, Folk stak Hovedet op af deres Quasi-Gravsteder og trak igen Vejeret uden Kvælningsfølelser.⁷⁹

At the end of the war, as many other Danes, Blixen had very conflicting feelings regarding her own participation to her country's resistance movement. Her lack of active political engagement during the occupation was something that, according to Stecher, she regretted after the war: 'At this point in her literary career, Blixen appears to have taken stock of her neutral position during the Occupation, admitting to a shameful passivity (which she shared with most Danes) and to her own lack of political engagement'.⁸⁰ However, according to what Ole Wivel reports in his memoir on his friendship with Karen Blixen, she had been somehow involved with the resistance movement. He writes that in 1943, during the operation of the rescue of Danish Jews, Karen Blixen had offered refuge to some of the Danish Jews waiting to sail to Sweden, as her house, Rungstedlund, was in the ideal position for the operation being just a few steps away from the coast:

Jeg var selv med i arbejdet andetsteds, og Karen Blixen kunne sige at vi burde være stolte af at være danske, så længe vi havde tyskere i haven og jøder inden døre. Vi drøftede begivenhederne, og i samtaler med en ung fælles ven, havearkitekten Ingwer Ingwersen, som var gået under jorden og ofte gæstede os, kom vi hindanen nær på en mere nøgtern og praktisk måde end under vore samtaler om digtning og livsanskuelse. Jeg fik især det sidste år under krigen et andet indtryk af Karen Blixen – som den ubetinget hjælpsomme, solidariske ven – end det obligate, tilslørende og livsfjerne.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Skygger*, pp.111-112/ 'When I started on the first page of the book, I had no idea whatever was going to happen in it, it ran on upon its own and- as was probably inevitable under the circumstances- developed into a tale of darkness. But when in the summer of 1943 the German persecution of Danish Jews set in, and most homes along the coast of the Sound were housing Jewish fugitives from Copenhagen waiting to be got across to Sweden, I slackened in my work; it began to look crude and vulgar to me compete with the surrounding world in creating horrors. Also, in the following months the Danish resistance movement fetched headway, we all began to rise from our sham graves, drawing the air more freely and ceasing to gasp for breath' *Shadows*, p. 132.

⁸⁰ Stecher, p. 147.

⁸¹ Wivel, p. 132, [I participated in the operation myself elsewhere, and Karen Blixen could say that we ought to be proud of being Danes, as long as we had Germans in our gardens and Jews indoors. We discussed about those happenings, and while in conversation with another young common friend, the garden architect Ingwer Ingwersen who had gone underground and often came to visit us, we got close with each other in a more practical and sober way than when we used to have our conversations on poetry and philosophy. Especially in the last years of the war, I got a very different impression of Karen

Judith Thurman confirms this anecdote by writing that ‘Karen Blixen had given the keys to her kitchen door to two friends in the Resistance, Johannes Rosendahl and Mogens Fog, her doctor, who was a member of the Freedom Council’.⁸² Despite that, Blixen still perceived her neutral position under the war as something she was not proud of. When after the war she was invited to write a memorial for the resistance fighters fallen during the war, she refused on the ground of feeling unworthy of the task due to the lack of manifest political engagement and active resistance under the occupation.⁸³

As stated before, *GV* was the product of the years of occupation. It encompassed not only the trauma of losing one’s country, but also, and most importantly, it dealt with the difficulties and the consequences that came with the moral responsibility to manifestly dissent – and the struggle of having enough courage to do so. Blixen’s relationship with *GV* was as conflicted as her own feelings towards her personal engagement with the resistance movement under the war. It took her twelve years to admit authorship of the book, and even then, she never considered it as one of her ‘serious’ books, but rather dismissed it as a sort of *divertissement*. Her own approach to the text has negatively influenced the critical reception of it, but as we shall see, *GV* represents a unique example in Blixen’s authorship, and a fertile ground of exploration. The following part of the chapter deals with the making of *GV*, presenting material from the Karen Blixen’s archive that questions the conception of a text written only for fun.

Blixen – as the unconditionally helpful and supportive friend – rather than the usual distant and unrealistic one].

⁸² Thurman, p. 350.

⁸³ Stecher, p. 147.

Part 2: The Making of *Gengældelsens Veje* and *The Angelic Avengers*

Karen Blixen's secret book

Karen Blixen publicly admitted the authorship of *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers* for the first time in 1956 when Eugene Walter interviewed her in Rome for the *Paris Review*. When Walter introduced the subject of GV/AA – referring to it as ‘a delightful novel’– Blixen replied:

(laughing): Oh, that's my illegitimate child! During the German occupation of Denmark I thought I should go mad with boredom and dullness. I wanted so to be amused, to amuse myself, and besides I was short of money, so I went to my publisher in Copenhagen and said, Look here, will you give me an advance on a novel and send me a stenographer to dictate it to? They said they would, and she appeared, and I started dictating. I had no idea at all of what the story would be about when I began. I added a little every day, improvising. It was very baffling to the poor stenographer [...] No, I prefer to keep *The Angelic Avengers* my secret.⁸⁴

According to the ‘poor stenographer’ in question, Ulla Rask, the task was not as demanding as Blixen depicts it. In fact, as Benedikte Rostbøll reports in the afterword of the recent Danish critical edition of GV,⁸⁵ Ulla Rask remembered that: ‘Vi morede os herligt, mens arbejdet stod på. Selv sagde hun (Karen Blixen), at hun ikke kunne tage sig sammen til at skrive en seriøs bog; hun måtte beskæftige sig med noget pjat for at holde situationen i Danmark ud’.⁸⁶ As often with Karen Blixen's statements about her own life, the line between the actual facts and the romanticising of them is always very fine. As analysed above, under the Nazi occupation Karen Blixen had actually published something ‘serious’, namely *Winter's Tales*. But despite the noble aim of the storyteller to encourage her community to resist, Karen Blixen found herself in a rather difficult financial situation under the occupation, as she was unable to receive her royalties from

⁸⁴ Blixen in Walter, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Benedikte Rostbøll ‘Efterskrift’ in Blixen, Karen, *Gengældelsens Veje* (København: Gyldendal & Det danske Sprog-og Litteraturselskab, 2013).

⁸⁶ Rostbøll, 2013, p. 321, [We had a lot of fun while we worked. She said so herself (Karen Blixen), that she could not pull herself together and write a serious book, she had to keep herself busy with something silly in order to survive the situation in Denmark].

abroad. These had been throughout her writing career her main source of income, so she had to come up with an idea that would sell quickly in Denmark. Blixen's uncertain financial situation was an important motivation in writing GV/AA, but what seems to have been overlooked by previous scholarship, is that as well as WT, GV/AA also aimed to provide its readers with some sort of encouragement, although, with a different form and in a different genre from her usual one. To write a book 'for fun', had a deeper meaning that what appears on a first glance. Both the American and English editions of GV/AA contain as an opening epigraph a quote from the book itself: 'You serious people must not be too hard on human beings for what they choose to amuse themselves with when they are shut up as in a prison and not even allowed to say that they are prisoners. If I do not soon get a little bit of fun, I shall die'. The quote was not published in the Danish version, as it could have been interpreted as a criticism of the Nazi occupying forces. It was a risk that neither Karen Blixen nor Gyldendal were willing to take. The challenge with GV in Denmark in fact, was also to publish something that would meet the restrictions and requirements imposed to the publishing industry by the censorship of the occupation forces. As Blixen explained herself in a letter to Dorothy Canfield dated 24th April 1946:

By the time when the book was published no translation from the English was allowed to appear in Denmark,– (and of course no original English work could get in.) – that is: no firm was permitted to publish any English translation without publishing, at the same time, a translation of some German book, written after 1933, and of no less pages than the English or American translation. As all the publishing firms were short of paper, and as they were deadly sure of not selling a single copy of their German translation, this stipulation wiped out all books from England or America from the market. So the author of my book had to be French, and not too sure, either, in his English names or conditions.⁸⁷

On the rare occasions when Karen Blixen publicly admitted the authorship of GV/AA (the interview with the *Paris Review* and the mention of the book in her collection of essays *Shadows on the Grass*), she always dismissed it as a book written for fun – 'I wanted so to

⁸⁷ Lasson, 1996, pag. 443-444

be amused, to amuse myself.⁸⁸ The author's own considerations, as well as the peculiarities of the book – such as its rather fragmented and pastiched structure – have contributed to denying this text particular critical attention. According to Blixen's own words, it would almost seem that the book had been written carelessly and with no particular intention of grandeur, a brief parenthesis in her otherwise highly praised authorship. However, what emerges from the correspondence with her publishers questions those assumptions.

The idea of fun-fornøjelse, which so often recurs in the correspondence with Haas and Huntington and in Blixen's explanations for the making of the book, does not have to be misinterpreted as only a divertissement. As Rostbøll points out, in *GV/AA* the concept of fun refers to Blixen's broader conception of destiny and life, and the opening epigraph serves as a key to interpret the novel itself:

Det drejer sig om både at have fun og være fun. Fun har at gøre med en særlig intens livsfølelse, en hypersensitiv evne til at gennemleve alle følelser uden tøven og angst; fun er forbundet med lidenskabeligt mod og dødsforagt, med humor, munterhed og eventyrløst.⁸⁹

Opposing the extreme vitality of fun to the darkness of the present circumstances served to defy them, therefore fun in *GV/AA* became the proposed strategy of survival to face the most difficult circumstances. In 1960, in 'Echoes from the Hills', Blixen refers to *GV* as 'den Bog der havde tjent mig som Redningsbøje' / 'my life saving book'.⁹⁰ This concept is reiterated throughout all her correspondence with the publishers that dealt with the novel, and one of the first impressions to emerge is Blixen's constant urgency in having the book published. Although the main reasons were financial, it appears that Blixen was also concerned with delivering her audiences an overall reading experience tailored to their needs in the historical circumstances – a concern that characterized the publication of *WT* as well. According to the reviews, the readers' reports and the reaction of the

⁸⁸ Walter, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Rostbøll, 2013, p. 323, [It is about both having fun and being fun. Fun has to do with a particular intense feeling for life, a hypersensitive ability to live through all emotions without hesitation or anxiety; fun is intertwined with passionate and death defying courage, with humor, cheerfulness and the desire for adventure].

⁹⁰ *Skygger*, p. 112/*Shadows*, p. 131-132.

publishers, the text had on its audience a reaction that was deeply intertwined with the historical situation. So if the Danish readers were keen to find entertainment and encouragements through its pages under the dark years of the occupation, the Anglo-American audience in the immediate post-war years sought an allegory that could explain the historical trauma they had just been through, and perhaps satisfy their lingering needs of justice– and sometimes– revenge. An example of this is the last lines of a letter that Constant Huntington, editor of Putnam and British publisher of Karen Blixen’s works, wrote to her immediately after reading the manuscript of GV/AA: ‘there is always in your work, great wisdom and knowledge of the forces of life. We can meet life, or the Germans, better for reading it’.⁹¹

Gengældelsens Veje in Denmark – a War Book

Contrasting with Blixen’s dismissive approach, the actual writing of GV required a considerable amount of work. Although completed in a relatively short time – as opposed to her usual writing routine that would usually stretch over a few years and several rewritings of the text – it is clear from the surviving archival material that GV involved the same attention to details that Blixen had dedicated to her other works. The first drafts of the Danish edition of GV, today kept at the Karen Blixen Archive at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, contain several variations compared to the published edition, as well as several notes from the author, which go to contrast the idea of a text written carelessly. For example, in the first draft of GV sent to Gyldendal the manuscript has a different title: *Rosa bliver hævnret* (Rosa is Avenged).⁹² The names of the characters are also different: Zosine Tabbernor is called Bella Barclay, Ambrose is Arthur, Pennhallow is Smith, Olympia is Jemima, Lucan Bellenden is Lucan Ross, and Mr Armorthy is Mr Clay. The folder containing this manuscript also contains a paper sheet where Blixen had listed all the characters of the novel – now with the names appearing in the published edition of the book – noting their birth date and their age at the time in which the novel was set.⁹³ On page 5 of this early version of the manuscript there is an interesting note with pencil above the sentence referring to which school Lucan had gone to. It says: ‘Den skole,

⁹¹ HutB, 5/12/1945, kps 51, KBA.

⁹² KBA, ‘Manuskripter’ IV. B. 2., Kps 126 ‘Gengældelsens Veje Tr.1944’, Det Kongelig Bibliotek, København.

⁹³ Ibid.

Lucan havde gaaet i, laa egentlig over hendes egen sfaere', and above the word 'sfaere', another note in pencil specifies 'sociale og økonomiske'.⁹⁴ This note suggests that in writing GV, Blixen had a very definite socio-cultural environment in mind. As it will be extensively discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, which deals with the gothic aspects of GV, this attention to the social and cultural environment of the characters will function as a way to question that same society.

The importance she invested in this detailed depiction in the economy of the plot is also signalled by an exchange of letters with her brother Thomas, where she consulted his financial knowledge to write about Mr Tabbemor, Zosine's father, and especially his economic situation in order to make it accurate and credible. Relying on other people's expertise and knowledge, especially when writing something set in a well-defined period of time, was not unusual for Blixen. In fact, as an example of her accuracy in depictions, in the afterword of Gyldendal's critical edition of *Vinter Eventyr*, Poul Behrendt reports that while writing the English version of the book, Blixen had asked her friend Erik Bernstorff-Gyldensteen to help her describe the clothing of a butler in 1875 for her tale 'The Invincible Slave-Owners'.⁹⁵ Behrendt also notes that for *Vinter Eventyr* Blixen had been very specific with Gyldendal about her preferred spelling for the book, and that all of her specific requests demonstrate her resolution in creating an 'arkaiserende prosa',⁹⁶ an archaicizing prose, in order to give the most accurate and inclusive portrait of the period she was writing about. This same intention would have guided her during the editing of the English edition of *The Angelic Avengers*, where she would write to both Random House and Putnam that she preferred the language, the atmosphere and the style not 'too much altered'.⁹⁷

Another peculiarity to be found in the first draft of GV sent to Gyldendal is the different pseudonym. Instead of Pierre Andrézel, *Rosa bliver hævnet* was sent to Gyldendal as the work of Thomas Motley, probably with a similar intention to that of keeping the language and style coherent with Blixen's idea of a text that mainly referred to an Anglo-American tradition of literary fiction. However, as explained by Blixen in her letter to Dorothy Canfield, given the Nazi censorship restriction on publishing anything, including

⁹⁴ [the school that Lucan had attended, was actually above her own sphere]/[social and economic], Ibid.

⁹⁵ Behrendt, *Efterskrift*, pp. 423-424.

⁹⁶ Behrendt, *Efterskrift*, p. 422.

⁹⁷ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

translations, from the allied countries, in order to publish and sell safely, the author of the book had to be French. There is no evidence in the correspondence where the genesis of the pseudonym is discussed in detail. However, according to Else Brundbjerg, the choice of the name Pierre Andrézel could be connected to the Danish poet Sophus Claussen's book *Fortælling om rosen*, that recalls the author's time in Paris during the second half of the 19th century. In the novel, one of the characters, Pierre Andrée, is a politician who at the time of the story has recently died. Andrée is depicted as a highly gifted man, who in order to have a career has negotiated his ideas accordingly to the most convenient policy. Brundbjerg argues that: 'Karen Blixen kunne vel også føle, at hun ved udsendelsen af denne bog misbrugte de ideer, det talent hun var i besiddelse af, udelukkende for at gøre forretning, uanset hvor nødvendigt det var økonomisk'.⁹⁸ Although not much can be found regarding the reason behind the choice of the name Pierre Andrézel, Karen Blixen considered her own story 'The Diver'—published in *Anecdotes of Destiny*—as an intertextual self-criticism of GV/AA, as she explains in a letter to her friend Birthe Andrup.⁹⁹ The diver of the story, Blixen explains, is called Elnazred, which is an anagram of Andrézel. 'The Diver' recounts the story of Mira Jama, the storyteller who recognizes in a peaceful fisherman—famous for his way of finding marvellous pearls through diving—one of the heroes of his tales. The fisherman is the theologian Safta Saufe, who in his youth had almost realized the dream of his life—namely to build wings that could allow him to fly to heaven and speak to the angels and eventually understand the meaning of life. When Mira Jama finds him, he has changed his name according to his new philosophy of life, taught to him by an old cowfish he met during his dives. Living as fish 'by all sides supported', quietly letting the current take him anywhere, Softa Saufe, the young theologian who wanted to fly and talk with the angels, has now become Elnazred, 'The happy man', his happiness found in his acceptance of taking life as it comes, with no unreachable aspirations. It could be argued that Karen Blixen felt, during the Nazi occupation, that she was carried by the dark currents of her present time to write something a little different, and in order to do so, she had to leave behind her usual

⁹⁸ Brundbjerg, Else, *Kvinden, Katteren, Kunstneren* (Charlottenlund: KnowWare, 1985), pp. 116-117, [Karen Blixen could also feel that, with the publication of this book, she had misused those ideas and that talent that she owned only to do business, regardless how necessary it was economically].

⁹⁹ Blixen qtd. in Brantly, pp. 182-183.

authorial mask and wear a different one. Andrézel could therefore also be, as suggested by Mads Bunch, a name deriving from ‘andre selv’, another self.¹⁰⁰

The writing and publication of GV in Denmark were deeply influenced by the atmosphere of darkness and lingering danger of the Nazi occupation. In the mentioned quote from ‘Echoes from the Hills’, Karen Blixen had written about the making of GV remarking that: ‘as was probably inevitable under the circumstances [the story] developed into a tale of darkness’.¹⁰¹ In the already cited letter to Dorothy Canfield she explained: ‘That in the course of the work I was carried away by the strongest currents in my atmosphere is possible, I shall not deny it!’.¹⁰² Another clue contradicting the idea of a book written carelessly and merely for fun is the letter Karen Blixen wrote to her lawyer Erik Petri on the 4th May 1944: ‘Jeg haaber paa De faar lidt Fart i Foretagendet. Jeg arbejdede som en Slave for at kunne aflevere Manuskriptet i Marts, og ved jo sletikke om det er kommet videre siden’.¹⁰³ Petri was also the one who took care of most of the correspondence and contracts regarding the publication of GV with Gyldendal. The contract with the publisher of GV was signed by Clara Svendsen on behalf of Pierre Andrézel, as stated in a letter Petri sends to Gyldendal on the 2nd of June 1944. The contract specifically refers to the text as a translation made by Clara Svendsen, who owns the right of it. Confirming the idea of the text as being intended for mainstream diffusion, in another letter from Petri to Gyldendal, he specifies that Clara Svendsen also owns the right to publish the book on other media – such as a feuilleton on a magazine, or as a movie.

The manuscript was eventually submitted on the 13th of June 1944, alongside with a short biography and a picture of the author. As Rostbøll confirms in the critical edition of GV, the picture of Pierre Andrézel was actually a picture of Karen Blixen’s brother, Anders Dinesen. This picture was sent from Karen Blixen to Petri in the letter of the 4th May: ‘Hermed Potrættet af Pierre Andrézel. De maa passe paa det, for det er det eneste eksisterende’.¹⁰⁴ With GV, the creative process was not limited to the book

¹⁰⁰ The ‘andre-selv’ suggestion came up during an informal discussion between Dr.Bunch and I at a conference we were both attending.

¹⁰¹ *Shadows*, p. 132.

¹⁰² Lasson, 1996, pp. 443-444.

¹⁰³ Letter from Blixen to Petri, 4/5/1944, kps 54, KBA, [I hope you can speed up the whole process. I have been working as a slave in order to deliver the manuscript by March, and I have no clue on what the progress have been].

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Blixen to Petri, 4/4/1944, kps 54, KBA, [Enclosed is the portrait of Pierre Andrézel. You must take good care of it, as this is the only existing one].

itself, it included the invention of the mysterious Pierre Andrézel, as well as Blixen's active engagement with the advertising campaign for the book (in the case of the American and English edition), and her participation, in Denmark, in the lively debate rose around the identity of Pierre Andrézel. The biography of Andrézel sent by Petri to Gyldendal recited:

Pierre Andrézel er født i 1890 i Bretagne. Hans moder var engelsk, og han studeret ved Oxford Universitetet. Han deltog og faldt i Verdenskrigen 1914. Bogen er en kriminalroman af den intellektuelle Genre, saaledes som den tillige er skrevet af Edgan Allan Poe, Stevenson, Stein Riverton og her i landet af Otto Rung.¹⁰⁵

It is relevant to notice that in Denmark the book was presented as a crime novel, but most reviewers will classify it as a gothic novel, and some of them will actually struggle to classify it at all. Although 'kriminalroman' was Blixen's preferred definition for the Danish edition, for the English and American edition, she shifted to present it as a pastiche of a gothic and a governess novel. But for the Danish market she was well aware of the popularity of crime fiction, and the unusualness of a typically Anglo-American literary phenomenon such as the gothic genre. Therefore, presenting the text as a crime novel would have increased its sales. The occupation saw the rise of detective novels, romantic novels and historical novels in the Danish publishing panorama, and GV combined all three genres in a unique pastiche.

Hans Brix, the first scholar to dedicate to GV some critical attention, wrote in his monographic work *Karen Blixen's eventyr*, that the success of the novel was improved under the occupation by the fact that it was a 'boghungrig tid',¹⁰⁶ a time of book-hunger. In fact, under the occupation the book industry saw no crisis – the demand for a literature for entertainment grew higher than ever giving rise to phenomena such as 'kjosklitteratur'¹⁰⁷ – mass produced paperbacks ranging from romance to detective novels. Serial novels were directed towards a younger audience, with titles such as *Bob Harder*, *Usa Detektiv* and *Fantastiske Trope Romaner*, while the eroticism and romanticism mixed in the stories

¹⁰⁵ Kps 54, KBA, [Pierre Andrézel was born in 1890 in Brittany. His mother was English, and he studied in Oxford. He fought and fell during First World War in 1914. The book is a crime of the intellectual kind, as the one's written by Edgar Allan Poe, Stevenson, Stein Riverton and here in the country by Otto Rung].

¹⁰⁶ Brix, p. 133.

¹⁰⁷ Agger, 2000, p. 559.

published in the magazine *Romanbladet*,¹⁰⁸ were mainly tailored for a female audience. These kind of publications provided the youth under the occupation with the escapism that they craved, but also served as a substitute for the lack of foreign films on the market, since English and American films were not allowed to be shown¹⁰⁹.

GV answered perfectly to the demand of a literature for entertainment and escapism. It was published on the 2nd of September 1944, after some delay due to significant paper shortage.¹¹⁰ The first edition of GV was published in a run of 5000 copies¹¹¹ and due to high demand, a second edition of an additional 5000 copies was published on the 15th November 1944. The book was reprinted two more times between November and December 1944, reaching a total of 15,594 copies sold.¹¹² Considering the circumstances – the difficult financial situation of the average Dane under the occupation, the paper shortage, and the general small population of Denmark – GV can rightly be considered as a wartime bestseller. As an entertaining novel, GV can be inserted in that current of entertainment-literature that was so popular during the occupation. As the Gyldendal volume of Danish history of literature point out: ‘Måske var det mørklægningen og følelsen af utryghed uden for hjemmets fire vægge, der fik flere til at anvende fritiden i lænestolen med en underholdende bog.’¹¹³

The book also raised a lively discussion regarding the identity of the author, with a surprisingly high number of journalists, literary critics and various intellectual figures speculating over the mysterious figure, and in most cases, connecting the writing style to Karen Blixen and urging her to admit the authorship. Despite Blixen’s own intervention with an article in defense of author’s anonymity, the ‘Andrézel’s affair’ continued to populate the pages of Danish newspapers and magazine for several months.¹¹⁴ The post-war years of reconstruction were more oriented towards existentialism, with the leading journal *Heretica* and authors such as Martin A. Hansen, Ole Wivel and Thorkvild Bjørnvig.

¹⁰⁸ Agger, 2000, p. 560.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Engelske og amerikanske film var ramt af importforbud, og fra januar 1943 kom der forbud mod at vise amerikanske film overhovedet’[English and American movies were hit by the import-veto, and from January 1943 American movies were forbidden] Agger, 2000, p. 560.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Gyldendal to Petri, 1/9/1944, kps 54, KBA.

¹¹¹ Trykkeriseddel[Printing list], 28/10/1944, kps 54, KBA.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Agger, 2000, p. 558, [Perhaps it was the blackouts and the feeling of insecurity outside of the house four walls, that made most people go back to their armchair with an entertaining book during their free time].

¹¹⁴ A comprehensive discussion on the topic will be presented in the following chapter, dedicated to the book’s reception.

In such a cultural panorama, there was no space for Pierre Andrézel's 'pjat' (nonsense). Significantly, in the post-war years the sales of the book decreased dramatically, with a total of 312 copies sold in 1946, and of 189 in 1947.¹¹⁵

GV in Denmark seems to have been a book of war, an emergency text inspired by the dark circumstances, and written especially for the people who lived through them. In *Shadows on the Grass* Blixen explained how writing the novel 'man kunde under denne Beskæftigelse glemme de Soldater der eksercerede i Gasmasker paa Vejen foran Huset og byggede Barakker i Parken'.¹¹⁶ Blixen also explained the emergency aspect of the Danish edition in a later letter to Constant Huntington dated 14th April 1946, in answer to the English publisher's suggestion of having the cover of the book illustrated by some famous artists:

As far as Pierre Andrézel is concerned, there will be no necessity for calling in any great artists. For at the time when the book was written, we were all exchanging illegal papers and books of all sorts, generally very imperfectly printed or typed, on bad paper, and it occurred to Pierre that he would like to have this book look like one of them.¹¹⁷

One could argue that Pierre Andrézel very purposely wanted to insert his creation in the current of illegal publications that had been so popular under the war. The reference to the illegal papers underlines the text's aim of being received as a war-book, incorporating the media and communications of the period, but also sharing the illegal papers same function – to be able to encourage dissent.

Putnam, *The Angelic Avengers* and Churchill's canary birds

Constant Huntington at Putnam was one of the first publishers Karen Blixen had contacted when looking for a publisher for her first book *Seven Gothic Tales* in 1933. He had at the time declined, on the basis that a book of short stories would not have sold a single copy and invited her instead to write a novel. It was only in 1935 that Huntington decided to publish Isak Dinesen's debut, after the great success it had had in America,

¹¹⁵ Kps 54, KBA.

¹¹⁶ *Skygger*, p. 110/'took one's mind off German soldiers drilling in gas-masks round one's house and setting up their barracks on one's land' *Shadows*, p. 131.

¹¹⁷ BtHu, 14/4/1946, kps 53, KBA.

where Robert K. Haas at Random House had decided to publish it in 1934. The relationship between Karen Blixen and Constant Huntington developed in a sincere friendship that lasted until the end of both their lives. The familiarity between the two is signaled in their correspondence by the fact that Huntington addressed her as ‘Tania’, which was the nickname that Denys Finch-Hatton gave to her in Kenya, and which remained her name among her English friends. Huntington was also one of Blixen’s most severe critics, and one of the few she would actually trust when dealing with her writing, which in the case of *The Angelic Avengers*, contributed in slowing down the publication process.

During the years of occupation, the correspondence between Karen Blixen and her English and American publishers stopped. Although she had managed to send them the manuscript of *Winter Tales* through the British Embassy in Sweden, she had no news regarding the destiny of the book until the end of the war. *Winter Tales* was published both in Great Britain and America during the war – Random House even made a soldier’s edition of the book –¹¹⁸ it was chosen as Book-of-the-Month by the homonymous club, and sold 28,000 copies in the first print run. Blixen learnt about its success at the end of the war and was particularly pleased by the soldier’s edition. In a letter to Robert K. Haas, publisher at Random House, dated 16th of February 1946 she writes, ‘I consider it a great honour to be published in this way, and to feel that my book may have entertained a few of our gallant allies!’.¹¹⁹ *Winter Tales* was a success in England as well where the first print of 5000 copies sold so quickly that despite the paper shortage Putnam had to reprint another 2000 copies the same month.

In the first letter that Huntington wrote to Blixen after the war, dated 28th of May 1945, he informs her that ‘during these years of occupation we were advised not, for their own sake, to try to communicate with people in Denmark’¹²⁰ but that he had been reassured by common friends that she was safe. He then tells her about the sales of *Winter Tales* and enquires about the novel ‘Frederick the Sailor’ that she had mentioned to him before the war that she was planning to write. It is important to point out this reference, as it contradicts Blixen’s own statement about GV/AA and novel writing in general, when

¹¹⁸ A soldier edition was a paperback edition of books that soldier could put in their pocket and take to the trenches (see Chapter 3, Part 2).

¹¹⁹ BtHa,16/2/1946, kps 51, KBA.

¹²⁰ HutB, 28/5/1945, kps 53, KBA.

on several occasions she had underlined how alien her writing was to such a genre,¹²¹ and how improvised the entire production of GV/AA had been. The reference to a novel is also mentioned by Haas in a letter dated 17th February 1939: 'I do hope that you are well and that you are going to let me hear more from you one of these days about that novel you are planning'.¹²² There is no evidence that the novel she had in mind as early as 1939 could actually have been GV; however, it is certainly significant that she must have been considering exploring the genre quite seriously, if she felt the need to communicate it to her publisher.

The publishers' interest in Blixen's venturing to write a novel was possibly economically driven – despite the success of Isak Dinesen's short stories, a novel would have been a more saleable product, likely to appeal to a wider audience. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand their enthusiasm after the war at the discovery of GV. Haas writes to Huntington in a letter dated 23rd of August 1945 informing him that Blixen has written a new book, a novel published in Denmark during the occupation:

Robbins [the mutual friend to whom Blixen had given a copy of GV] tells me that it is a horror story, symbolic of the Nazis and the Danish resistance movement, and the amazing thing is that it was published in 1944 by Gyldendal and sold 30,000 copies. No one seems to have read it with a very seeing eye.¹²³

A Danish copy of the book had, however, already reached Putnam, as Huntington wrote to Blixen on the 23rd of August 1945 informing her that one of their consultants had read it and 'enjoyed it immensely' and that he would publish it as soon as he received the English translation from her. Blixen replied in a letter dated 13th September 1945 explaining her late reply due to her health problems. The years of the occupation had indeed been particularly hard on her, as she had struggled with syphilis since her late twenties – 'the doctor has impressed on me that I must be very careful for a long time, in particular with all the kinds of mental work, as the whole thing seems to come from

¹²¹ As Thurman reports, after VE appeared in Denmark, Karen Blixen in an interview with the magazine *Samleren* had said 'I don't believe I will ever come to write a novel', Thurman, p. 351.

¹²² HatB, 17/2/1939, kps 51, KBA.

¹²³ HatHu, 23/8/1945, kps 53, KBA.

mental overworking¹²⁴ she wrote to Huntington, and added that ‘one has had to bear up during the five years of occupation, now we collapse in a most undignified way’.¹²⁵ Blixen would continue to suffer from several acute relapses of syphilis symptoms, which made it very hard to keep a normal work routine, and after the publication of GV it would take over ten years before she published any other ‘serious’ work.¹²⁶ In spite of the doctors’ recommendations of avoiding mental overwork, she had started the English translation of GV immediately after the end of the war and had the manuscript ready by the end of September. If the Danish version of GV had been a lifesaving book during the war, its English translation became a lifesaving book after the war, when she was confined to bed once again, and writing confirmed its purpose as a strategy of survival, as it had been after her return from Kenya. She would later comment in *Shadows on the Grass* that during the war: ‘For mit eget Vedkommende tog jeg, for nogenlunde at bevare Forstanden og Ligevægten, Tilflugt der hvor jeg i trange Tider i Afrika med same Formaal var søgt hen: jeg skrev en Roman’.¹²⁷

If for the Danish version the only indication she had given to the publisher was that of not giving away the author’s identity, for the English and American one she was much more particular about the production of the text: ‘I have, as you know, a few stipulations to make before the book is published at all’.¹²⁸ The letter to Huntington of the 13th of September, of which she would send an almost identical version to Haas, contained all her directions for the publication of GV in English. Her first concern was which title to give the book, and although she initially seemed to give free rein to the publishers, she would firmly remain settled upon ‘The Angelic Avengers’, despite both Haas and Huntington’s suggestions of changing it:

Now as to the ‘Gengældelsens Veje’, which, by the way, you may give any name you like: ‘The Roads of Retribution’, ‘The Angelic Avengers’, ‘The Innocent Man-Hunters’, ‘Rosa is Revenged [...] only it must be something

¹²⁴ BtoHu, 13/9/1945, kps 53, KBA.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ She would publish *Anecdotes of Destiny* in 1956, under her usual Isak Dinesen pseudonym.

¹²⁷ *Skygger*, p. 111/‘In order to save my reason, I had recourse to the remedy which, for that same purpose, I had used in Africa in times of drought. I wrote a novel’ *Shadows*, p. 132.

¹²⁸ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

in tune with the book itself, that is, rather old-fashioned, and I should prefer the title of the book to begin with a 'The'.¹²⁹

The other 'stipulation' about the book regarded the author's identity:

You must never give me away as the author of the book. Of course there has been so much talk about this matter here that I can hardly expect it not to be brought up about an English edition as well, and I don't mind it being repeated, or any kind of jest or joke being made about it. Only you must never let on that I have confessed the authorship. I will be allowed to deny it till my dying day, and even if everybody is aware of the true facts of the case.¹³⁰

Having struggled to get her first book published and considered valid literature, Karen Blixen was very protective of Isak Dinesen, her literary name and fame, and tried throughout her writing career to maintain a certain style coherence and authorial consistency. Perhaps she viewed Pierre Andrézel as a different mask, a voice clashing with Isak Dinesen's because of what she considered a qualitative difference between the two. As she wrote to Birthe Andrup in her letter regarding 'The Diver':

[The story] is a slightly melancholy, slightly jovial, slightly bitter complaint over the fact that *The Angelic Avengers*, far above any of my earlier books, was praised as a beautiful achievement [...] I have tried to provide you with wings, but then I could not please you. Now, when I have resolutely sought the depths, you reward me with applause and prosperity.¹³¹

For Blixen, the other important point of the preparation of Pierre Andrézel's debut in England and America was the way the book was to be launched. She suggested to both Huntington and Haas that:

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Blixen quoted in Brantly, p. 182.

You must be prepared to give the book a get-up, and to arrange an advertising campaign in tune with the book itself. It may be a task not altogether easy, but I have great confidence in your taste and sporting spirit. I think these things are very important, and may go a long way in the matter of success or failure of the book.¹³²

Although confident in the ability of Huntington in editing her texts very cleverly and discreetly, she still remained concerned about the editing of *GV*, writing to him that: ‘You may correct in it what you think necessary, but of course an author will always be a little nervous about this kind of thing. I shall prefer to have it less correct as to the language, to having the style and atmosphere too much altered’.¹³³ Another concern of hers was that of having the book published as soon as possible, to the point of urging Huntington to involve an English officer that could fly across the North Sea with the manuscript, instead of relying on the mail services that after the war suffered from severe delays and disruptions. Fully aware of the commercial potential of her novel, she also suggested that: ‘the book might have chances with the movies, and it would amuse me very much indeed, could this be worked. So I beg you to consider the problem, and to do all you can for it. It would be the greatest fun to me to go to England to see it being rehearsed’.¹³⁴ She concludes her letter with an explanation, or a justification, on the reason why she wrote something so different from her usual short-stories writing:

All in all, and above everything else: this book was written to provide me myself and my countrymen with a bit of fun in a, to say the least of it, funless time, the only praise I can give it is that it may show a certain sporting spirit by the public, but without the same sporting spirit in the publisher, this will be difficult to obtain. I know that you can say nothing about it till you have read the book, but with my experience of your understanding of my other books, I feel that I may trust you to understand what I mean. This to me is extremely important, and I urge upon you to do your best

¹³² BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

for me in this regard. I shall of course be very much interested to hear what you think of the book, and hope to have your opinion of it as soon as possible after you have received the MS. Do not be too severe, I have meant no harm!¹³⁵

To complete the Andrézel creation Blixen added in a postscript the translation of the information about the author which had appeared on the jacket of the Danish version but noted that:

All this does not go very well in England, where you will all know better. On the other hand, I cannot alter it for an English edition of the book, as this would mean to give away myself. I feel it to be rather a dilemma, but I think that the best thing will be to take it as it come, and to write: During the war, this book was published in Denmark. The publishing firm there gives the following information about the author. The public may then get out of it whatever they like! I will send you a photograph of Pierre Andrézel with the MS.¹³⁶

Blixen was well aware of the necessity of publishing her book as soon as possible, as its creation and its themes were so entangled with the historical circumstances of the war and the post-war consequences, and it answered a public demand for what she thought would have been a literature of entertainment and escapism. If these concepts were applicable to the context of an occupied Denmark, from its first arrival in a post-war England the book was instead mostly received as an allegory. When Huntington first read the manuscript he wrote to Blixen on the 5th of December 1945:

Dear Tania, I finished your thriller in the country over the week-end, reading breathlessly from early morning to late night. It's superlative entertainment, and more than that, for, as always in your writing, original ideas and points of view come through, giving the work a freshness and force and distinction rarely found elsewhere [...] You say the story has little to do with the Danish occupation and

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

fight for liberty, but I find a very moving and gallant parallel, which gives the book an added interest and importance. I think we ought to say that it was written during the War in a country occupied by the Germans.¹³⁷

Huntington was so keen on the interpretation of it as an allegory that he initially proposed to Blixen a different title, based upon Winston Churchill's definition of Denmark under Nazi occupation as the gangster's canary birds: 'Would you agree to something like THE CANARY BIRDS,¹³⁸ a story told for diversion in an occupied country, translated from the French of Pierre Andrézel by Karen Blixen'.¹³⁹ Huntington concluded his letter by praising Blixen's mastery in handling the tools of crime fiction, writing: 'I must pay you a great tribute for the way you build your evidence with absolute scientific precision, with never the slightest deviation from consistency' and compared her work to the Brontë sisters: 'You are mistress of their horror and emotion, but you have not their deadly seriousness, and you have a slightly ironic lightness and charm, which belong to the condition in which, and for which, the story was written'.¹⁴⁰ Huntington understood the entertaining aspect of the book, both as a goal for the author and as a service to the audience. However, his interpretation of it as a political allegory was strongly discouraged by Karen Blixen, who wanted the historical context to serve mainly as an explanation to the darkness of the book and the exceptional circumstances to explain and justify the several structural and stylistic incongruences in the text.

It took almost two years for Huntington to have the book published. The publishing industry, as everything else, struggled to go back to normality after the war. As Huntington wrote to Blixen in a letter dated 17th of April 1946 trying to explain the delay in the publication process: 'Conditions in the book trade are still as difficult and confused as ever [...] You have no idea how impossible it is to accomplish any of the things that were routine publishing details before the War'.¹⁴¹ However, it was not only technical difficulties that delayed the publication of GV/AA in England. The main trouble for

¹³⁷ HutB 5/12/1945, kps 53, KBA.

¹³⁸ As Rostbøll notes, Karen Blixen had thought that the expression 'the canary birds' had first been used by Churchill to refer to Denmark as a model protectorate under Nazi occupation. However, the expression came from Berlin in 1886 and was reused in 1941 on the Danish edition of BBC news, as Hans Kirchhoff has written in *Gads Leksikon om dansk besættelsestid* in 2002. (Rostbøll, 2013, p. 366).

¹³⁹ HutB 5/12/1945, kps 53, KBA.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ HutB 17/4/1946, kps 53, KBA.

Huntington, given Blixen's irrevocable decision to be in any way connected to the book, was that of presenting on a British market a supposedly English product. If Pierre Andrézel had to have an English background, the 'Britishness' of his work had to be at least credible. This process involved not only the linguistic corrections, but also the justification of most of the characters' names and background. In between December 1945 and January 1947, the editing process of *The Angelic Avengers* was Blixen's main occupation. Of all of Huntington's changes and suggestions, Blixen accepted mostly the ones concerning the use of her language, but was immovable on changing the title, or anything that would alter what she considered the atmosphere of the book. 'I myself like 'The Angelic Avengers' as being in the style of the whole book',¹⁴² she writes to Huntington in reply to his request for a title that could be 'strange and symbolic'.¹⁴³ Blixen would have preferred the cover of the book to be plain as the Danish one, but eventually succumbed to Huntington's illustration idea:

Conditions in England are quite different from the conditions in Denmark when the book was published, so that the rather blank sketchy make-shift which was appropriate enough for the Danish edition, would not do at all here. What would you think of canary-birds with rather human faces, in a cage in the centre of the design, surrounded by suggestions of the characters in the book, all in grey – the Pennhallows, the young lovers, perhaps the horse Mazeppa, Olympia, the Devil himself, etc? I think such a design might convey something of the slightly supernatural character of the work.¹⁴⁴

There are no detailed documents in the Karen Blixen archive containing the correspondence with Putnam regarding the sale of AA, but in a letter dated 14th March 1947, one of the editors of Putnam writes to Blixen, informing her that AA 'was published at the end of February, and your 20 free copies were dispatched by parcel post. We have

¹⁴² BtHu 8/2/1946, kps 53, KBA.

¹⁴³ HutB 24/1/1946, kps 53, KBA.

¹⁴⁴ HutB 17/4/1946, kps 53, KBA.

already sold over 6,000 copies, in spite of the absence of both reviews and the magic of your name'.¹⁴⁵

Random House, Dorothy Canfield and The-Book-of-The-Month-Club

If Constant Huntington's main goal in his editing of the book was that of maintaining a certain stylistic coherence by mainly intervening on the linguistic aspect of the novel, Robert K. Haas of Random House on the other hand attempted to change the structure of the plot itself. Once he had read the manuscript of GV/AA he wrote to Blixen praising her skills as a thriller writer: 'I think that the way you have created an authentic Jane Austen atmosphere is a real tour de force. As a matter of fact, up to the time of the death of the Pennhallow I was literally on the edge of my chair',¹⁴⁶ but he was most of all concerned about the happy ending of the novel:

I feel I must make the comment that the last few chapters dealing with the romances of the two girls and concluding in a happy ending were just a bit anti-climatic [...] it seemed to us that had those chapters been telescoped and not quite so much emphasis been given to what happened after the deaths, the book might have been more of an integral whole.¹⁴⁷

In order to convince Blixen, Haas also mentioned that he recognised the book's potential for a movie 'but from our experience here I am strongly of the opinion that I would stand a much better chance were the suggested changes to be initiated'.¹⁴⁸ As Huntington did, Haas tried to persuade Blixen to let him use the Isak Dinesen pseudonym: 'we could double the distribution of the book were your own name attached to it'.¹⁴⁹ As opposed to Huntington's idea of presenting the text as an allegory, Haas had a more cautious approach on the matter. He wrote to Blixen that although he saw the connection, the implications 'seem to me to be so over-subtle that it would be inappropriate to refer to them in any advertising campaign'.¹⁵⁰ Blixen agreed with Haas' view, writing in response:

¹⁴⁵ HutB 14/3/1947, kps 53, KBA.

¹⁴⁶ HatB 20/2/1947, kps51, KBA.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

As to the ‘implications’ in the book, I entirely agree with you that it would be inappropriate to refer to them in any advertising campaign. They hang together with the situation here in Denmark at the time when the book was published, when the German censorship was at its most severe, and also with Winston Churchill’s little joke about the Danes, when he referred to us as ‘the Gangster’s canary birds’.¹⁵¹

In the same letter, Blixen justified her refusal to edit the ending of the book by explaining that she did not intend the story to be ‘an orthodox crime novel, where the whole plot finishes with the discovery or punishment of the murdered. I see it more as a kind of ‘hold-all’, where romance, crime, and idyll are all blended’.¹⁵² And she also considered that removing the last two chapters would ruin the plot’s balance: ‘the long introduction before Mr Pennhallow makes his entrance on the stage does somehow require to be weighed up by some kind of conclusion after he disappeared’.¹⁵³ Of the same opinion was Dorothy Canfield, to whom Haas had given the manuscript to read in the hope she would agree with his editing idea. On the contrary, Canfield was one of the most enthusiastic readers of the novel, and she was the one who chose the novel as Book-of-the-Month for the Book of the Month Club January selection in 1947.¹⁵⁴

It was actually through the intervention of Dorothy Canfield that Karen Blixen had been able to publish her first book.¹⁵⁵ As Judith Thurman reports in her biography of Karen Blixen, the American writer was a good friend of Blixen’s aunt Bess Westenholz, and she was the one who sent the manuscript of *Seven Gothic Tales* to Haas and convinced him to publish it. After reading GV/AA, Canfield wrote to Haas that she has read the manuscript with ‘almost extravagant pleasure and admiration’ and that this book, ‘as far as success with great numbers of readers goes, will outdo her earlier success’.¹⁵⁶ Canfield grasped immediately Blixen’s entertaining aim and also understood her balance and construction of the novel: ‘The wild adventure and violence of the story [. . .] would be

¹⁵¹ BtHa 8/3/1946, kps 51, KBA.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ HatB 16/12/1946, kps 51, KBA.

¹⁵⁵ Thurman, p. 312.

¹⁵⁶ Canfield to Haas, 25/3/1946, kps 51, KBA.

incomplete and unintelligible, (to the inner eye) without the ending'.¹⁵⁷ Like Blixen, Canfield also recognised the importance of having the book published as soon as possible: 'the theme of the book is profound, universal and timely now! [. . .] The deathly anguish of Zosine, so powerfully described in the last part of the book is analogous to that black night of the soul, through which we have all been living, driven,- as we have been- by the Germans to drink the deep poison of hatred'.¹⁵⁸ Canfield's letter persuaded Haas to keep the ending unedited, and perhaps contributed to raise his enthusiasm for the publication process. He eventually wrote to Blixen: 'Every time I think of the book I feel a real surge of enthusiasm and admiration and I do want you to know how profoundly it has interested and moved me as well as the others of us here who have read it'.¹⁵⁹

In spite of the adulations, Blixen vehemently refused the candidature of AA as Book-of-the-Month. In a letter to Haas she explained that she did not want Andrézel's book aligned with her other books that had received the same honor (*Seven Gothic Tales*, *Out of Africa*, *Winter Tales*). She wrote to Haas that 'Pierre Andrézel, when he wrote the book, made the vow, upon the cage of the canary-birds, not to accept any literary mark of honour for it'.¹⁶⁰ Blixen wanted Andrézel to remain an anonymous voice, serving the necessity of entertaining and distracting during 'a fun-less time' and not to be a recognizable author. She had already written to Haas in the letter of the 8th of March explaining why she did not want to give her own name to the book:

The very reasons which you produce in order to make me give up the name of Pierre Andrézel are those on account of which I shall never consent to let the book be published under my own name. You will understand what great delight it gives me to be told that 'my name has become one almost to conjure within the American market'. But the more it is so, the greater care I will take of that name, the more I shall feel my artistic responsibility and the call of noblesse oblige. [...] I have already in Denmark found some difficulty in making my publishers see the point of my anonymity, and of the existence of Pierre Andrézel. It is rather difficult

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ HatB 10/4/1946, kps51, KBA.

¹⁶⁰ BtHa 16/6/1946, kps 51, KBA.

to explain when the idea is not grasped immediately and so to say, by intuition. It is not a deceit, it is a mask!¹⁶¹

Haas agreed to all of Blixen's stipulations. The book was published in January 1947 by Random House, and judging by the royalties document included in the correspondence, in the first print it sold 21,297 copies. After the initial success the sales of the second half of 1947 amounted to 1,592, and in the following year – as had happened for the Danish edition – the sales decreased dramatically, registering a total of twenty copies sold.

Concluding Remarks

GV/AA is a text that can be fully understood only within the extraordinary context in which it was conceived. Because it was a product of war, its success and diffusion were deeply connected to the receiving context. As demonstrated by Blixen's resistance in editing the English version of the text, she strongly wanted it to stay imperfect, as to symbolize the urgency, the imperfections and instability of the time in which it was written. As mentioned, Blixen also justified her refusal to edit the ending of the book by explaining that she did not intend the story to be 'an orthodox crime novel' but rather as 'hold-all'.¹⁶² The book's pastiche of different genres mirrors its 'imperfection', but as we shall see, the reception of its genre changed according to the cultural context in which it was received. The following chapter seeks to explore the connection between the genre definition and its function in the receiving context, through the analysis of the first reviews of the text, published in magazines and newspapers across Denmark, the UK and the US.

¹⁶¹ BtHa 8/3/1945, kps 51, KBA.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Chapter 3:

The Reception of *Gengældelsens Veje* in Denmark, and of *The Angelic Avengers* in the United Kingdom and the United States

‘There are certain parallels between detection and literary criticism. Both are attempts to make sense of the here and now by examining the there and then’.¹

Introduction

If the creation of GV/AA was intrinsically connected to the War and Post-War circumstances, so was its immediate reception, which varied according to the receiving context. As John Storey has underlined: ‘Text and context are not separate moments available for analysis at different times. Text and context are always part of the same process, the same moment – they are inseparable: one cannot have a text without a context, or a context without a text’.² The aim of the following chapter is to discuss the influence of the cultural context in defining the genre of the text, as well as the function and meaning of those genre classifications within each reception context. While the previous chapter was focused on the correspondence between Blixen and her publishers, this chapter is going to use the reviews published on a variety of newspapers and magazines between 1944 and 1948 in Denmark, the UK and the US. The first part of the chapter analyses the immediate reception of GV after its first publication in Denmark, and examines how and why the attention of the reviewers was focused on the unmasking of Pierre Andrézel and the challenging task of defining the novel’s genre.

The second part of the chapter discusses the reception of the novel in the UK and the US in the immediate aftermath of WWII. Focusing on this circumscribed period of time allows us to understand why GV/AA can be defined as a war-book, namely a text that was relevant and popular specifically in the context of the conflict and its immediate aftermath, and why it subsequently lost its allure, and meaning to

¹ Scaggs, John, *Crime fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 1-2.

² Storey, John, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: theories and methods* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 44.

later generations of readers that had not lived through the trauma of war. Although the reception and genre definition of the book varied according to the receiving context it becomes evident in all analysed cases that the immediate success of GV/AA relied on the novel's ability to respond to the public demand for escapist, entertaining literature, which characterized the most popular books during and after the war.

Part 1: The Reception of *Gengældelsens Veje* in Denmark

‘Mystik om en bog’³ unmasking Pierre Andrézel.



The immediate reception of GV in Denmark was generally characterized by two main questions: who was the author and what exactly was this book. The second question initiated a lively debate on literary genre. GV was classified by the literary reviewers as a gothic novel, a crime novel, a governess novel, a Victorian novel, a sentimental novel, and a pastiche of them all. As discussed in Chapter 2, by the time GV was published, Denmark was in the midst of one its most unstable moments in its history with virtually no functioning government or police forces. Furthermore, the rise of sabotage and anti-occupation actions saw the Nazi surveillance increase. In this precarious climate the entertainment industry was as lively as ever, with audiences craving escapism and light entertainment. In the book market, this meant a rise in the sales of the two primary entertainment genres – romances and crime fiction. Despite

³ Title of a review published in *B.T.* on the 25th September 1944. Please note that from now, if not otherwise stated, all the reviews cited come from the [kps \(folder\) 154 in the Karen Blixen Archive \(KBA\)](#), Copenhagen Royal Library

⁴ Picture published in *Politiken*, 24th September 1944, kps 154, KBA. It says ‘Pierre Andrézel. There is a glimpse of Rungsted Inn in the background!’, implying Karen Blixen’s association with GV, as Rungsted was well known for being the location of her family’s house.

the Nazi censors' ban on publishing texts from the allied countries, Danish readers – especially younger generations – craved for the exoticism of the popular paperback novel (*kejoskelitteratur*), resulting in the popularity of series such as *Bob Harder*, *USA Detektiv* and *Fantaskiske Troperomaner*.⁵

The question regarding the identity of Pierre Andrézel became the dominant element of the reviews in the months immediately after the book's publication, with this literary mystery coming to be known as 'The Andrézel Affair'.⁶ As the sales figures in the previous chapter show, *GV* quickly became a bestseller in the first few months after its publication. The reason for this success can be linked to the public's need for entertainment and escapism in the precarious historical environment, but it was also the curiosity towards unmasking Pierre Andrézel that magnified the book's fortune. As Benedikte Røstbøll writes: 'Anmeldelserne blev begyndelsen på en intens klapjagt på romanens forfatter og på en ophedet debat om brug af pseudonym og retten til anonymitet – et forløb, der strakte sig over september, oktober og november 1944, og som er blevet betegnet Andrézel-affæren'.⁷

In his work on crime fiction, John Scaggs notes that 'there are certain parallels between detection and literary criticism. Both are attempts to make sense of the here and now by examining the there and then',⁸ and the Andrézel affair certainly provided a fertile ground for literary detection work among critics and journalists. Karen Blixen's name was immediately suggested, and the various stylistic clues in *GV* that unmistakably pointed to her were quickly spotted. Some reviews simply implied that Blixen was the author without actually mentioning her name – such as the notice in *Social Demokratiet* on the 1st November 1944: 'Det kan ikke nægtes, at Romanen afslører et nærgaaende Slægtskab med den mest raffinerede Stilist og mest Internationale Skikkelse mellem vore kvindelige Forfattere'.⁹ Others would very explicitly refer to her, with titles ranging from 'Karen Blixen under nyt Pseudonym?'¹⁰

⁵ Agger, 2000, pp. 559-560.

⁶ See Røstbøll, 2013, p. 317.

⁷ Røstbøll, 2013, pp. 316-317, [The reviews were the beginning of an intense hunting for the author of the book, and of a lively debate on the use of pseudonym and the right to anonymity – a process that stretched over September, October and November 1944, and that was referred to as the Andrézel affair].

⁸ Scaggs, pp. 1-2.

⁹ [It cannot be denied that the novel reveals a close affinity with the most elegant stylist and the most international figure among our female writers].

¹⁰ In *Soro Amtstidende* 19th September 1944, kps 154, KBA, [Karen Blixen under new pseudonym?].

to 'Har Baronessen igen skrevet undet andet Navn?'.¹¹ Some seemed to assume that there was no doubt that Blixen held the pen behind the mysterious Pierre Andrézel, such as the eloquent reviewer in the *Aalborg Stiftsblade* (7th October 1944): 'det må være Karen Blixen, der igen har moret sig med at forvirre Læseverdenen'.¹²

The most accurate work in tracing Andrézel's true identity was written by the pastor Kaj Thaning in *Nationaltidende* on the 19th November 1944 with the title 'Et stykke litterært Detektivearbejde - Pastor Kaj Thaning begrundet, hvorfor Andrézel er Karen Blixen'.¹³ Thaning's justification was on philological grounds – all the stylistic hallmarks identified by him in GV pointed to Blixen. He especially focused his attention on the English-oriented syntax that he believed characterized Blixen's style 'ved andet Øjekast af være skrevet af Karen Blixen- rent bortset fra Indholdet beviser Sproget det, præget, som det er, af Fru Blixens mange engelske Reminescenser'.¹⁴

According to Karen Blixen in *Shadows on the Grass*,¹⁵ her declaration in the interview with the *Paris Review*,¹⁶ and what she wrote to her publishers, the main aim of writing GV was amusement and have fun, in a 'fun-less time'.¹⁷ It could be argued that the 'fun' which GV was meant to provide was also in the form of a literary game, where she would have been allowed to wear a different authorial mask, and her readership would have been playing along by enjoying the text and accepting her new mask. The Andrézel affair, and the hunt for her identity was something that she considered as far too invasive, and felt almost as a betrayal from her countrymen.¹⁸ Her other main worry was that of being unmasked vis a vis the Nazi censors with a text that was potentially highly problematic. In fact, according Ole Wivel, writing in his memoir about his friendship with Karen Blixen, he had no doubt that the story of GV was meant to be read as an allegory of Denmark's situation under occupation. Therefore, since the use of a different pseudonym was primarily intended as a

¹¹ In *Aarbus Stiftstidende* 26th September 1944, kps 154, KBA, [Has the Baroness written under yet another name?].

¹² [it must be Karen Blixen, who has once again had fun in confusing her readers].

¹³ [A piece of literary detective work – Pastor Kaj Thaning explains why Andrézel is Karen Blixen].

¹⁴ [a part from the content, another clue that demonstrates it was written by Karen Blixen is the language, characterized as it is by Ms Blixen's many English reminiscences].

¹⁵ Dinesen, Isak, *Shadows on the Grass* (New York : Random House, 1961).

¹⁶ Eugene Walter 'Isak Dinesen, the Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review*, Autumn 1956, No.14.

¹⁷ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

¹⁸ Rostbøll, 2013, pp. 322-24.

protection against the Nazi censors, the literary detective game initiated by the Danish reviewers could have been a very dangerous one.

Wivel also reports that Blixen, frustrated by the direction the *Andrézel* affair had taken, had instructed him to publish a review at the time the second edition of the *GV* was printed, on 14th October 1944, in which he was meant to explicitly suggest that the book was written in Danish and by a Danish author. The review was published in *Nationaltidende* on 22nd of November 1944¹⁹ and quotes the sentence of the novel in which Zosine calls herself and Lucan ‘The canary birds’, Churchill’s famous expression when referring to Denmark under the Nazi occupation. Wivel writes that ‘påvisning af denne sætningstilføjelse med så tydelige allusioner til Det tredje Riges opfattelse og brug af Danmark under krigen (...) efter Karen Blixen mening måtte få selv den dumme dansker til at vogte sig for flere afløringsforsøg’.²⁰ Blixen also decided to take part in the *Andrézel* debate herself, writing an article which seems to be warning her readership about the dangers of unmasking *Andrézel*. The piece was published in *Berlingske Aftenavis* on 23rd November 1944 and titled ‘Om pseudonymer og Gengældelsens Veje’:

‘Gengældelsens Veje’ er ikke nogen daarlig Roman. Men den er skrevet for at underholde, uden kunstnerisk Prætention [...] Det gør paa mig Indtryk af at være skrevet i en Fart [...] Det er jo ikke godt for os at vide, hvad der da har drevet en ukendt Forfatter – eller, for den Sage Skyld, selve Pierre Andrézel – til at skrive denne Bog. Maaske har han følt, hvad en af hans Personer, paa side 82, som jeg tilfældigt først slog op paa,– udtaler. ‘Alvorlige Folk,’ siger Zosine ‘skal ikke gaa for strengt i Rette med et Menneske, for hvad det finder paa at more sig med, naar det er lukket inde som en Fange, og ikke engang har Lov til at sige, at det er i Fængsel.’ Og maaske har han forestillet sig, at der kunde være andre Mennesker i Landet, der følte som han selv [...] Han har i det hele ikke villet kræves til Ansvar for denne Roman, og har ikke følt nogen Forpligtelse til at vedgaa Sandheden om det. Jeg vil da her gerne udtale, at jeg er ganske enig med Pierre Andrézel. Jeg vilde ikke, i hans Sted, have Skrupler ved at benægte mit Forfatterskab, selv i det

¹⁹ Rostbøll, 2013, p. 329.

²⁰ Wivel, p. 132, [highlighting this sentence, which had such a clear allusion to the Third Reich’s perception and use of Denmark during the war (...) according to Karen Blixen should have made even the dumbest Dane wary of attempting any other unmasking experiments].

højtideligste Forhør. For et Pseudonym er ikke noget Bedrag, det er en Maske [...] Hvis denne ukendte Forfatter i dette øjeblik føler, at han har faaet nogle Læsere til, for en Time eller to, at glemme andre Ting for de Rædsler, som han i 'Gengældelsens Veje' slæber dem igennem, saa har han maaske opnaaet, hvad han vilde, og er godt tilfreds. Og han vilde da maaske være sine Læsere taknemlig, dersom de, til Gengæld, vilde give ham Lov til, som hidtil, at gaa sine egne Veje'.²¹

In her defence of authorial anonymity, Blixen was very clearly stating that the intention of the book was that of offering entertainment and escape. Years later, when she came to comment on the book in both *Shadows on the Grass* and the interview with the *Paris Review*, she will underline how writing the book offered her the same kind of escapism that it subsequently provided to its audience during the dark years of the occupation. However, according to Benedikte Rostbøll the concept of fun – so characteristic of Blixen's work and the basic intention of GV – was not grasped by her Danish audience: 'Dette litterære maskespil ville de alvorfulde anmeldere ikke lege med i, endsig respektere. I stedet insisterede de på at afsløre og demaskere forfatteren bag pseudonymet'.²² Karen Blixen often emphasised her estrangement from Danish attitudes: she stated in a letter to Birthe Andrup regarding the Danish reception of GV: 'The Danes speak all the time of their sense of humor, 'det danske lune' but...they have so many times insisted upon taking me seriously, they have not been willing to play with me...It is a terribly disconcerting feeling to be the only intoxicated one at a party of very sober people, one feels oppressed'.²³

²¹ Blixen in Brix, p. 255, [GV is not a bad novel. But it was written to entertain, with no artistic intention [...] I have the impression it was written in a hurry [...] It is not wise for us to know what has driven this unknown author – or Pierre Andrézel in this case – to write this book. Maybe he felt like one of his characters from page 82- which just happened to be the first page I opened. 'Serious people' says Zosine 'should not be too hard with what one chooses to have fun with, when they are shut up in a prison and not even allowed to say that they are prisoners'. And perhaps he thought that there would be other people in the country that were feeling just the same [...] he did not want to take the responsibility for this novel, and has no obligation to acknowledge the truth about it. I would like to say that I strongly agree with Pierre Andrézel. In his place, I would not hesitate in denying my authorship, even under a solemn oath. Because a pseudonym is not a deception, it is a mask [...] If this unknown author at this moment feels that he has managed, for an hour or two, to get some readers to forget other troubles through the horrors he drags them through in GV, then he has probably achieved what he wanted and is quite satisfied. And maybe he would be grateful if his readers in exchange would allow him to go his own way].

²² Rostbøll, 2013, p. 325, [The solemn reviewers did not want to play along with the literary mask game, let alone respect it. Instead, they insisted upon revealing and unmasking the writer behind the pseudonym].

²³ Thurman, p. 352.

The Andrézel affair undeniably became a phenomenon prominently preoccupied with uncovering the author's identity. Yet – despite Blixen lamenting the Danes' lack of irony and fun – what emerges from the reviews is a fairly different pattern. The Andrézel affair was characterized mainly by the willingness to engage with the mysterious author in a literary game. With the exception of Kaj Thaning's detective piece, the tone of the reviewers was overwhelmingly playful.²⁴ As will be elucidated upon in the following part of the chapter, GV not only offered entertainment and escapism by means of the reading experience, but also by means of its the reception. The Andrézel affair represented a welcome distraction from the occupation affairs, a divertissement that in encouraging an extremely lively discussion on literature and literary genre shows a fascinating case of collective reading experience.

'Kriminal historie i krinoline' *Gengældelsens Veje*, genre and literary canon

GV became a wartime bestseller because it satisfied the audience's expectation of entertainment and escapism, a feature that was quickly recognised by the Danish reviewers: 'Er det Tidens Tegne, at *Gengældelsens Veje* er blevet en efterspurgt Bog?'²⁵ asked the reviewer of *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, suggesting the importance of the precarious historical context in the success of a book 'der ikke ligner de andre'.²⁶ If the vast majority of the Danish journalists and critics dedicated their efforts to unmasking Pierre Andrézel, what energy there remained was used to define the novel's genre. 'Det er ikke nemt at rubricere denne Bog',²⁷ lamented the opening line of the 15th May 1945 review of the *Vendsyssel Tidende* newspaper – 'i stil og tone er den en Guvernantroman fra forrige Aarhundrede, og Handlingen er skiftevis en sentimental Kærlighedshistorie og en særdeles dystre Kriminalroman'.²⁸ One of the most entertaining, and relevant, reviews of the book was published in *Middelfart Social Demokrater* on 5th December 1944²⁹, sporting a title that managed to convey the genre question quite eloquently: 'Kriminal historie i Krinoline' [A crime novel in crinoline]:

²⁴ See for example 'Kriminal historie i krinoline', discussed in the following paragraph.

²⁵ *Aarhus stiftstidende*, kps 154, KBA, [Is it a sign of the times that GV has become a very requested book?].

²⁶ [a book that does not resemble the others].

²⁷ *Vendsyssel Tidende*, 15th May 1945, kps 154, KBA, [It is not easy to classify this book].

²⁸ [It is a Governess novel from the last century in style and tone, and the plot shifts in between a romantic love story and a gloomy crime novel].

²⁹ 'Kriminal historie i Krinoline' in *Middelfart Social Demokrater*, 5th December 1944, kps 154, KBA.

Kan de lide Mystik? Saa er 'Gængældelsens Veje' Bogen. Det er Mystik i tredje Potens. Mystisk er historien, mystisk er Forfatteren, mystisk er den Clara Svendsen, som har oversat Bogen til Dansk, hvis den er oversat, og hvis der er en forfatter, der hedder Pierre Andrézel. Men en Bog er der – og den er djævelesk spændende [...] det er en fantastisk Fortælling, en romantisk Gyser med en fornem Air af gammel arisktokratik kultur og en Snært dekadent Raffinement, som kunde Karen Blixen have skrevet den, alias Isak Dinesen, hvis det nu ikke var Andrézel eller Svendsen. I hvert fald maa Andrézel have lært Blixens historier udenad for til en grad at indleve sig i hendes Tonefald [...] Hovedpersonerne er to underdejlige Pigebørn i Kysehatte og Krinoliner, hvis Skæbne former sig mere fantastisk end 'De syv fantastiske Fortællinger' tilsammen [...] 'Gængældelsens Veje' forener Kriminalgyserens Nervespænding med aristokratiske Oldeforældres højromantiske, smukt rødmende og blegende, taarevædede og idealistiske Levemaade. Krydsningen er yderst raffineret Underholdning, der imødekommer Tidens Trang til Flugt i Fantasiens Verden paa en kultiveret Maade.³⁰

Instead of trying to confine it into one genre, this review seemed to accept, without question, the text's multifaceted essence, as well as its aim to entertain. It is also interesting to notice how it underlines the link between the need to entertain and the historical context, suggesting that in difficult times the audience craves escape. This review was also one of the most representative of the kind of reception GV received in Denmark, where the playful use, intersection and subversion of tropes from various

³⁰ [Do you like mystery? Then GV is the book. It is mystery cubed. The story is mysterious, the author is mysterious, and the books' translator to Danish, Clara Svendsen, is mysterious too – if it was translated, and if there is really an author called Pierre Andrézel. But this book is diabolically entertaining [...] it is a fairy tale, a romantic horror with a distinguished atmosphere of old-fashioned aristocratic culture and giving an impression of decadent sophistication that could only have been written by Karen Blixen, alias Isak Dinesen – if in fact it was not Andrézel or Svendsen. In any case, Andrézel must have known Blixen's stories by heart in order to channel her style [...] The main characters are two extremely young ladies in bonnet hats and crinoline whose destiny takes a direction that is even more fantastic than the 'Seven Fantastic Tales' altogether. GV combines the nerve-breaking suspense of the thriller with our ancestors' aristocratic, heavily romantic, beautifully blushing, tear-stained, idealistic ways. The combination results in an extremely sophisticated entertainment that meets, in a cultivated way, the current time's need for escape in an imaginary world].

literary genres that characterise GV did not escape the eye of the most attentive readers.

Although Blixen lamented that the reception of GV in Denmark was contaminated by an excess of seriousness when dealing with a book that she had planned to be pure entertainment, most of the reviewers actually dealt with it quite ironically, engaging with her in a debate that was often rather humorous, as is the case with the above review, or in the case of a review published on Politiken on the 24th September: ‘Forlaget lancerer Bogen som er litterær Kriminalroman, men den er ikke mere kriminalroman end Eventyret om Rødhatte og Ulven. Den er nærmest hvad vi vilde kalde en ‘gotisk’ eller ‘fantastisk’ Fortælling, som er svulmet op til en Roman’.³¹ This particular review was in response to Gyldendal’s choice to present GV on the market as a *kriminalroman*. This choice can be explained by Blixen’s and Gyldendal’s awareness of the familiarity of the wider Danish audience with the genre of crime fiction. As Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas underline in *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, ‘Denmark, like Norway, saw early interest in the crime story’³² identifying the first Danish crime fiction author as Steen Steensen Blicher with ‘Præsten i Vejlbye’ [The Priest of Vejlbye] as early as 1829. Confirming the longevity of the debate on GV, Nestingen and Arvas also mentions that ‘Other prominent Danish writers, such as Hans Scherfig and Hans Kirk, wrote classical crime fiction; one might even argue that Karen Blixen engaged the form in a novel like *The Angelic Avengers*’.³³

Presenting the book as *kriminalroman*, however, did not stop it from being classified as a gothic novel. In order to make this genre and its connection with GV more understandable for a Danish audience, a review published in *Ekstrabladet* on the 24th October 1944 titled ‘En Gotisk fantasi’ [A gothic fantasy] had a rather informative approach:

³¹ [The publishing house is launching the book as a crime novel, but this is no more a crime novel than Little Red Riding Hood is. This is almost what we would refer to as a gothic or a fantastic tale expanded into a novel].

³² Nestingen, Andrew and Arvas, Paula eds. *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p.4.

³³ Ibid.

Gængældelsens Veje' er en ny [...] 'gotisk Fortælling'; en Genrebetegnelse, der i danske Ører ikke har nogen klar Betydning, med en staaende Rubrik i den engelske Litteraturhistorie [...] 'Gængældelsens Veje' er da ogsaa fornemmelig er frem gående littærer Pastiche, hvori Still-Elementar fra den viktorianske Guvernante Roman [...] blander sig med Skrækvirkninger som dem, 'Monk' Lewis opererede med allerede i 1790erne [...] Skønt højliterær indtil det litteraturhistoriske.³⁴

What is interesting in both cases is the liveliness of a literary debate that went on for months in Denmark – one could even argue that is still going on – involving scholars as well as a wider community of readers. Other reviewers considered the text as a pastiche, such as the one published by *Jyllandsposten* on the 12th September 1944, tellingly titled 'Raffineret Pastiche' (Sophisticated Pastiche): 'En ung fransk Forfatter har her moret sig med at digte Jane Austen og Simenon sammen. Det er den gammeldags Dame-Roman Stil, og det er den moderne kriminalistiske Milieu Gyser Stemning, vi her faar serveret'.³⁵ A similar opinion could be found in Svend Erichsen's review in *Social Demokratien* on the 1st November 1944, titled 'Et dansk roman af international Snit [A Danish novel of international design]':

Bogen er en med artistisk noblesse og Finfølelse gennemført Pastiche over den romantiske Novelle - nærmere afgrænset den romantiske Uhygge-Novelle. Navne som Hoffman, Poe og Stevenson falder i Pennen. [...] En bog som 'Gængældelsens Veje' er poetisk Underholdning af ædel Kvalitet. Aristokratisk kunst – ja vel, men for en meget stor Læsekreds.³⁶

³⁴ 'En Gotisk fantasi' in *Ekstrabladet*, 24th October 1944, kps 154, KBA, [GV is a new [...] gothic tale, a genre classification that to Danish ears does not have a clear meaning, but a steady genre in English literary history [...] GV is also mainly a literary pastiche, in which style elements from the Victorian governess novel [...] combine with horror effects that Lewis already used in 'the Monk' in the 1790s [...] beautiful and highly cultivated in the literary history].

³⁵ 'Raffineret Pastiche' in *Jyllandsposten* 12th September 1944, kps 154, KBA, [A young French author has had fun in poetically combining Austen and Simenon. Here we are offered the style of an old fashioned Lady's novel style with a modern crime and horror atmosphere].

³⁶ 'Et dansk Roman af international Snit' in *Social Demokratiet*, 1st November 1944, kps 154, KBA, [The book is one of artistic nobility and delicacy of feelings throughout, a pastiche of the romantic novel – closer to the border of the romantic- horror novel. Names such as Hoffman, Poe and Stevenson spring to mind [...] A book such as 'Gængældelsens Veje' is poetic entertainment of noble quality. Certainly aristocratic art, but for a very large readership].

With the discussion on the genre classification of the book followed the inevitable question on how legitimate it was to consider this book as proper literature – as it was so precariously suspended between traditional genre denominations of high-brow and low-brow styles. Since the crime genre was such a predominant feature of the text, the enduring discussion of its literary value has characterized the reception of GV up until very recently. As Joel Black writes in ‘Crime Fiction and Literary Canon’: ‘Crime fiction has always had an uneasy relation to what scholars and critics consider “literature” and he goes on to make a very relevant point we can apply to our discussion of Blixen/Andrézel ‘One need only note the tendency among established literary authors to use pseudonyms when writing in this genre’.³⁷ Some reviewers tried to find a compromise, such as the one published in *Vendsyssel Venstreblad* on the 23th November 1944 : ‘Den rummer alle de Egeskaber, der lokker det store Publikum til, og samtidigt tilfredsstiller den selv den kræsneste Læser. Det er noget af et Mirakel’.³⁸ The review published in *Social Demokratiet* on the 11th November 1944 concurred: ‘Det lykkedes Forfatteren at hæve et Emne, der ellers maatte være velegnet til et kulørt Hefte, op i et litterært Plan, som vel er Underholdningslitteraturens, men dog den fornemme Underholdningslitteratur.’³⁹ Another review written by Jacob Paludan in *Nationaltidende* already in its title – ‘Litterær Kriminalroman [Literary Crime]’ – explained its critical agenda: ‘Den er blot af en Art, som sjædent skrives mere, men som bringer de store mystery- and imagination- forfatter i erindring, en Poe eller Stevenson, en Blixen-Finecke [...] der er nemlig ingen billige Tricks i Bogen’.⁴⁰ When discussing the issue of established authors that deals with the genre of crime fiction, Joel Black pertinently questions of what kind of reception such a text could have:

³⁷ Joel Black ‘Crime fiction and literary canon’ in Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley, eds. *A companion to crime fiction* (Chichester : Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 76.

³⁸ *Vendsyssel Venstreblad* on the 23th November 1944, kps 154, KBA, [It embodies all the qualities that lure the large audience, and at the same time it satisfies even the fussiest reader. It is something of a miracle].

³⁹ *Social Demokratiet* on the 11th November 1944, kps 154, KBA, [The Author managed to raise a topic that otherwise may have ended as a colourful Booklet, up to a literary level, which still is entertainment, but the classy kind of entertainment].

⁴⁰ ‘Litterær Kriminalroman’ in *Nationaltidende* 19th September 1944, kps 154, KBA, [It is no more and no less than that kind of art which is rarely written anymore, but that brings to mind the great mystery and fantasy authors such as a Poe, Stevenson or a Blixen-Finecke [...] there are no predictable tricks in the book].

Do such works reveal artistic qualities inherent in the genre, or are these works exceptions that belong to an elite (or effete) subgenre of their own? How do readers respond to such hybrid works that combine sensational effects appreciated by general audiences with a mix of subtleties and profundities appealing to more refined tastes?⁴¹

Refusing to accept such a hybrid and literary compromise, one reviewer seemed to have thought the same question. Published in *Horsens Folkeblad* on the 12th September 1944, with the unforgiving title of ‘Mislykket Forsøg [Unsuccessful attempt]’, in this case the reviewer considered Andrézel’s talent to be misused on an entertainment book: ‘Det er en højst forvirrende Bog [...] man har paa forenemmelsen, den mystiske Andrézel har tvunget sig selv til at skrive en underholdningsroman [...]. Men han er alt for begavet og alt for litterært dannet til at levere den rene Sødsuppe [...] Den er interessant, men ikke god’.⁴²

Before cultural studies came to its rescue, even the reading of crime fiction was generally considered by the intellectual community as a guilty pleasure: ‘for me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol’⁴³ wrote W.H. Auden in ‘The Guilty Vicarage’, his essay on crime fiction. However, despite its status as a sub-literary genre, Auden still acknowledged its ability to provide the reader with escapism and a sense of release from guilt. As has been amply explored by recent studies of crime fiction during WW2,⁴⁴ this genre was particularly prolific at the time because of those main features individuated by Auden. The function of escapism and release from guilt were particularly relevant for the Danish audience in the context of the Nazi occupation, and GV allegorically embodied in its plot and its characters the struggle of resistance and dissent, as well as the more conflictual problems of cooperation. GV plays with some elements of canonical crime fiction, such as the murder and the detective,

⁴¹ Black, p. 76.

⁴² ‘Mislykker Forsøg’ in *Horsens Folkeblad*, 12th September 1944, kps 154, KBA, [It is a most confusing book [...] one has the impression that the mysterious Andrézel has forced himself to write an entertaining novel [...] But he is too gifted and too accomplished to deliver the plain sweet-soup [...] it is interesting but not good].

⁴³ Auden, W.H. ‘The Guilty Vicarage’ in Harper’s Magazine, May 1948, web source: <http://harpers.org/archive/1948/05/the-guilty-vicarage/>

⁴⁴ See for example the work of Claire Gorrara and Margaret Anne Hutton on Second World War and French Crime fiction: Gorrara, Claire, *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War Past Crimes, Present Memories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), and Hutton, Margaret-Anne, *French Crime Fiction, 1945-200: Investigating World War II* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

but treats them in a subversive way. John Scaggs notes how the start of crime fiction was a consequence of the establishment in the English-speaking world of the police forces during the 19th century and underlines how the modern police represented the faith in enlightenment in a climate of positivism.⁴⁵ The use of the trope of the police in crime fiction, and especially in the police procedural, serves the function of reassurance in the eventual restoration of the social order disrupted by the crime. In GV this is exactly subverted. Here the police forces, represented by Monsieur Tinchebrai, are portrayed as inept or in league with the villain, mirroring the loss of faith in the establishment that permeated the Danish population during the final years of the occupation. It is important to note how GV deliberately draws upon that specific tradition of crime fiction that was transitional in between gothic and crime, for example Wilkie Collins or Edgar Allan Poe. Both these authors, but particularly Poe, are considered to be the initiators of the genre, and at the same time they are also classified as late Victorian Gothic. Catherine Spooner, in her essay 'Crime and the Gothic'⁴⁶ underlines how flexible the border between gothic and crime is and how the latter developed from the elements established from the former:

While the Gothic novel in its original form fell out of favour after about 1820, its distinctive tropes continued to influence other forms of nineteenth-century fiction, including the Newgate novel, Walter's Scott historical fiction, the realist fiction of Dickens and the Brontes, the sensational novel, the ghost story, the American Gothic of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and crucially, the detective story. Although these texts did not necessarily follow the stock formulae set down by Radcliffe, Lewis, and their contemporaries, they found new ways of interpreting the Gothic, enabling the genre to shift with the tastes of the times.⁴⁷

Spooner also underlines how both genres share the same kind of relationship with the past: 'the sense of a fearful inheritance in time, the awful legacy of the past intruding onto the present'.⁴⁸ This feeling towards the past particularly characterizes Victorian Gothic fiction, where the story is not necessarily set in the past (as was the case for

⁴⁵ Scaggs, pp. 17-19.

⁴⁶ Catherine Spooner, 'Crime and the Gothic', in Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley. eds. *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

⁴⁷ Spooner, p. 246

⁴⁸ Ibid.

previous Gothic fiction) but ‘in a present disrupted by the threatening reminders of scandalous vestiges of a former time that should have been discarded in the onward march of progress and enlightenment’.⁴⁹ Gothic stages the conflict between the pre-Enlightenment (past) and post-Enlightenment ideas (present) and this conflict is generally displayed by the settings and character’s opposition. The novelty of Victorian Gothic fiction, which will go on to inspire and remain a characteristic of future crime fiction – especially in the Golden Age – is to circumscribe the action, and the danger, to the closed space of domesticity. As Scaggs has noted the Golden Age of crime fiction established its enduring success during the war exactly because it circumscribed the action to a very narrow field. In such demarcated setting the reader would feel familiar as opposed to the anxiety provoked by the outside world: ‘the locked-room mystery was immensely reassuring for the inter-war reading public, reducing the world, as it did, to self-contained, enclosed, manageable proportions and dimension’.⁵⁰ But crime fiction of the Golden Age also adhered to a more positivistic mentality where the crime could be scientifically proven and explained. In Gothic fiction, and especially Victorian gothic, even when the crime is resolved, or the supernatural event explained, the reader is still left with the unsettling feeling of an inadequate resolution to the conflicts. In *GV*, Blixen/Andrézel intertwines the functions of crime and gothic fiction, using the readability and suspense of the former – ensuring the text’s accessibility for a wider audience but ultimately choosing the gothic discourse as the most appropriate to mirror her surrounding context. Gothic allowed her to stage the unresolved conflicts of the war, with all of its dramatic implications and consequences: ‘as was probably inevitable under the circumstances (the text) developed into a tale of darkness’.⁵¹

As shown by the analysed reviews, *GV* was a text that when received as a pastiche of literary genres that ranged from ‘high-brow’ to ‘low-brow’ established with the audience a dialogue that went beyond the individual reading of the text and expanded in a wider collective debate on its classification. Besides the obvious fascination with the author’s unmasking, the pattern that emerges from the discussion about the genre classification of *GV* is very closely related to Lawrence Grossberg’s

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Scaggs, pp. 52.

⁵¹ *Shadows*, p. 132.

view on texts and cultural reception: 'People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires'.⁵² It could be argued that GV provided an entertaining experience that was not limited to the personal reading experience, but that also continued in the collective reception of the text. It established with its Danish readers an interactive literary game, challenging them to engage with the text by finding a classification for it, or by playing the role of the detective themselves in order to unmask the mysterious Pierre Andrézel. In this sense, GV served the Danish audience and society under the war as a *divertissement*, a welcomed distraction in troubled times. In shaping various debates, it also encouraged shared discussion and created a sense of community. Grossberg writes that:

A text can only mean something in the context of the experience and situation of its particular audience... how a specific text is used, how it is interpreted, how it functions for its audience – all of these are inseparably connected through the audience's constant struggle to make sense of itself and its world, even more, to make a slightly better place for itself in the world'.⁵³

The case of GV challenges the Danish literary canon, challenging the perception that a text's importance necessarily has to be bound to traditional criteria of high brow literary quality. If we were to consider a text's value according to its impact on the receiving context, GV in creating entertainment and debate that not only distracted and helped the audience, but also challenged them into engaging with 'cultural' discussions about literary genre – could surely be considered as a very significant book in the Danish wartime cultural panorama.⁵⁴

⁵² Grossberg L., 'Is There a Fan in the House?' in Lewis, Lisa A., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 52.

⁵³ Grossberg, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁴ To confirm the popularity of this text, one only has to refer to the sales figure in the first four months of its publication. It is also significant that due to the high demand GV was reprinted four times between September and December 1944 (see Chapter 2).

Part 2: The Anglo-American reception of *The Angelic Avengers*

‘A Mad Romance where probability does not enter’⁵⁵ *The Angelic Avengers* in the UK

Just as in the Danish context, the British success of AA can be explained as a consequence of the historical context of its reception. Gill Plain remarks that in the British literary panorama, ‘the desire to escape the war had been present from its earliest years, as was evident from the ongoing popularity of detective fiction and the remarkable revival of the nineteenth-century novel [...] with Jane Austen, in particular, enjoying a significant renaissance’.⁵⁶ As has already been identified by this thesis, all those aspects – such as escapism, revival of nineteenth century novel, and the popularity of detective fiction – are richly represented in AA, confirming the novel’s attractiveness in that particular historical context. This cultural context, and its need for a literature of escapism and entertainment, characterizes the first British reviews of AA.

British reviewers – just like their Danish counterparts – were concerned with solving the mystery around the author’s identity, but the question did not monopolise the discussion of the book. Instead, UK reviewers seemed to have been more focused on assessing the quality of the text itself. Some reviewers seemed not to have recognised Blixen’s pen behind Andrézel’s writing, such as the one in the *Daily Herald of London* on 25th March 1947, where the title of the review read: ‘Vanishing, he left a masterpiece’ and declared Pierre Andrézel ‘a genius’.⁵⁷ This review also remarked upon how the use of a century year old English language enhanced the horror of the story, and that the author ‘has phases of Jane Austen, Wilkie Collins and Edgar Allan Poe’.⁵⁸ Of the book, the reviewer opined ‘It’s an amazing piece of literature and worthy to take its place with the classics’.⁵⁹ When it came to the allegorical aspect of the tale, the reviewer acknowledged that the book had been seen by some people as an allegory of the Nazi occupation of Denmark, but encouraged his contemporary British readers not to let that deter them ‘for

⁵⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, 13th March 1947, in KBA, kps 154.

⁵⁶ Plain, Gill, *Literature of the 1940s war, postwar and peace* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 12.

⁵⁷ ‘Vanishing, he left a masterpiece’ in *Daily Herald*, 25th March 1947 kps 154, KBA.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the plot is compelling without its symbolism'.⁶⁰ However, the reviewer seemed then to recognise that for the Danish readers it must have had some allegorical hidden message of resistance, as it concluded: 'It's no wonder it "sounded like a trumpet call to all oppressed people" while, at the same time, it made them forget by the sheer suspense of its pages their own personal horror'.⁶¹ Another review that did not recognise Blixen's authorship was published in *The Glasgow Herald* on the 13th March 1947. AA was defined as a 'mad romance' where 'probability does not enter' and the reader was warned to 'be prepared to accept all the conventions of the school of Mrs Radcliffe to enjoy it'. Quite the opposite of the previous review which considered Andrézel a 'genius', this one found that the many repetitions in the structure of the novel, were 'one of the marks of the writer's immaturity'.⁶²

Not everyone appeared to have remained oblivious to the true identity of Pierre Andrézel. For example, Vernon Fane's review in *The Sphere*, on the 22nd March 1947, seemed to have unmasked Blixen, and provided a brief historical contextualisation of the novel to explain her choice of pseudonym: '[...] the book was first published in Copenhagen in 1944, although its setting is France and there may have been an excellent reason why its author, better known under another name, was unable to publish in his or her own country'. Fane also considered AA to be 'definitely an oddity, since in style and plot it has a marked resemblance to the 'Gothic' literature of the past two centuries [...] The novel is, however, much more readable than the term implies, and has a great force and even a queer kind of excitement'. The review circumscribes the gothic genre to a more narrow field, and labelled AA as 'really good early-Victorian thriller'.⁶³ The 'Bowen on Books' column in *The Tatler and Bystander* on April 23rd 1947 appeared to recognise Blixen's hand between the lines, writing that Mr Andrézel 'would seem to betray, on its every page, and already accomplished feminine hand'. He called the book an 'enchanted modern-Gothic tale' and then specified that 'is far from being a thriller – call it, rather – a lyrical melodrama' and concluded that 'To the jaded or blasé novel-reader, *The Angelic Avengers* offers something completely fresh'. Interestingly, he also offered a rather simple, yet effective, take on the question regarding the allegorical aspect of the book: 'Is this an

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *The Glasgow Herald*, 13th March 1947, kps 154, KBA.

⁶³ *The Sphere*, 22nd March 1947, kps 154, KBA.

allegory? Yes, if you like – but no, equally, if you would rather not: just fantastic enough, the story abounds in scenes that have an actuality of their own'.⁶⁴ The actuality of the themes discussed in the novel, that seemed to suggest the allegorical aspect of it, was also underlined by L.P. Hartley in *The Sketch* in the column 'The Literary Lounge' (date unknown). Hartley defined AA as something that 'has all the horror of nightmare combined with an equally strong illusion of actuality', and although he did not mention it explicitly, Hartley implied that it was Blixen's pen behind the book 'Pierre Andrézel [...] is, we suspect, the pseudonym of a well-known writer whose short stories have won much praise from connoisseurs'. According to his reading, in AA – which he defined as a 'spiritual thriller' – it was easy to spot and recognise the same themes as in Blixen's previous books: 'in this, as in what we believe to be other books by the same author, we find an almost mystical mingling of happiness and pain: to him, the two are aspects of one experience, enhancing and explaining each other'.⁶⁵ Hartley's concise reading, and his understanding of Blixen's dynamic dualism, anticipates the most recent interpretations of Blixen works by scholars such as Marianne Stecher and Mads Bunch. It also foregrounds and supports this thesis' understanding of GV/AA as a text that intersectionally and intertextually connects to Blixen's other works, as well as her understanding of her historical and social context.

The popularity of a book like AA in the British setting has to be connected not only to the escapism it provided, but also to its discussion of gender. Indeed, in some regards the two themes were connected. In the UK, as in the rest of Europe, post-war society was characterized by a considerable change in gender policies – women during the war had worked and covered roles that had until then been unavailable to them. Yet, at the end of the war the UK took a regressive stance. In this cultural context, especially in the immediate post-war years, there was a subsequent need for a literature of escapism, often set in the past or in fantastical worlds. This was especially appealing for 'writers wishing to appeal to a female readership that perceived itself excluded from the public narratives of nation and war'.⁶⁶ Most of this escapist literature was set in the past, as 'the past is a site that enables the examination of contemporary issues through a safely

⁶⁴ "Bowen on Books" in *The Tatler and Bystander*, April 23rd 1947, kps 154, KBA.

⁶⁵ "The Literary Lounge" in *The Sketch*, date unknown, kps 154, KBA.

⁶⁶ Plain, p. 149.

distancing lens'.⁶⁷ The same can be argued for GV/AA, where the contemporary issues of occupation, resistance and entrapment were discussed through the safe displacement of a distant past and different place. Historical fiction and romance were particularly popular, as Plain underlines: 'Some fiction spoke directly to the 'postwar' moment, articulating a set of desires that resonated powerfully with the conflicted position of women at the end of the war'.⁶⁸ As an example, Plain examines Georgette Heyer's *The Reluctant Widow* (1946) and notes that:

In her heroine's dilemma, Heyer acknowledges the contradictory pressures placed on women in wartime: the demand that they contribute to the war effort, often through the adoption of male roles, while yet maintaining their traditional femininity [...] The expectation that women maintain this double consciousness permeated the culture of the 1940s, but it was understood throughout as a temporary wartime measure.⁶⁹

In fact, Plain notes that the situation for working women after the war hardened and gender ideology regressed to restrictive gender roles. Women were now once again expected to become the angel of the house, moving from the trenches back into the kitchen: 'The past was, then, the safest place for any writer wishing to engage with sexual politics and, for many popular writers, it became a space within which women's fantasies could be made explicit'.⁷⁰ Therefore, AA it is a perfect match in the British post-war literary context – it did discuss contemporary gender issues, but safely displaced them to the past. It dealt with women's position in society and with their sexualities, but masked it under a typical Bluebeard gothic tale – thus rendering its rather polemical content less dangerous and more approachable for a mainstream audience.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Plain, p. 151.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Plain, p. 150.

‘Romance, mystery, diabolism and horror’⁷¹ *The Angelic Avengers* in the US

The American reception of AA was less focused on the unmasking of Pierre Andrézel and more based on ranking the text’s literary value. However, most reviewers took it for granted that Isak Dinesen was the pen hiding behind Andrézel, which inevitably influenced the reception of the book. At the time of AA’s publication, Isak Dinesen was in fact celebrated as a literary idol far more in the Anglo-American cultural context, than in her homeland of Denmark. In the US in particular, the Isak Dinesen phenomenon was not only directed towards a wider audience, but it also established a flourishing tradition of Blixen scholars – such as Robert Langbaum, Judith Thurman and, most recently, Marianne Stecher – who contributed to securing Isak Dinesen’s position among the greatest authors of modernity. This connection to her American audience was also deeply felt by Blixen herself, who told a Danish reporter from *Berlingske Tidende* during her trip to USA in 1959 that:

I did not come to America for the purpose of running down my own country ... but when I compare the American and Danish reviews of my first book I cannot help but think how much better I have been understood and accepted in America than in Denmark. Yes, finally I have also got a name in Denmark, but for a long time my name was always spoken of and written about in parenthesis when one considered Danish writers. In Denmark one is not now, as in America, interested in fantastic stories, there is more enthusiasm for the realistic school. In my last book, *Anecdotes of Destiny*, there was a story which a Danish critic stamped as pornography. In America one apparently has a more liberated attitude to literature.⁷²

Karen Blixen’s trip to America in 1959⁷³ was to be her only one – she was invited to participate in several events and conferences, was made an honorary fellow by The America Academy of Arts and Letters and, according to her biographer Judith Thurman,

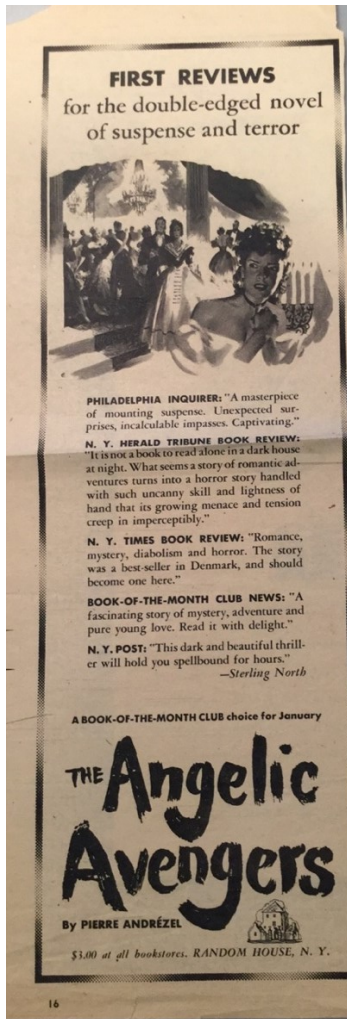
⁷¹ From *The Angelic Avengers*’ review published in *The New York Times* (1947, date not clear), in KBA, kps 154.

⁷² *Berlingske Tidende*, Copenhagen, 1 February 1959, Blixen in Thurman p. 474.

⁷³ Thurman, p. 473.

felt 'overwhelmed by America's openness and generosity toward her'.⁷⁴ One could argue that America's fascination with Karen Blixen was also the fascination with the idealised, decadent aristocratic European culture she portrayed in her stories, and which she performed in her public persona. In 1947, when *AA* was published in the US, several factors contributed to its popularity, but first and foremost it was the unspoken but plain connection of Andrézel to the best-selling Isak Dinesen. To this contributed the fact that the book was chosen as Book-of-the-Month by the Book-of-the-Month-Club, just as Dinesen's previous books had been. Dorothy Canfield's review for the club developed a romanticised story of the book's publication history in Denmark into an epic tale of Danish readers against Nazi censorship. Furthermore, *AA* arrived on the US market at an opportune moment, characterized as it was by the increasing popularity of paperback novels.

⁷⁴ Thurman, p. 473, 474.



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As shown in the first picture above, Random House seemed to have taken Blixen at her word when she had requested a proper advertising campaign for the novel. Comparing the graphic design of the advert with the poster for Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1940), it is possible to see how Random House had adapted the plain graphic of the Danish version of GV to something more likely to appeal to a wider audience in the US. The use of graphics that were visually similar to a multi-award winning and hugely popular movie was a strategic publicity initiative to induce readers to buy a book that would probably not have been noted as much in the comparatively much bigger American market. The clippings of the reviews included in the advert were also chosen to encourage the similarity with a thriller story. For example the *Philadelphia Inquirer*

⁷⁵ The first picture is from kps 154, in the folder called 'Engelsk og Amerikanske anmeldelser' in KBA, the second picture is a reproduction of the movie poster of Alfred Hitcock's adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*, source: <https://www.cinematerial.com/movies/rebecca-i32976/p/ez2iqwvf>.

called AA ‘A masterpiece of mounting suspense. Unexpected surprises, incalculable impasses. ‘Captivating’ the *New York Herald Tribune* warned the reader that ‘It is not a book to read alone in a dark house at night. What seems a story of romantic adventures turns into a horror story handled with such uncanny skills and lightness of hand that its growing menace and tension creep in imperceptibly’; while the *New York Times* recognised the main selling points of AA: ‘Romance, mystery, diabolism and horror’ and continued ‘The story was a best-seller in Denmark, and should become one here’; and ultimately the *New York Post* considered AA as a ‘dark and beautiful thriller’ that ‘will hold you spellbound for hours’.⁷⁶

Moreover, the attention to the image was connected to the huge popularity of paperbacks, which had taken the US literary market by storm during the war, and in which the cover image was a fundamental selling point. As Erin A. Smith underlines ‘American paperbacks were (in)famous for their covers’, they had ‘lurid, sensational covers designed to grab the attention of a passer-by from the racks in the drugstore or on the newsstand’.⁷⁷ Highlighting the important connection between this kind of literature and movies, Smith notes that these book covers ‘functioned more like movie posters or billboard advertising’.⁷⁸ The post war American market was more than ready for a book like AA, the previous decade had indeed being characterized by the rise of mass market paperback publications. These kinds of publications had an important role to play in democratising literacy: ‘this democratization of literature and literacy was the most important cultural aspect of the paperback revolution’⁷⁹ while also expanding the target market. The expanding readership was also a consequence of the Armed Service Editions – namely the books that were distributed free of charge to servicemen during the war ‘The titles were a mix of fiction and non-fiction, literary classics and the latest bestsellers. They were designed to offer both education and entertainment – something for readers of every taste’.⁸⁰ The circulation numbers of the Armed Service Editions are impressive: ‘between 1943 and 1947, more than 123 million copies of 1,322 titles were reprinted and distributed to soldiers and sailors’.⁸¹ The slogan of Council of Books in Wartime, was that ‘Books are

⁷⁶ All from kps 154, KBA.

⁷⁷ Smith, Erin A. in Vials, Chris eds *American Literature in Transition, 1940-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 300-301.

⁷⁸ Smith, p. 301.

⁷⁹ Smith, p. 304.

⁸⁰ Smith, p. 295.

⁸¹ Ibid.

weapons in the war of ideas⁸² and, as Smith reports the Council ‘stressed that books in the hand of soldiers and sailors would improve morale by alleviating boredom and loneliness in the camp, allowing servicemen to “escape” from the death and destruction of the war, and helping them process their disturbing emotions through literature’.⁸³

Isak Dinesen’s *Winter’s Tales* featured among these titles, and, as was previously outlined, GV/AA shared with WT the same basic intention of entertaining while educating and encouraging, while in the post-war setting it satisfied readers’ needs and expectations. Its storyline and themes of courage, revenge and deception, meant it fitted well during the aftermath of the war, while also complementing the discourse of the hyperbolic epic made of the European resistance fighter from the American point of view. This discourse had been initiated during the war by John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down* (1942) – the novel narrates the resistance of a small, unnamed Scandinavian town that gets occupied by foreign enemies. The influence of this kind of discourse is evident in Dorothy Canfield’s review of AA for the ‘Book of the Month Club’. The fact that AA was selected as Book of the Month improved its success, as well as ensuring its circulation. As underlined in the previous chapter, this was highly discouraged by Blixen herself, who did not want GV/AA to be considered at the same level as her other works, all of which had been chosen as Book of the Month as well. She also disagreed with Dorothy Canfield’s review of AA for The Book of the Month Club News, as it heavily relied on reading the novel as an allegory of the Nazi occupation of Denmark. Canfield’s enthusiastic review seemed to be determined to make AA become a testimony of the author’s and Denmark’s, heroism under the occupation:

In 1944, when Denmark was still locked into the windowless Nazi jail, a novel was published in Copenhagen, which caused a tremendous stir among Danish and other European readers. [...] But delighted Danes quickly recognized that there, thinly veiled, was something far more than the enchanting narrative it was on the surface. [...] would the Nazis see, what the Danes saw plainly, that this novel, which kept every reader turning the pages faster and faster to what happened, was

⁸² Smith, p. 295.

⁸³ Ibid.

also a bold, noble and total condemnation of the conquerors, in whose power Denmark then lay helpless?⁸⁴

It is interesting to notice in Canfield's review that, rather than reviewing the actual text, the focus seems to be on the creation of a myth around the story of the Danish readers, romanticising its reception and creating almost an epic tale the reception itself:

So European readers fell on this romance, with such an unsuitable title, looking for an inner meaning. And it was there, plain to any eye that looked for it! In the situation of the two girls, Danes recognized the situation of their own beloved nation, prisoners of people smoothly plausible in the beginning, who had turned out to be the embodiment of evil. For by this time, the Danes knew what the Nazis wanted of them. It was what the wicked old man, and his wicked sister, wanted of the girls, to act as a blind. The outraged world was aroused against the Germans by the intolerable suffering of their victims in the occupied countries. The conquerors wanted the highly respected Danes to act as a living proof that if people would acquiesce unresistingly in Nazi rule, they would get good treatment.⁸⁵

However distant it was from the reality of the actual Danish reception of the book, Canfield's review did actually identify one of its fundamental aspects, namely its encouraging aim: 'At this crucial moment, the new novel grandly blew a trumpet-call to courage, courage not only physical, but of the noblest spiritual elevation, in that it showed how evil may be resisted without doing evil'. Canfield's review of GV/AA, and its glorification of Danish courage and resistance, seems to be influenced by a more general feeling in the US after the war, a feeling of admiration towards the resisting European countries. One could even argue that Canfield's review was possibly influenced by Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down* – the story of the heroic resistance of the unnamed small Scandinavian town to the merciless occupier would seem to resonate in Canfield's description. Whether the similarity to Steinbeck's novel was intentional or not, Canfield's review remains representative of the post-war cultural climate in the US. Post-war readers

⁸⁴ In kps 154, KBA.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

needed entertainment, but also readings that could flexibly be read as allegories, in order to help them make sense of the trauma of the war.

Concluding remarks

The analysis of the reception of GV/AA in the immediate aftermath of its publication in Denmark, Britain and America demonstrates that each receiving context read the text according to their own cultural background, and used the categories and designation that were the most familiar. Hence, in Denmark it was sold as a crime novel, in the UK it was understood in the realm of romantic and gothic fiction, and in the US it was sold as suspense product which echoed paperback novels and thriller movies. The minor differences between the Danish and English editions, as well as Blixen's resolute involvement in the publishing process, reflect her cultural awareness of the different receiving markets. As Canfield observed in her review, as well as in her correspondence with Haas,⁸⁶ the novel was timely during the war and the immediate aftermath – an assertion seemingly confirmed by declining sales in subsequent years.⁸⁷ As Madsen has remarked,⁸⁸ it is quite possible to see that AA had been quite a shock for Blixen, not least because of its unexpected reception and success. Indeed, Blixen did not write anything else for another twelve years.

The following table will help visualize the differences in the Danish and Anglo-American editions of GV/AA:

Editions	Dansk (Gyldendal) 1944	British(Putnam)/American (Random House) 1947
Title	<i>Gengældelsens veje</i>	<i>The Angelic Avengers</i>
Structure	I. To Veninder II. Saint Barbe	Part one: Rose-strewn roads and thorny paths Part two: Two canary birds

⁸⁶ See Chapter 2.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 2.

⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter 1, Madsen concludes his analysis of GV by observing that it remained a trauma for Blixen: 'Det er tankevækkende, at der efter *Gengældelsens Veje* skulle gå 13 år, før Isak Dinesen skrev en bog igen [It is thought-provoking that after GV thirteen years would pass before Isak Dinesen wrote a book again]', Madsen, p. 125.

	III. Rosa bliver hævnnet	Part three: The buried treasure
Epigraph	Absent	'You serious people must not be too hard on human beings for what they choose to amuse themselves with when they are shut up as in a prison and not even allowed to say that they are prisoners. If I do not soon get a little bit of fun, I shall die' (self-citation p. 110)
Note	'Denne roman hviler paa en virkelig Begivenhed, som omtales i de franske Politiannaler 1840-1841'[This novel relies on real happenings reported in the French police annals 1840-1841]	Absent

Although the storyline is the same, some details in the two editions signal an awareness of the differing receiving contexts. The main difference between the two texts is the title – the Danish one would have literally translated as ‘the ways of retribution’ and it would not have been in tune with Blixen’s plan of publication for the Anglo-American market. As she had requested in her letters to Huntington and Haas, the book had to maintain the atmosphere, and every small detail had to contribute to that image. ‘The Angelic Avengers’ sounded like a more appropriate title for a novel that was sold as gothic, but *Gengældelsens veje* was a much more appropriate one for the Danish readers starved of justice and revenge at the time of the occupation.

The other difference is the internal chapter division and names. Both editions are divided into three parts, but the titles for each part are quite different. The Danish ones are: I: ‘To Veninder’ (two friends), II: ‘Saint-Barbe’, III: ‘Rosa bliver hævnnet’(Rosa is

avenged); while the English ones are: Part One: 'Rose-strewn roads and thorny paths', Part Two: 'Two canary birds', Part Three: 'The buried treasure'. Also in this case, the vocabulary chosen for both editions shows that the Danish titles could be more easily linked to a crime fiction literary tradition, while the English ones were referring to a romantic tradition of literature. It is interesting to notice also how in both cases they reflect the story's development from the initial pastiche of romance, to the internal excursus on detective fiction/mystery, until the climax of the horror of the last part. Also in this case, it is easy to see how the published text relied on the popularity of some genres compared to others in the receiving context. As we have seen, the Danish edition was tailored specifically for the Danish population under occupation – it served as an escape, entertainment and encouragement, but it also warned against unreliable narrators. It invited its readers to question their surrounding reality, the information they received, and the stories they heard – especially in a time of war. Therefore, the Danish edition contains a small epigraph that is absent in the English edition which states: 'denne roman..'.⁸⁹ It has been noted by Mogensen that this feature was inspired by the tropes of crime fiction as found in the work of Wilkie Collins or Mary Elizabeth Braddon, but that it can also be considered as a warning – to trust or not to trust? On the other hand, the English edition contains an epigraph that is absent in the Danish one and that consists of a quote from the book itself 'you serious people..'.⁹⁰ Because of the reference to imprisonment and freedom, it would have been too dangerous to publish it in occupied Denmark, but for the post-war Anglo-American readers, the reference was quite clear. The epigraph also seems to invite the readers to take the book as an entertaining read – and in fact it was used by Blixen in her article on the defence of pseudonyms to deter readers and reviewers from unmasking her.

While the reception of GV/AA differed slightly in the countries examined upon initial reception, the most frequently recurring observation was regarding the definition of its genre. As GV/AA plays with different genres and literary modes, the most common – and fitting definition was that of pastiche. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a pastiche consists of:

⁸⁹ See table above.

⁹⁰ See table above.

A literary work composed from elements borrowed either from various other writers or from a particular earlier author. The term can be used in a derogatory sense to indicate lack of originality, or more neutrally to refer to works that involve a deliberate and playfully imitative tribute to other writers. Pastiche differs from parody in using imitation as a form of flattery rather than mockery, and from plagiarism in its lack of deceptive intent.⁹¹

This definition certainly applies to a work like GV/AA, as the novel intentionally refers to previous literary traditions of Gothic, romance and crime fiction. Pastiche is a term that has twofold connotation as well – it can be used both in a derogatory way and in a more neutrally descriptive way – and GV/AA seems to have provoked both responses in its reviews. This was especially the case in the Danish context, where it sparked a lively discussion on genre and literary quality. One could argue that a pastiche is actually a fairly sophisticated piece of work, if its creation necessarily requires a profound knowledge of the previous literary traditions that is going to pastiche, and implies an audience that is able to recognise such references. However, pastiche is also a very inclusive and transcultural mode, as Richard Dyer has underlined:

Pastiche intends that it is understood as pastiche by those who read, see or hear of it. For it to work, it needs to be ‘got’ as a pastiche.[...] this implies particular competencies on the part of audiences and, to this extent, pastiche may be seen as elitist, including those who get it, excluding those who don’t. Pastiche no doubt does often incite snobbery (“don’t you get it?!”), but this does not necessarily overlap with elites as normally socially defined. Pastiche is used and recognized just as much in popular and mass culture as in the middle and high brow.⁹²

Thus, pastiche is a very interactive mode – it does exist on the ground of interaction between text and reader. Such interaction, as will be analysed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, is central in the creation of GV/AA. Dyer also underlines that the reception of a pastiche is susceptible to its receiving context:

⁹¹ Baldick, Chris, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Print, 2015).

⁹² Dyer, Richard, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 3.

The form of a pastiche's likeness is subject to perception. A pastiche imitates its idea of that which it imitates (its idea being anything from an individual memory through a group's shared and constructed remembering to a perception current at a given cultural-historical moment). The pastiched text does not itself change: leaving aside the vagaries of manuscripts and editions, the words are what they are, but the perception of their significance and affect changes. Different periods and cultures see and hear different things in texts and this must be registered in any imitation, and therefore pastiche, of them.⁹³

As noted for the reception of *GV/AA*, the definition of what it was changed according to the most familiar categories of definition for each country. Ultimately, the choice of pastiche can also be applied to the intention of creating a text that would have an encouraging aim in difficult historical times: 'Pastiche is not something superficial, disconnected from the real and, especially, from feeling. It is rather a knowing form of the practice of imitation, which itself always both holds us inexorably within cultural perception of the real and also, and thereby, enables us to make a sense of the real'.⁹⁴ If a pastiche invites us to reflect on the idea of imitation, and imitation is to be understood – as in Aristotelian terms – as the most primal practice of learning, then pastiche implies a form of invitation to imitate, intended as learning. It could be argued that *GV* in the context of Nazi occupation staged a story of bravery and resistance, and in its pastiche form, it encouraged its audience to imitate it. The following chapter will analyse how this aim to encourage is achieved in *GV/AA* through the use of storytelling techniques.

⁹³ Dyer, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Dyer, p. 2.

Chapter 4: **Ideal Storytellers and Unreliable Narrations:** **Storytelling in Isak Dinesen and Pierre Andrézel**

*'den allerførste betingelse, min Pige [...] for at bære sig ad som et fornuftigt Menneske, det er Fantasi'*¹

Introduction

As an author, Karen Blixen publicly identified with the mask of Isak Dinesen, the storyteller. Her public commentary on her own writing had always been characterized by affirming this association, with statements such as 'I am not a novelist, not even a writer. I am a storyteller'.² Consequently, most of the criticism on her writing has followed this inclination and contributed to the creation – and solidification – of the Isak Dinesen's storyteller image. In interviews, as Thurman underlines, Blixen 'would admit to being a passionate reader and gave lists of the books she loved to reread, but they generally omitted anything that could tie her to a school, set her within a category, associate with a predecessor – except, perhaps, Scheherazade. She spoke of herself as belonging to the oral tradition'.³

Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapters, the existence of the *novel* GV in the context of such a programmatically genre confined authorship, has caused perplexity in readers and scholars alike. Blixen's reluctance in acknowledging the authorship of a text that, at a first glance was so distant from her style, influenced the scholars' perception of it, and contributed to its long exile from the "proper" Blixenian canon. However, as we shall see, this novel does not clash with Blixen's storytelling authorship, but instead offers a rather refreshing view on many of the recurring and characterizing themes of her writing. This chapter is going to discuss Blixen's self-representation as a storyteller, comparing her idea of storytelling to the canonical figure of the storyteller presented by Walter Benjamin, and investigate how the choice of the novel as a genre gives Blixen the opportunity to create a text that discusses storytelling itself, and questions the reliability of narrative. In order to understand the meaning and practice of storytelling in GV/AA,

¹ GV, p.19/ 'the very first faculty, my girl [...] which one requires in order to behave like a reasonable and sound-minded person, is imagination' AA, p. 8.

² Blixen quoted in Wilkinson, Lynn R. "Hannah Arendt on Isak Dinesen: between Storytelling and Theory" *Comparative Literature*, 2004, Vol.56 (1), p. 78.

³ Thurman, p. 265.

the first part of this chapter is going to compare the figure of the storyteller as theorized by Benjamin, with the performing storyteller Isak Dinesen. The second part of the chapter is going to analyse the characters performing as storytellers in *GV/AA*, but also how the text uses storytelling as a strategy of encouragement for its audience/readership.

Part 1: Theorizing, performing and practicing – Storytelling in Walter Benjamin, Isak Dinesen and Pierre Andrézel

To define the meaning of storytelling for Isak Dinesen, and for Pierre Andrézel, it will be necessary first to define what a storyteller is – and to do this we are going to use the definition developed by Walter Benjamin in his essay ‘The Storyteller’. This essay was published in 1936,⁴ almost at the same time as the publication of Blixen’s first collection of tales. Although it is improbable, due to geographical and cultural displacement, that Benjamin and Blixen would have been aware of each other’s work, it is thought provoking that they both shared the same interest for a peculiarly anti-modern genre, in a very modernist cultural environment. While Blixen as Isak Dinesen used storytelling as part of an artistic performance, Blixen as Pierre Andrézel used storytelling in a way that was very similar to the theorization of storytelling proposed by Benjamin. As we shall see, for Benjamin and Blixen/Andrézel the theorization, and use, of storytelling, carries a meaning that aims to transcend the modernist focus on individualism, and calls, instead, for a genre based on connection and communicability.

In ‘The Storyteller’, Benjamin writes that the fall of storytelling in modern times has been caused by the rising inability to share experiences. As an example, he refers to the end of World War I ‘Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?’⁵ From the lack of shared experiences naturally follows the absence of storytellers since ‘Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn’.⁶ What constitutes storytelling is in fact the ability to talk about experience – the storyteller’s and others, and to share it. The sharing of experience also means the sharing of wisdom: ‘the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage’.⁷ Benjamin continues:

⁴ The essay was originally published in the journal “Orient und Okzident” in 1936 and in 1955 in *Schriften*, a collection of Benjamin’s literary essays curated by Theodor W. Adorno. I am using *Illuminations* the English translation of *Schriften*, published by Fontana Press in 1973.

⁵ Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 84.

⁶ Benjamin, p. 85.

⁷ Benjamin, p. 107.

But if today ‘having counsel’ is beginning to have an old fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story.⁸

In Benjamin’s view, storytelling is a form of communication that is in contrast with the modern way of living, characterized by individualism rather than community life, and the lack of communities as the focal point of a society translates into the inability to share and connect. This grounding connection between storytelling and community is also represented by the relationship between a storyteller and his audience: ‘A man listening to a story is the company of the storyteller’.⁹ It is a relationship of dependence and definition – a storyteller is defined by his audience, and a storyteller defines his audience. This conscious exchange is also expressed in a mutual knowledge of the other’s need. A storyteller knows what his audience needs ‘A great storyteller will always be rooted in the people’¹⁰ and the audience will expect from him some counsel, since a good story will always contain ‘openly or covertly, something useful’.¹¹

Isak Dinesen, the storyteller out of Africa

Confirming Benjamin’s theory on the unpopularity of storytelling in modern times, it took Karen Blixen several attempts before getting her tales published. Her choice to identify with a genre so antiquated for the time delayed her debut as a published author. Among the first publishers she approached was Robert K. Haas at Harrison Smith and Robert Haas (later merged into Random House) – who eventually became her American publisher. In 1932, Haas refused Blixen’s first manuscript of what would eventually become *Seven Gothic Tales* – ‘on account of the difficulty of selling any collection of short stories in substantial quantities’, but underlined that ‘if you are contemplating doing a novel we would feel very fortunate indeed to have the opportunity to publish it’.¹² Instead

⁸ Benjamin, p. 86.

⁹ Benjamin, p. 99.

¹⁰ Benjamin, p. 100.

¹¹ Benjamin, p. 86.

¹² Haas to Blixen, 7th September 1932, in Lasson, *Breve 1931-1962*, vol.1, pp. 95-96.

of adapting to the publishing market's request, Blixen insisted, and eventually succeeded, in getting her stories published as Isak Dinesen, by Robert K. Haas himself, in 1934. As a surprise for both the author and the publisher, *Seven Gothic Tales* sold considerably well and was published in the UK, and eventually Denmark, where after several failed translation attempts, it was Blixen herself who undertook the task of self-translating her own tales.

When analysing her genre of choice, the setting of her tales, as well as the creation of the Isak Dinesen- storyteller character, it is worth underlining that at the time of her return from Kenya, Karen Blixen had spent almost twenty years considerably displaced from a Western social and cultural context. Some of the pivotal events of her time – such as the First World War, or the women's right to vote in Denmark – had happened while she was in Africa. Furthermore, her return to Denmark was a choice forced by unfavourable circumstances, rather than an assertive decision to go back. She expresses this feeling of displacement and disorientation in 'Echoes from the Hills' where she writes that 'i den første Tid efter at jeg fra Afrika var kommet tilbage til Danmark havde jeg vanskeligt ved at se noget som helst som Virkelighed'.¹³ Displacement however, became a powerful creative force and eventually shaped her entire writing. As Clara Mucci writes: 'Decentramento, irrealità, sogno e narrazione si identificano per la Blixen, in una vera e propria poetica dello 'spaesamento' (o della devianza), presupposto formale e sostanza della sua scrittura'.¹⁴

Karen Blixen's time in Kenya had granted her an independence and a freedom that a woman of her social background could never have experienced in Denmark. It could be argued that her choice of storytelling, a genre from the past, signals a distancing from her current time and culture and can be seen as a conscious, counter-current decision to disagree with what she felt as oppressive aspects of Western society 'The very fact that Isak Dinesen became a storyteller rather than, say, a novelist was a moral choice. She was taking sides with the "heroic" past, and with the fabulists of an older age, against her own contemporaries'.¹⁵ The preferred period for her stories, between the 18th and 19th

¹³ *Skygger*, p. 93/'during my first months after my return to Denmark from Africa, I had great trouble in seeing anything at all as reality' *Shadows*, p. 335.

¹⁴ Mucci, Clara, *Tempeste, Narrazioni di esilio in Shakespeare e Karen Blixen* (Pescara: Liguori Editore, 1998), p. 106, [Decentralization, unreality, dream and narration can be identified in Blixen as part of an actual poetic of displacement (or of deviance), as formal prerequisite and substance of her writing].

¹⁵ Thurman, p. 297.

century, is what Blixen identified as the 'last great phase of aristocratic culture',¹⁶ a time she considered as being characterized by great passions and individuals brave enough to follow them. This Nietzschean ideal and view of life¹⁷ was further enhanced by Karen Blixen's years in Africa and the interactions with the Kenyan population – especially with the Masai tribes. The Masai embodied what she identified as the aristocratic individual, and she described them in *Out of Africa* as having 'i fuldeste Maal den særlige Form for Intelligens, som vi kalder *chic*, og saa vildt dristige og fantastiske, som de er, er de dog lydige mod deres egen Natur og mod et Ideal'.¹⁸

According to her own account, it was only the loss of Africa that triggered her choice of becoming a published author – 'I shall always remain an amateur as a writer. Had I been able to keep my farm; I should never have written any books at all'.¹⁹ Despite her claims on the accidental nature of her professional writing career, this does not imply that she was completely unfamiliar with the publishing world. In her early twenties, in Denmark, she had actually published three short stories in the Danish magazines *Tilskueren* and *Gads Danske Magasin*.²⁰ If the idea of writing professionally was put aside during her years as a coffee plantation owner, the act of writing was, in fact, a steady part of her everyday life, as testified by the ample and constant correspondence with her family and friends during her African years.²¹ In Africa she also started writing the stories that would be published in *Seven Gothic Tales*: 'jeg begyndte om aftenen at skrive Historier og Eventyr, som kunde tage mine Tanker langt bort til andre Lande og Tider'.²² It is interesting to notice that the shaping of her authorial voice necessarily had to happen when displaced from a Western context and go through the African experience, where

¹⁶ Thurman, p. 264.

¹⁷ 'Here, one might note that the Nietzschean tendencies in Karen Blixen's work are part of the greater cultural and intellectual climate in Scandinavia following the turn of the century and the earliest phases of literary modernism', Stecher, p. 114.

¹⁸ DAF, p. 118/'that particular form of intelligence which we call *chic*: daring, and wildly fantastical as they seem, they are still unswervingly true to their own nature, and to an immanent ideal' OOA, p. 101.

¹⁹ Hansen, Leander-Frantz, *The Aristocratic Universe of Karen Blixen* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), p. 128.

²⁰ The stories, published under the pseudonym Osceola, were: "The Heremits", published in August 1907 in *Tilskueren*, "The Ploughman" – in *Gads Danske Magasin* in 1907, and "The de Cats Family", published in *Tilskueren* in 1909. See Thurman, pp. 101-110.

²¹ See Karen Blixen, *Breve fra Afrika 1914-31*; udgivet for Rungstedlundfonden af Frans Lasson. (København: Gyldendal, 1984), English edition *Letters from Africa*, edited by Frans Lasson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²² DAF, p. 47/'I began in the evenings to write stories, fairy-tales and romances, that would take my mind a long way off, to other countries and times' OOA, p. 42.

she ‘talte, frit og uhæmmet’.²³ While once back in Denmark she wrote: ‘under disse Omstændigheder forstummede jeg selv. Jeg havde, I enhver Betydning af Ordet, intet at skulle have sagt. Og dog maatte jeg tale. For jeg havde mine Bøger at skrive’.²⁴ Back in Denmark, writing became a survival strategy, the mourning for the loss of her life in Africa, as well as a way to confirm the independence she had gained. Her self-representation as Isak Dinesen the storyteller symbolized her refusal to move back to the same social conventions she had escaped from years ago, which wanted to confine her to roles more suitable for a woman of her time and background.

The distancing from her home country and her own social background is represented in her choice of a subversive male pseudonym, as well as in the decision to write in English, the language that had characterized her time in Africa – and thus her time as an independent woman – but also in the choice of a narrative form that was far from popular in Western society in the middle of the 1930s. Storytelling was to Blixen a legacy of her African time, where it was an activity that permeated her everyday life. As we learn from *Out of Africa*, stories were told to entertain, to explain, and often to overcome cultural barriers and make concepts universally understandable. For example, she recounts that when she started writing her tales, her ‘nu kom de selv ind for at se mig skrive’,²⁵ and that afterward her Kikuyu cook Kamante had enquired ‘Msabu, hvad er der I Bøger?’²⁶ she had told him the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus, in order to make him understand what kind of stories she was writing in her book. As Lasse Horne Kjaeldgaard has pointed out in *Danish literature as World literature*, Karen Blixen’s conception of literature was that of: ‘stories being able to transcend national and cultural boundaries, making sense to people without any formal literary background – available to all, also to the understanding of one another. Also in terms of this ideal, Karen Blixen desired – and deserves – to be measured on the scale of world literature’.²⁷ The act of narration characterized most of Blixen’s communications with the workers at her farm, but also her relationship with Denys Finch-Hatton, her English partner. She writes in *Out of Africa*:

²³ *Essays*, p. 13/‘spoke, freely and without restraint’ *Daguererotypes*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Essays*, p. 16/‘Under the circumstances I myself grew silent. I had, in every sense of the word, nothing to say. And yet I had to speak. For I had my books to write’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 10.

²⁵ DAF, p. 49/‘houseboys came in themselves to watch the work of the typewriter’ OOA, p. 44.

²⁶ DAF, p. 50/‘Msabu, what is there in books?’ OOA, p. 45.

²⁷ Ringgaard, Dan and Thomsen Rosendhal, Mads, eds. *Danish Literature as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 208.

Denys havde en Egenskab, der var uvurderlig for mig: han kunde høre paa en Historie [...] Naar han kom til farmen, spurgte han mig om jeg havde nogen ny Historie at fortælle. Jeg havde digtet mange Eventyr og Historier mens han havde været borte. Om Aftenen gjorde han sig det bekvemt paa Gulvet foran Kaminen med alle Husets Puder spredt omkring sig, jeg sad med Benene overkors ved siden af ham, som selve Sheherazade, og han hørte opmærksom paa en lang Historie fra Begyndelsen til Enden.²⁸

The identification with Scheherazade suggests Blixen's intention to re-appropriate storytelling as a popular and feminine form, as Marcia Landy has underlined in 'Anecdote as Destiny: Isak Dinesen & The Storyteller': 'she worked in a genre which has become increasingly rare in the modern world, one which has been identified more with men than with women'.²⁹ It also signalled, however, her intention to identify with the canonical tradition of storytelling. Karen Blixen underlined that 'den Kunst at høre efter en Historie er gaaet tabt i Europa' / 'the art of listening to a story has been lost in Europe' but that the 'De Indfødte i Afrika [...] kan den endnu' / 'Natives of Africa [...] have still got it'.³⁰ Their distance from the psychological introspection that a novel provides, according to Blixen was also demonstrated by the fact that when a story was told they would not take sides and that 'for dem ligger Vægten i selve Handlingens Sindrigheid'.³¹ She would adopt the same techniques she had absorbed from this oral storytelling tradition in her own writing.

²⁸ DAF, p. 187/ 'Denys had a trait of character which to me was very precious, he liked to hear a story told [...] when he came to the farm he would ask: 'Have you got a story?' I had been making up many while he was away. In the evenings he made himself comfortable, spreading cushions like a couch in front of the fire, and with me sitting on the floor, cross-legged like Scheherazade herself, he would listen, clear-eyed, to a long tale, from when it began until it ended.' OOA, p. 159.

²⁹ Landy, Marcia 'Anecdote as Destiny: Isak Dinesen & The Storyteller' in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol.19, No.2 (Summer, 1978), pp. 389-406, p.389

³⁰ DAF, p. 187/OOA, p. 159.

³¹ DAF, p.215/'the interest for them lies in the ingeniousness of the plot itself' OOA, p. 182.

Performativity and modernist echoes in Isak Dinesen

As Landy has noted, what characterizes Karen Blixen's authorship is 'her desire and ability to recreate in writing the earlier conditions of telling a story.'³² Despite her self-representation as a storyteller, we should underline the aspect of recreation, or re-enacting, on paper the oral tradition: 'Dinesen's tales draw on various traditions of oral storytelling and in fact mimic the situation of the storyteller as discussed by Benjamin, but their complexity – their textuality – belongs to print culture'.³³ As Langbaum has pointed out: 'her stories cannot- in spite of her own claims to the contrary – really be classed with the sort of stories you can tell orally. The complexity of pattern, the need to read backwards and forwards, would make the stories impossible to take in by ear'.³⁴ Her public role as a storyteller was reinforced by her numerous radio speeches, public appearances and interviews:

She was, in the role of Isak Dinesen or the role of Baronessen, extremely consistent and, indeed, professional, as the mass of interviews and the reports of those who met her late in life attest. It is astonishing how, almost verbatim, they reiterate the same anecdotes and bon mots. The coherence, of course, enhanced her legend, for it made it easier to disseminate.³⁵

While there was a high degree of performativity in the creation of the image of Isak Dinesen, her tales consisted of sophisticated prose that continuously engaged in a dialogue with world literature, as Mads Bunch has pointed out: 'in her tales we find an unusually high, almost excessive, number of allusions to world literature, Shakespeare above all, the Bible and Greek mythology, and in her Danish versions also numerous allusions to Danish literature (primarily nineteenth century writers)'.³⁶ What characterizes her writing is a hybridity of ancient tradition and modern consciousness, a fusion that happened thanks to the meeting of her cultural background with the experience of Africa:

³² Landy, p. 389.

³³ Wilkinson, pp. 82-83.

³⁴ Langbaum, p. 25.

³⁵ Thurman, p. 349.

³⁶ Bunch, p. 1.

Isak Dinesen has been able to reinvigorate the romantic tradition because she rediscovered in Africa the validity of all the romantic myths, myths that locate spirit in the elemental – in nature, in the life of primitive people, in instinct and passion, in aristocratic, feudal and tribal societies that have their roots in nature. She could not, however, have seen Africa as she did had she not brought to it eyes prepared by European romanticism, had she not discovered Europe in Africa.³⁷

Isak Dinesen as the storyteller, was a public performance that Karen Blixen very carefully built over the years. The choice of storytelling as a genre from the past was a mean to distance herself from her surrounding Western culture, but it was also a grounding part of her performance. If Isak Dinesen was to be the embodiment of the culture of a long gone past, her writing genre had to adequately fit to the performance. As Frank Egholm Andersen writes: ‘She loved to live her life as a theatre. Nothing was allowed to remain what it immediately appeared to be: everything had to be a good show, to glow, throw off sparks, and first and foremost be part of a story she could produce or be co-producer of.’³⁸ If the adoption of storytelling was a polemical stance against more contemporary genres characteristic of a culture she distanced herself from, it did not mean that she was detached from her current times or unaware of its cultural and intellectual debates and trends. As Andersen underlines: ‘During her entire life she was deeply engaged in the Western world’s intellectual discussions and the spiritual currents of her times’.³⁹ Her prose production, as well as her lifelong correspondence with several European and American writers and intellectuals, are a clear demonstration of this engagement. Even if the choice of the genre, and the personification of the storyteller, were meant to project the image of a form of art deeply connected and dependant on the past, the grounding use of performativity, masks, intertextuality and constructed identities make Isak Dinesen, in fact, a very modernist author. This was noted early, as observed by Wilkinson: ‘even Dinesen’s earliest critics have noted the complexity of her tales and their debts to European modernism’.⁴⁰ For example, in 1971 Donald Hannah underlined that Dinesen’s narrative use of masks as metaphors for the entrapment of social conventions, was similar

³⁷ Langbaum, p. 45.

³⁸ Andersen, Frank Egholm, ‘Afterword: “On Modern Marriage” and the Twenties’ in *On Modern Marriage and Other Observations* by Isak Dinesen (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1977), p. 115.

³⁹ Andersen, p. 115.

⁴⁰ Wilkinson, p. 82.

to that of a very modernist author such as Pirandello, especially as articulated in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: ‘There is, in other words, both a similarity between the dramatic structure of Pirandello’s work and the narrative structure of several of Isak Dinesen’s stories, and a preoccupation with a similar theme expressed through this. Trapped inside this play within a play, he is a character with a fixed and immutable role to play, and it is this fixity of identity he is rebelling against’.⁴¹ While the preoccupation with social role’s imposition and the necessity to be true to oneself is a grounding theme for Pierre Andrézel, as well as in most of Isak Dinesen’s writing, what really sets the two masks apart is the presence of the performing author. Isak Dinesen, the public performing storyteller, was an imposing presence in her writing, but Pierre Andrézel, on the other hand, was a mask at the service of its audience. In her defence of pseudonym, Karen Blixen wrote for Pierre Andrézel:

‘Hvis denne ukendte Forfatter i dette øjeblik føler, at han har faaet nogle Læsere til, for en Time eller to, at glemme andre Ting for de Rædsler, som han i “Gengældens Veje” slæber dem igennem, saa har han maaske opnaaet, hvad han vilde, og er godt tilfreds. Og han vilde da maaske være sine Læsere taknemlig, dersom de, til Gengæld, vilde give ham Lov til, som hidtil, at gaa sine egne Veje.’⁴²

It was not the author that had to draw attention to herself here, but to the function of her story. As Benjamin wrote, a storyteller will always be rooted in the people, and will be aware of what kind of entertainment the circumstances require. Blixen, under the novelist mask of Pierre Andrézel, and in circumstances of emergency, used storytelling in service of her close Danish community.

According to Georg Lukàcs, the ideology of modernist writers was diametrically different from anything coming before that – ‘Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationship with other human beings’.⁴³ If, as suggested by Lukàcs, modernist literature is based on the ontological assumption that man is a solitary

⁴¹ Hannah, p. 138.

⁴² Blixen in Brix p. 255, [If this unknown author in this moment feels that he has managed, for an hour or two, to make some of his readers forget their other troubles through the horrors he drags them through in GV, then he has probably achieved what he wanted and is quite satisfied. And maybe he would be grateful if his readers in exchange would allow him to go his own way].

⁴³ Lukàcs, Georg, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, (London: Merlin Press, 1963), p.19.

creature, unable to establish relationships outside himself, it can be argued that a cultural discussion about storytelling, which is, on the other hand, based on the assumption of men as being part of a community and sharing experiences – was a reaction to modernist individualism. Both in Benjamin and Blixen/Andrézel the theorization and use of storytelling signals a call for an anti-modernist genre, a genre that could transcend the feeling of loneliness and individualism and re-create the feeling of connection that a community would provide. Using storytelling meant going back to a pre-capitalist society characterized by connection rather than alienation. A political situation such as the occupation and the war questioned individualism and called, instead, to rethink solidarity and community sharing.

I argue that Karen Blixen's self-representation as Isak Dinesen the storyteller is an artist's interpretation of a role, and that it is instead under her novelist's mask of Pierre Andrézel that she gets to *practice* the art of storytelling in the way it was theorized by Walter Benjamin. If we consider Benjamin's basic criteria for storytelling – to provide counsel and to share wisdom – we can see how the social and historical circumstances in which GV/AA was written provided the ideal environment for a storyteller. Denmark under occupation was an audience in need of entertaining, but mostly in need of encouragement; it was an audience that craved counsel in hard times. On the other hand, the context of occupation and resistance also questioned the trustworthiness of sharing narrative. And as a result of those two different outcomes of storytelling – to counsel, but not always to be trusted– with GV/AA, Pierre Andrézel both used and questioned storytelling.

Part 2: On Masks, Pseudonyms and Novel Writing – Pierre Andrézel as Blixen's other self

Masks and Pseudonyms

GV/AA is a novel of masks and disguises that constantly questions the perception of truth. As Brantly has underlined, 'Dinesen's fiction places great emphasis on art, masks, and storytelling'.⁴⁴ Masks were a grounding theme in Blixen's writing, and the concept of mask was also very much connected to her use of pseudonyms. On Karen Blixen's use of masks, Else Brundbjerg has written:

Nu kan ma sker bruges og have mere end en betydning. De kan både tildække og afdække. En maske kan sikre et menneskes ønske om anonymitet. Den kan også anvendes i en fantasiløs omverden, fordi man under denne maske kan give spillerum for den fantasi og forestillingsevne, som omverdenen måske mere end noget andet længes efter. Den kan give udtryk for et menneskes virkelige og sande jeg, hvad det ønsker at være og også slev mener, det er. Endelig er der de falske masker, som ikke har noget andet formål end at tækkes sine omgivelser. Karen Blixen brugte alle disse former for masker i sit forfatterskab. Også et pseudonym er en del af maskefilosofien. Valget af et bestemt pseudonym kan sige en del om mennesket bag det, og det synes i alle tilfælde at gælde for hende.⁴⁵

In the article she published in response to the Andrézel Affair⁴⁶ Blixen wrote: 'et Pseudonym er ikke noget Bedrag, det er en Maske'.⁴⁷ As suggested by Brundbjerg, the mask in Blixen is used in multiple ways, it implies the idea of interchangeable and constructed identities, but also allows the expression of a person's true self. In the first

⁴⁴ Brantly, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Brundbjerg, p. 110, [Now, masks can be used with more than one meaning. They can both cover and reveal. A mask can ensure a person's anonymity. It can also be used in an outside world deprived of imagination, because under that mask one can give free rein to the imagination and performativity that are maybe needed more than anything in that world. It can also express a person's real, genuine self, what it wishes to be and who they mean they are. Finally, there are fake masks, which have no other use than that of disguising its surroundings. Karen Blixen used all of these forms of masks in her writing. A pseudonym is also a part of the mask philosophy. The choice of a pseudonym can say quite a lot of the person behind it, and this seems to apply to her in many cases].

⁴⁶ 'Om pseudonymer og Gengældelsens Veje' in *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 23 November 1944.

⁴⁷ Blixen in Brix, p. 255, [a pseudonym is not a deception, it is a mask].

case, the presence of a mask involves a performance and invites the reader to play along with the author, but because of its performativity, it also signals the potential unreliability of the narration. When impersonating Isak Dinesen, Karen Blixen used her mask in this way – as a literary game enhanced by her public performances as a storyteller. If, as Brundbjerg suggests, the choice of a pseudonym can say something about the person behind it, the choice of Isak Dinesen is deeply connected to the idea of playfulness. The surname, Dinesen, her own maiden name, hints the call to be unmasked and an invitation for the audience to play along. As Thurman has underlined, the name Isak in Hebrew means ‘the one who laughs’ and refers to Abraham and Sarah’s child, a ‘postmenopausal miracle, a divine joke. When she delivered him Sarah said: “God hath to made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me”’.⁴⁸ The Isak Dinesen mask thus allowed Karen Blixen both the playfulness and the necessary freedom to express herself creatively. Thurman reports that in an interview held after having been unmasked as Karen Blixen when *Seven Gothic Tales* was first published in Denmark, she explained her reasons to take up a pseudonym for writing:

on the same grounds my father hid behind the pseudonym Boganis [...] so that he could express himself freely, give his imagination a free rein. He didn’t want people to ask, ‘Do you really mean that? Or have you, yourself, experienced that?’[...] I moved my own tales back a hundred years to a truly Romantic time when people and their relations were different from now. Only in that way did I become completely free.⁴⁹

The choice of pseudonym here is intended as a mask that guarantees freedom – it suggests the exchange of one’s social mask for a mask that can disguise, and at the same time, guarantee freedom to express the creative self. On the other hand, the consolidation of this myth with her public performances ended up limiting her creative freedom – she had towards this pseudonym, as she wrote to Haas, a ‘noblesse oblige’⁵⁰ to its image. Under the Isak Dinesen mask she could not experiment as she did under the Pierre Andrézel mask. Thus, what did the Andrézel choice of pseudonym suggest about the

⁴⁸ Thurman, p. 266.

⁴⁹ Blixen quoted in Thurman, p. 80.

⁵⁰ BtHa 8/3/1945, kps 51, KBA

author behind it? As mentioned before, Andrézel could also mean in Danish Andre Selv – another self. One could argue that this choice of pseudonym allowed Blixen to wear yet another different mask, a different self that because of its anonymity allowed her a different creative freedom, but also a different, less censored way, to express herself. For example, as Sarah Stambaugh has noted, GV/AA ‘includes some of Dinesen’s most outspoken statements about the position of women’.⁵¹

The great undertaking of writing a novel

Part of Isak Dinesen’s public storytelling performance was, of course, to deny or be very ambiguous towards the possibility of writing a novel. Just two years before the publication of GV/AA, in an interview with Annamarie Cleemann for the magazine *Samleren*⁵² Blixen declared:

Jeg tror (...) ikke, at jeg nogensinde kommer til at skrive en Roman – skønt man skal jo ingenting forsværge! – for det er for mig ikke Længden, der gør Udslaget mellem de to Slags Bøger. Der er en Væsensforskel mellem en Roman og en kort Historie, en Fortælling.⁵³

Although, interestingly, in this interview she did not appear to rule out entirely the possibility of venturing into the novel territory, the essential difference between the novel and the tale that she is referring to, is voiced by one of her characters in *Last Tales* in “The Cardinal’s First Tale”:

Misforstaa mig ikke [...] den Roman, om hvilken vi nu taler, som former sig omkring og lader sig skabe af sine Menneskeskikkelser, den era f anerkendelsesværdig Art, en alvorsfuld, højtstræbende menneskelig

⁵¹ Stambaugh, Sarah, *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen, a Feminist Reading* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1988), pp. 35-36.

⁵² Blixen qtd in Rostbøll 2013, p. 336. The interview was published in *Samleren*, nr.2, October 1942, p.34.

⁵³ Ibid, [I don’t think I will ever end up writing a novel – although one can never say!– because to me is not the length that makes the difference between the two kinds of books. It is an essential difference between a novel and a short story, a tale].

Frembringelse,— men den vil dog bestandig forblive en blot menneskelig Frembringelse. Den guddommelige Kunst er dog bliver Historien.⁵⁴

Thus, it would seem, that according to Blixen, a novel is a human and, consequently, a transitory product – a story, instead, transcends temporality and aspires to the universal. As Langbaum puts it, in Isak Dinesen ‘The story transforms human purposes in divine purpose. It is the means by which the artist can show both the limited points of view of the characters and the abiding view of God’.⁵⁵ Stories, then, make the particular universal and more widely accessible. The idea of writing a novel, however, was something she had discussed with her publisher Robert Haas since 1932, even before the publication of *Seven Gothic Tales*. In the aforementioned letter, in which he declined her tales’ manuscript, he also encouraged her to write a novel, a suggestion that Blixen declined. She discussed the reason behind her refusal in a letter to Dorothy Canfield, who had initially introduced her to Haas. Blixen writes: ‘As to the novel which Mr Haas tells me that he wants me to write, I hope that if I live I shall write it. But not just now, and that for these reasons: I have been much buffeted by Life during the last years, and unless I get some sort of encouragement I find it very difficult to enter upon any great undertaking’.⁵⁶ It becomes evident, further in the letter, that the novel she is here referring to is what will eventually be *Out of Africa*:

I want to write about East Africa, where I have had for seventeen years what I shall ever feel to be my real life [...]. And if ever I write about Africa, it could not be helped that the book would contain much bitterness and complaint about the way in which the country and the people have been treated by the English, and in which they have let loose upon it our mechanical and mercenary civilization.⁵⁷

Towards the end of the letter, she underlines that this ‘great undertaking’ was not something she wished to do in her first book, but rather once she had ‘obtained some

⁵⁴ SF, p. 27/Mistake me not [...] the literature of which we are speaking – the literature of individuals, if we may call it so – is a noble art, a great earnest and ambitious human project. But it is a human project. The divine art is the story. In the beginning was the story’ LT, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Langbaum, p. 12-13.

⁵⁶ Lasson, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

sort of a name as a writer'.⁵⁸ It can be argued that only as an established author would she have felt that her voice could be authoritative enough to have some sort of impact. From what she declares here, it would seem that she identified the novel as the genre that could better express a criticism on social concerns – in this case the treatment of Kenya by the British colonial empire. Although it is arguable whether *Out of Africa* can be classified as a novel, and whether it openly problematizes colonialism, it is relevant to emphasise that she initially intended the novel as the genre to express criticism, and that the only other time she engaged with it was with GV/AA. As we will examine in detail in the following chapter, GV/AA expresses alarm on several social situations that concerned her, such as the Nazi occupation of Denmark and the annihilation of individual diversity in a totalitarian society. Significantly, to discuss those, she chose the novel as the literary genre that she considered the most fitting for the task. It is thought provoking that at the start of her writing career she intended to publish a novel that could express her disagreement on a political matter only as an established author; and that then, as an established author in 1944 when GV/AA was published, she denied its authorship and invented a different pseudonym for it. While it is quite possible that, in the context of Nazi occupied Denmark, it was personal safety that dictated the choice of disguising her identity as the author of a book that allegorically problematized the occupation, the reason why she continued to deny its authorship for fifteen years after its publication is related to her public persona. When the book was about to be published in the USA, and Robert Haas was pushing her to use her well-established Isak Dinesen pseudonym, she answered:

the very reasons which you produce in order to make me give up the name of Pierre Andrézel are those on account of which I shall never consent to let the book be published under my own name. You will understand what great delight it gives me to be told that “my name has become one almost to conjure within the American market”. But the more it is so, the greater care I will take of that name, the more I shall feel my artistic responsibility and the call of noblesse oblige.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ BtHa 8/3/1945, kps 51, KBA.

Blixen felt an artistic responsibility towards her well known pseudonym, and to be coherent with her carefully built public image, she did not want Isak Dinesen the storyteller to co-exist with Pierre Andrézel the novelist.

Part 3: Providing Counsel, raising awareness of unreliable narratives– Storytelling in *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*

If a great storyteller will always be rooted in the people, then Andrézel fit the criteria quite well. GV/AA was the only text that Blixen conceived specifically for the Danish audience in those precise circumstances. As mentioned before, Blixen stated in the letter to her English and American publishers when sending the English manuscript: ‘this book was written to provide me myself and my countrymen with a bit of fun in a, to say the least of it, fun-less time’.⁶⁰ A storyteller rooted in its people will know what they need, and Blixen created a text that while entertaining, could encourage people at the same time. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the concept of fun found in Karen Blixen’s writing is an expression of the will to live, and used in the context of the occupation was meant as an encouragement to react to the harsh circumstances. Leaving the public mask of Isak Dinesen behind, with Pierre Andrézel, Blixen used storytelling as a tool to interact with her community.

GV/AA engages in a constant dialogue with its readers, and there are several points in the book that seem to refer directly to the Danish situation. One of the most striking intertextual reference to the occupation is the remark on fun by Zosine: ‘I alvorlige Folk skal ikke gaa saa strength i Rette med et Menneske for, hvad de finder paa at more sig med, naar det er lukket inde som en Fange og ikke en Gang har Lov til at sige, at det er i Fængsel! Hvis jeg ikke snart faar lidt Kommers, saa dør jeg!’.⁶¹ This quote also appeared as the epigraph of the English and American edition, and was also used by Blixen during the Andrézel affair in her article on defense of pseudonyms. There are also moments in the book that convey encouraging messages, such as Lucan’s words to Zosine after the loss of her family house Tortuga: ‘Du skal se [...] at hvis vi kun holder ud, gaar det os godt til sidst. Det er bedre for os at slaa af paa vore Fordringer og gaa noget igennem, naar vi kun kan bevare vor Selvagtelse, og med Tiden ogsaa vinde andre

⁶⁰ BtHu and BtHa, 13/9/1945, kps 53 and 51, KBA.

⁶¹ GV, pp. 97-98/‘You serious people must not be too hard on human beings for what they choose to amuse themselves with when they are shut up in a prison, and are not even allowed to say that they are prisoners. If I do not soon get a little bit of fun, I shall die.’ AA, p .110.

Mennerskers Respekt'.⁶² Another reference to Denmark as a protectorate is Zosine's exclamation 'Is it not degrading, a sickening knowledge that we two are safe from them? We are their two little canary birds in a neat little cage'.⁶³ Interestingly, confirming its allegorical reference to the occupation, is the fact that this sentence does not appear in the Danish version.

The ideal storytellers in *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*

The encouragement provided in GV/AA, comes mainly voiced by the characters' stories. Benjamin writes that a good story always contains something useful: 'The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers'.⁶⁴ In the structure of GV/AA, the plot is intertwined with a constellation of small tales and stories, all told by the characters in order to explain something, convey a certain point of view, or affirm their identity by telling their background story. And if the stories are displaced – in time and place – they treat themes that were painfully close to the contemporary Danish readership such as courage, revenge, surveillance, escape, individuality's annihilation, and the grounding importance of solidarity and love. The displacement also serves as a distancing strategy – to set a similar situation in a different context gives the reader the necessary distance to develop a judgement about it.

The first character in GV/AA to appear as a storyteller is Olympia. Her tale, set in the first part of the novel, appears initially out of place. When Zosine's father manages to escape after the ball, Olympia starts telling the story of how she came to work for his family. But the tale develops into the story of her own youth, her troubled motherhood, and her displacement from her own homeland. Through storytelling, Olympia affirms her identity; as Adriana Cavarero points out:

'According to Karen Blixen, the question: 'who am I' flows indeed, sooner or later, from the beating of every heart. It is a question that only a unique being can

⁶² GV, p. 71/ 'Do not lose courage [...] if we can hold out, everything will be all right in the end. It is better to cut down our pretensions, and to go through a short hard time. If only we can keep our self-respect, we shall win the respect of others as well' AA, p. 79.

⁶³ AA, p. 175.

⁶⁴ Benjamin, p. 86.

sensibly pronounce. Its response, as all narrators know, lies in the classic rule of storytelling'.⁶⁵

Portrayed initially as a madwoman through the eyes of Zosine, the aristocratic daughter of her employer, Olympia represents at the end of the novel the character that conveys stability, honesty and truth, by virtue of her self-awareness: 'Olympia stod imellem dem paa Gulvet som en massiv og urokkelig Virkelighed [...] talte og teede sig som en vanvitting, [...] alligevel var det hendes Nærværelse, der tvang Løgnen paa Saint-Barbe tilbage'.⁶⁶ When Olympia tells her first story, she stages a proper storyteller performance: 'traadte [...] Olympia midt up paa Gulvet. Hun saa sig, langsomt om i Stuen, slog sig for Brystet og hævede Stemmen.' 'Jeg skal fortælle om min Herre'/'Olympia stepped out on the floor. She slowly looked round the room, beat her breast with her fist and raised her voice. "I, I will tell you of my master"'.⁶⁷ Like Scheherazade, Olympia embodies what Cavarero calls in Blixen's writing 'the womanly art of narration'.⁶⁸ Olympia represents 'the figure of the female storyteller – old witches and wise wet-nurses, grandmothers and storks, fates and sibyls, [that] can be encountered at every stage of the literary imagination to attest the sources and the feminine practices of narration'.⁶⁹ Storytelling for Olympia is an act of self-affirmation, and the same is valid for Madame De Valfonds – Zosine's rediscovered grandmother. She uncovers her identity to Zosine by telling her the story of her own youthful mistakes. Although there are many characters telling stories throughout the novel – such as Noel, Mr Pennhallow and Mr Tabbernor – the phrase 'Jeg vil fortælle dig en Historie'/'I will tell you a story'⁷⁰ – and the implied act of owning the act of storytelling – comes from female characters: Olympia, Madame de Valfonds, and Zosine. For the first two characters, the act of storytelling is an act of self-affirmation, for Zosine it signals her growth into maturity and wisdom. Hannah Arendt writes that for Karen Blixen 'Storytelling, at any rate, is what in the end made her wise [...] Wisdom is a virtue of old

⁶⁵ Cavarero, Adriana, *Relating Narratives, Storytelling and Selfhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

⁶⁶ GV, p. 210/'Olympia stood on the floor between them like a solid and unshakable reality [...] spoke and behaved like a madwoman, and still it was her presence which drove back the falsehood at Sainte-Barbe' AA, p. 258.

⁶⁷ GV, p. 55/AA p. 57.

⁶⁸ Cavarero, p. 122.

⁶⁹ Cavarero, p. 122.

⁷⁰ GV, p. 226/AA, p. 281, GV, p. 55/AA p. 57, GV, p. 168/AA, p. 203.

age, and it seems to come only to those who, when young, were neither wise nor prudent'.⁷¹

This wisdom acquired through life experience, and then shared through storytelling, in GV/AA also characterizes the evolution of the two main characters, Zosine and Lucan. If Zosine at the start of the novel is represented as the impulsive and spoiled young heiress, through the discovery of the dark reality that surrounds her and Lucan, she grows wiser and becomes a storyteller herself 'Jeg skal fortælle dig en Historie'/'I will tell you a story'⁷² she tells Lucan, and tells her a story about courage. For Lucan, storytelling is a tool through which she progressively acquires self-awareness. When Olympia tells her first story, Zosine listens to the story 'halvt lyttet',⁷³ but Lucan 'sad tavs af Skræk ved, hvad hun havde hørt'/'too amazed to utter a word'.⁷⁴ Lucan embodies the ideal audience for a storyteller in another occasion in the story as well. When Noel, who will end up being her prince charming, has finished telling his tale 'Lucan havde lyttet med Forfærdelse, men tillige med dyb Medfølelse. Hendes fromme blaa Øjne traf Fortælleren'.⁷⁵ Lucan and Noel will become the representation of the perfect unity, according to Blixen's philosophy, as they represent the fusion of two contrasting elements that complement each other.⁷⁶

This is mirrored also in the description of the narrator and listener interdependent relationship; the one cannot exist without the other. Noel represents the male counterpart to the feminine art of narration in GV/AA. He also embodies the ideal storyteller – when he finishes his tale: 'Han havde talt med en saadan Oprigtighed og Vægt, at den mærkelige Fortælling næsten var blevet Virgelighed for det lille Selskab i Spisestuen paa Saint-Barbe'.⁷⁷ Noel's capacity of creating a different reality through his narrative is also displayed in the moonlight scene with Lucan: 'Tid og Rum ophævedes for hende, ethvert Øjeblik, hvori hans Stemme nnaede hendes Øren, var hende

⁷¹ Arendt, Hannah 'Foreword- Isak Dinesen, 1885-1962' to *Daguerrotypes*, p.xxv. First published in Arendt, Hannah, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

⁷² GV, p. 168/AA, p. 203.

⁷³ GV, p. 59/'only with half an ear' AA, p. 62.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Although here the two versions are slightly different – in Danish Lucan is silenced by skræk/terror and in English by amazement – the ultimate meaning remains the same. That storytelling has an important emotional impact on the character who is ready to receive it.

⁷⁵ GV, p. 107/'Lucan had been listening with awe, but at the same time with deep sympathy and compassion. Her sweet blue eyes were fixed on the face of the narrator' AA, p. 123.

⁷⁶ See also Chapter 6, pp. 243-244.

⁷⁷ GV, p. 108/'He had spoken so earnestly and with so much weight that the strange tale of his had almost become real to the small party in the dining room of Sainte-Barbe' AA, p. 124.

dyrebart'.⁷⁸ Storytelling, coming from Noel and absorbed by Lucan, brings her to a new self-awareness. 'Og dog følte hun, at hun i denne Tid levede paa en anden Maade end nogensinde før'⁷⁹ and only then will she be able to contradict MrPennhallow for the first time. Significantly, this confidence comes to her when Pennhallow is lecturing her on his idea of womanhood, characterized by the plan to teach women proper behaviour, and get rid of the ones that do not fit the criteria of 'et ideals, i den rene Kvindeligheds Tjeneste'.⁸⁰ Lucan reacts to his speech by going back to the memory of the storyteller's voice: 'Noels Stemme i Haven, som bestanding genlød i hendes Sind, kom ogsaa nu tilbage til hende [...] Kærlighedens Magt var da vældigere end selve Ondskabens og Rædslens, dens Lys gennemtrængte det sorteste Mørke'⁸¹ and this gives her the necessary courage to reply to MrPennhallow – 'det ikke kan forholde sig, som De siger. Der er vistnok Tilgivelse for alle Mennesker. Der er en uendelige Naade i Verden'.⁸²

Unreliable narrations

According to the definition provided in Part 1 of this chapter, of the storyteller as someone able to bring counsel and wisdom to hers/his community, Noel represents the ideal storyteller. Mr Pennhallow instead, represents the opposite of this concept, namely that of the unreliable narrator. The classic definition of unreliable narrators in literary studies was provided by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 'I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norm), unreliable when he does not'.⁸³ According to this definition, if the norms of GV - and Blixen's - were to bring to the reader a form of narration that could bring counsel and wisdom, Pennhallow embodies the antithesis to that, being the character that instead represents a form of false, and thus unreliable, narration. Bruno Zerweck has underlined in "Historicizing Unreliable Narration" how the concept of unreliable narrators is also always inevitably connected to the individual's

⁷⁸ GV, p. 113/'Time and space had ceased to exist; only his voice in the night air was real' AA, p. 131.

⁷⁹ GV, p. 116/'She felt now that she lived more fully than ever before' AA, p. 135.

⁸⁰ GV, p. 121/'pure and guiltless womanhood' AA, p. 141.

⁸¹ GV, p. 122/'Noel's voice in the garden, which forever resounded in her heart, again came back to her [...] Thus love was mightier indeed than the power of evil; its light penetrated the black darkness of horrors' AA, p. 143.

⁸² GV, p. 123/'It cannot be as you say. There is, I think, forgiveness for all people on earth. There is an infinite grace in the world' AA, p. 143.

⁸³ Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961), pp. 158-159.

interpretative strategies and its historical and cultural context: ‘each individual set of interpretative strategies constitutes a selection on the basis of culturally determined framework and preferences within a certain historical context’.⁸⁴ In the context of occupied Denmark, Pennhallow could be interpreted as the projection of the unreliability of the current political discourses. His stories are stories of deception, yet it is through his skilled performances that he creates a credible world that Lucan and Zosine, after many tribulations and at the height of their vulnerability, decide to inhabit without hesitation. Pennhallow represents the performance of storytelling, rather than the ideal storyteller, and as such his discourse is ambiguous and unreliable. While Noel’s voice resounds in Lucan’s ear as a reminder of her own strength, Pennhallow’s voice is ‘en brudt og hæs Hvisken’.⁸⁵ Pointedly, he ends up losing it after Noel tells his story –‘hans Stemme, der altid havde været svag, blev helt borte’⁸⁶– when confronted with the genuine storyteller, the performer loses his ability to mimic and remain silent. When the Reverend Pennhallow first enters the story, he is presented as ‘en lille Herre traadte ind i Kontoret’.⁸⁷ His first disguise is already in being a Reverend, and on top of that he adds his performance of a ‘little old gentleman’. A lot of attention is dedicated to the initial depiction of his behaviour and appearances: ‘han førte sig med en sand og næsten højtidelig Værdighed’.⁸⁸ These descriptions are important in the reader’s perception of him as an unreliable narrator. As Bruno Zerweck has underlined in, it is very important in a text that a potential unreliable narrator would assume human-like attributes ‘because otherwise there is no (fictional) cognitive center to which unreliability can be attributed [...] The effect of unreliability fundamentally depends on the reader’s construction of the narrator’.⁸⁹

Pennhallow’s depiction is ambiguous from the start. The reader learns that he belongs to a family of preachers from ‘den Sekt, der kaldes Aventister’/‘a severe and ascetic religious sect’⁹⁰ where ‘de har alle været højt ansete Talere’/‘they have been all highly admired preachers’,⁹¹ and yet ‘der er rigtignok tillige Sagn om sorte Faar i denne

⁸⁴ Zerweck, Bruno, ‘Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction’ in *Style*, 2001 Spring, Vol.35(1), pp.151-78, p.155.

⁸⁵ GV, p. 120/‘hoarse and broken’AA, p. 140.

⁸⁶ GV, p. 119/‘his voice [Pennhallow’s], always faint, vanished’ AA, p. 139

⁸⁷ GV, p. 73/‘a little old gentleman noiselessly stepped into the room’ AA, p. 81.

⁸⁸ GV, p. 73/ ‘he carried himself in these old clothes, with a surprising, almost solemn, dignity’ AA, p. 81.

⁸⁹ Zerweck, p. 56.

⁹⁰ GV, p. 72/AA, p. 80.

⁹¹ GV, p. 72/AA, p. 80.

Slægt. Men saadanne Sagn opstaar jo nettop tit af Misundelse eller af Mangel paa Forstaaelse af det ualmendelige'.⁹² Furthermore, his intentional performativity seems to be displayed very soon: 'han talte meget sagte, men gjorde dog ikke Indtryk af at have nogen Brist i sin Stemme. Snarere syntes han at dæmpe den Hensynsfuldhed imod dem, han talte med'.⁹³ While characters such as Olympia and Noel are depicted as spontaneous and, within the limitations of their social impositions, behaving according to their feelings, Pennhallow from his first appearance is shown as a character that plays a part for which his every movement is well thought out and deliberately chosen. He is the performer. And because GV/AA ultimately celebrates the importance of individuality and authenticity, in his complete hypocrisy he represents the perfect opponent and the ideal villain. When Mr Pennhallow stages his defence in front of the judge of Lunel, he is so convincing that everyone believes him: 'Han syntes at vokse og blive bredere, mens han talte'.⁹⁴ His speech is held in front of a representative of the law and Mr Tinchebrai, the detective who will later be unmasked as one of Mr Pennhallow's accomplices, and the situation could be echoing that of corrupted police forces during war and occupation time. Pennhallow's defence performance plays on arousing feelings of pity in his audience. He tells how he and his wife take care of young lonely girls in memory of their own lost child, that in Marseille he was at the deathbed of a man asking his priest services for confession, and that the money he got from the man was given to him to use for charity 'til mine fattige'.⁹⁵ Pennhallow's narration subverts all the pillars of Western's society: family, law and religion. He is not only lying in front of the law, but while performing them, he is also violating traditionally sacred roles – such as a pastor and father – to cover up his actions of murder and sexual trafficking. In GV/AA masks can both protect and mislead, and they contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of constant anxiety that very much mirrors the situation of a country occupied by enemy forces. The first disguise happens at the start of the book, when during the ball Zosine's father must escape from his debtors. Interestingly, it is not Pennhallow, the villain of the story, who first introduces the theme of disguising one's identity – it is actually one of the heroines. This underlines

⁹² 'there are, indeed, other tales of black sheep in the family. But such tales often arise from envy, or from the lack of understanding of the great and unusual' Ibid.

⁹³ GV, p. 73/'He spoke very quietly, but all the same he did not seem to suffer from any ailment of his voice or throat. He rather gave the impression of deliberately subduing his voice, out of some particular consideration for the person to whom he talked' AA, p. 81.

⁹⁴ GV, p. 134/'He seemed to grow and to broaden while he spoke' AA, p. 159.

⁹⁵ GV, p. 133/'for the benefit of the poor of my parish' AA, p. 158.

the similarities within an occupied country, where the circumstances often implied that anyone could be forced into a situation of pretense. Zosine exclaims:

Ingen, nej ingen [...] kan forstaar, hvad jeg har gaaet igennem i disse Dage. [...] Og nu er jeg saa træt [...] som jeg ikke troede, at noget Menneske kunde være udenfor Graven selv. Det er forfærdeligt at leve i Spænding og at frygte for sit Liv. Man tror, det er morsomt og eventyrligt! Ja, det er det. Men ser I, det er, naar Faren er forbi, at man dør.

No one, no one on earth [...] can realize what I have gone through, what I have experienced during these days and nights. It is a terrible thing to be deceiving people all round you. But at the same time it has in it some kind of fascination, a power to exert all one's faculties. It is a fatal game, it is wicked, I believe. But still it is a game, one feels as if one might go on forever. But now I am more tired than I had thought it possible to be. It is when danger is over that one sits down to die! I am happy, but my strength has gone, and I am changed. I believe I have grown old.⁹⁶

Zosine's speech could likely refer to the experience of the resistance fighters, especially when comparing the Danish and the English version of the text. The Danish one, written in 1944, the most active year for the Danish resistance movement, it is more concise in its meaning, giving the actual impression of Zosine's exhaustion just after action. On the other hand the English one, re-written after the occupation, appears to be a more thoughtful speech, as if it had had more space, or experiences, to be developed. Although, as analysed in previous chapters, Blixen was not directly involved in the resistance movement, she offered her house for the transportation of the Danish Jews that were rescued by being taken to Sweden by boat. 'There were Jews in the kitchen and Nazis in the garden',⁹⁷ Blixen told her first biographer Parmenia Migel. Zosine's words might have been conveying Blixen's own experience, or that of her friends that were active in the resistance movement – such as Johannes Rosendahl and Mogens Fog.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ GV, p. 52/AA, p. 53.

⁹⁷ Migel, p. 129.

⁹⁸ See Thurman, p. 304.

In GV/AA, The theme of masks and of the unreliability of personal narrations reaches its apex in the final part of the novel, where the girls have eventually discovered the Pennhallows' secret and decide to stay to fight back, instead of escaping. 'vi jo selv har Maskerade paa Saint-Barbe nu for tiden',⁹⁹ Zosine says to Lucan, and explains what a bal masque is:

Du danser med en maskeret Kavalier og tror ved dig selv, at du ved, hvem han er. Han tror ogsaa, at han ved, hvem du er. Men ingen af eder kan dog være sikker I eders Sag [...]jo, det ere n lystig Maskerade! [...] Vi ha Masker paa, og de gamle har Masker paa! Vi ved ikke, om de har kendt os, og de ved heller ikke, om vi har set deres Ansigter bag ved Masken.¹⁰⁰

Concluding remarks: Pierre Andrézel as the storyteller in wartime

GV/AA could be considered as a novel that is at the same time a collection of stories. If the storyteller is someone who in every case 'has counsel for his readers',¹⁰¹ GV/AA provides counsel with all its various stories. Storytelling has been ruined by information, according to Benjamin, since information is a form of communication that privileges the contemporary and near, it lacks that spatial and temporal displacement necessary to a story to make it universal. Furthermore, there is no space for the reader to develop his own wisdom about it. Because information is a form of communication based on providing a ready prepared meaning, it clashes with the form of communication of storytelling that, as Arendt says, 'reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it'.¹⁰² In the context of the occupation, with information being censored, misleading or propagandistic, a text like GV/AA provided a space for the audience where to be entertained and encouraged, where to gain some perspective on their situation through stories displaced in space and time. Paraphrasing Arendt, storytelling reveals

⁹⁹ GV, p. 166/ We ourselves are holding a bal masque at Sainte Barbe, these days' AA, p. 200.

¹⁰⁰ 'You dance in a mask, with a masked young gentleman, and you believe that you know who he is. He too, believes that he knows who you are. But none of you can be certain of the matter [...] Yes, it is a merry masquerade [...] we have got our masks on, and the old people have got theirs! We do not know if they have recognized us, and they cannot tell either whether we have recognized their murderers' faces behind their masks' Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin, p. 86.

¹⁰² Arendt, p. xx.

meaning, but according to Umberto Eco, the same could be said for the act of reading popular novels:

[...] Leggere racconti significa fare un gioco attraverso il quale si impara a dar senso alla immensità delle cose che sono accadute e accadono e accadranno nel mondo reale. Leggendo romanzi sfuggiamo all'angoscia che ci coglie quando cerchiamo di dire qualcosa di vero sul mondo reale. Questa è la funzione terapeutica della narrativa e la ragione per cui gli uomini, dagli inizi dell'umanità, raccontano storie. Che è poi la funzione dei miti: dar forma al disordine dell'esperienza.¹⁰³

The chaos of a situation like the one in which GV/AA was produced required for a storyteller to write a novel that would give the function that Eco is referring to. As we have seen in the section of this thesis dedicated to its reception, GV/AA pastiched traditionally popular low-brow genres, such as gothic, crime and romance. Using widely popular genres increased the novel's distribution and widened its audience. Furthermore, as we have seen, the Andrézel affair created a public debate that implied that the novel was widely discussed. Even if the reading experience was a solitary affair, it was then shared in the act of discussing it. GV/AA used the techniques of storytelling and mixed it with the accessibility and contemporaneity of the modern form of the popular novel. GV/AA was written, as Blixen had said, to provide both herself and her audience with some entertainment and escape in "fun-less times". Both the author and the audience shared the same experience, and the same needs – "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it in the experience of those who are listening to his tale"¹⁰⁴– or reading it, in the case of GV/AA. This circularity of shared experiences, even if through the act of reading, is supported by the storytelling narrative. As Landy has pointed out: "The oral tradition which stands behind

¹⁰³ Eco, Umberto, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi* (Milano: Bompiani, 2011), p. 107, [To read stories mean to play a game through which we learn to give meaning to the immensity of the things that have happened, are happening, and will happen in the real world. While reading novels we escape the anxiety that strikes us when we attempt to say something true about the real world. This is the therapeutic function of narrative and the reason why men, since the start of humanity, tell stories. Which is then the function of myths: to give shape to the chaos of existence].

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin, p. 87.

the tale nourishes and maintains the validity and importance of social discourse'¹⁰⁵ and Blixen's storytelling 'reassert through discourse the dignity of human beings and the importance of community.'¹⁰⁶ As discussed, it is arguable whether Karen Blixen as Isak Dinesen did actually fulfil the role of the storyteller as a spokesperson of a community. However, as we have seen, it is paradoxically in her role as the novelist Pierre Andrézel, that she seems to take on the responsibility of telling tales 'for at gøre Verden lykkeligere og visere',¹⁰⁷ to entertain and encourage her countrymen when it was most needed. As noted by Lynn Wilkinson in her article "Hannah Arendt on Isak Dinesen: between Storytelling and Theory"¹⁰⁸ Hannah Arendt had used Isak Dinesen in her writing as an example of the last existing storyteller in contemporary world. Storytelling for Arendt has a fundamental function in the life of the polis 'while storytelling brings into focus the meaning of an individual life, it creates a public world of shared narratives that survives the death of individual members. Dinesen's works, it seems, might serve as an example of how we might go about translating Arendt's remarks on Greek storytelling into modern terms'.¹⁰⁹ Under the mask of Pierre Andrézel, Karen Blixen brought counsel to her community of readers by recurring to a method as old as humanity – she told them a story to entertain them and to encourage them to resist and react.

While storytelling in GV/AA becomes a way to diffuse counsel, the book could also be considered as a self-reflexive commentary on her own storytelling strategies – which it uses extensively. GV/AA is a novel about storytelling itself. Some of the characters are storytellers, and some affirm their individuality through storytelling. But storytelling is also questioned – the narrative is often unreliable, mirroring the Danish situation under occupation where any kind of information was unreliable, questionable or misleading. According to Zerweck, the concept of unreliable narrations is necessarily connected to the historical context where the text is received: 'one cannot exclude from the analysis of the text's unreliability the cultural context in which a narrative text is received. Any cognitive narratological discussion of unreliable narration must therefore take into account that the interpretation of a narrator as unreliable tells us at least as much

¹⁰⁵ Landy, Marcia "Anecdote as Destiny: Isak Dinesen & The Storyteller" in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol.19, No.2 (Summer, 1978), p. 391.

¹⁰⁶ Landy, p. 406.

¹⁰⁷ SA, p. 18/'to delight the world and make it wiser' AOD, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkinson, p. 77

¹⁰⁹ Wilkinson, p. 78

about the cultural context in which it was performed as it tells us about the text.¹¹⁰ As we have seen, *GV/AA* was a text that was very much a product of the historical context, and it also offered several opportunities of reader/author interaction – in the form of intertextual encouragement, or through stories treating themes relevant to the contemporary context of reception. Presenting unreliable narrators and narrations gave the opportunity to Andrézel to invite her community of readers to reflect on the reliability of contemporary discourses. As reported in “Letters”, Blixen had witnessed the distortion of a national narrative in Germany through the imposition of Nazi ideology, and remained deeply concerned by it. The sudden Nazi occupation of her own country forced her to face those issues, and write about them. As she had considered the novel as the ideal genre to discuss a situation of oppression – such as the one she had experienced in Kenya – it is easier to understand why she felt compelled to write a novel in 1944. Although obviously with very different circumstances and outcomes, in both cases she had witnessed the imposition of an ideology that aimed to result in the creation of a homogenized society with no space, nor respect, for individual diversity. As discussed in the previous chapter, this theme was discussed by Blixen in “Letters”, and the freedom to be oneself remains a recurring theme in her writing, and a fundamental concept in *GV/AA*.

¹¹⁰ Zerweck, p. 157.

Chapter 5:

Questioning Unreliable Narrations: *Gengældelsens Veje*/*The Angelic Avenger's* Subversion of Western Patriarchal Discourse

'under Forklædningen er vi, hvad vi er, og hvad vi gennem Tiderne har været. [...] i fuld Troskab mod vort kvindelige Væsen, og med fuld Overholdelse af vor kvindelig Værdighed'.¹

Introduction

Karen Blixen's writing is characterized by the circularity of certain themes. Stories, metaphors, images, and characters, often reappear creating a recognisable fictional universe. These repetitions, especially when regarding her (mostly) autobiographical stories, were a storyteller strategy to create a legend around the figure of Isak Dinesen. But as Marianne Stecher has noted, in her prose writing her aesthetic and philosophy remain remarkably unshaken as well. If one was to summarise Blixen's universe, a task certainly not made easy by the variety of themes and concepts in her work, it could be said that Blixen believed that life, and the universe, were made by the interplay of different elements. From this essential interaction, and mutual inspiration, stems creativity. Therefore, it is essential that individuals pursue their calling to be themselves, and diversity is to be celebrated as the most fundamental aspect of life. Anything that prevents this individual quest for self-affirmation, is to be abhorred. Consequently, religious or political movements that tend to homologate society, or create prescribed roles, are not acceptable in Blixen's view.² As Stecher has demonstrated in her work,³ this view informs Blixen's entire writing, as well as her understanding of the great historical, social, and cultural happenings of her century – thus her understanding of gender, totalitarianism, and colonialism.

¹ *Essays*, p. 88/ 'Under the disguise we are what we are, and what we have been throughout time. With complete loyalty towards our female being and in complete accord with our female dignity' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 81.

² See for example Blixen's comparison of Islam and Nazism in *Breve/Letters*.

³ See Stecher pp.93-99 and pp.170-182.

While these themes are openly discussed in her essays, and artistically concealed in her fictional writing, I believe that in *GV/AA* she deals with them differently than in her other texts. As discussed in the storyteller chapter, the different pseudonym allowed her a different expressive freedom from her well-known authorial alter-ego. This freedom also applies to the expression of her political worries, and translates in the choice of the novel as a genre able to express those concerns. Furthermore, through the character of Mr Pennhallow, *GV/AA* warns the readers about unreliable narrators and this warning expands to include the unreliability of the discourses that have shaped western society. It has been underlined recently, especially through the work of Marianne Stecher and Mads Bunch, that Blixen can be understood as a rather subversive thinker for her time. Much attention has been placed on her essayistic writing, in order to underline this point and to justify her relevance as a thinker lively involved in modernity. In this chapter I am going to examine how *GV/AA* re-elaborates some of Blixen's usual themes, as well as giving voice to some of her most outspoken concerns on the great themes of her century. The first part will compare *GV/AA* to her discussion of totalitarianism and imposed ideologies in 'Letters'; the second part will discuss how clothing in *GV/AA* and other stories, represents a criticism of imposed social gender roles; and the last part will discuss how through the figure of Olympia, Blixen reflects on the historical damage of colonialism and of the Western patriarchal system of values.

Although *GV/AA* has often been classified as the furthest from Blixen's usual style, as underlined in the reception chapter of this thesis, ever since its first publication it has nevertheless been noted how many things in common it shares with Blixen's other books. Some of the first Danish reviewers noted this aspect – most notably Kaj Thaning who tracked down all the most Blixenian traits of *GV/AA*.⁴ Hans Brix as well offered an analysis of the most Blixenian motifs in the novel, focusing on the use of similar imagery to many of her other texts.⁵ In the storytelling chapter I argued how *GV/AA* could also be described as a self-commentary on the idea of storytelling and on the performance of the storyteller. In this chapter I will analyse to which of her own texts Blixen referred mostly for the creation of this novel, to demonstrate that while *GV/AA* stands in a different place from her usual authorship, it also engages in a dialogue with her previous,

⁴ In *Nationalstidende* 19th November 1944 'Et stykke litterært Detektivearbejde – Pastor Kaj Thaning beggrunder, hvorfor Andrézel er Karen Blixen', see Chapter 3.

⁵ See Chapter 1.

and future, work. GV/AA can be rightly classified as a pastiche, but it can also be considered as a self-pastiche. Blixen as Andrézel uses and subverts some of her own stories and topics, creating a text that engages with her entire oeuvre, and questions the grounding values and ideas of Western society.

Part 1: On totalitarian society, religion, and the indoctrination to the “proper faith”

*En dag da Husets Herre var hjemmefra, fandt dets Frue Vej berind [på biblioteket]’.*⁶

As underlined before, GV/AA was a product of the occupation, but it was also a product of war because of Blixen’s own witnessing of a state of war in Berlin in 1940, a visit reported in her essay ‘Letters from a Land at War’. While the two texts are different in style, aim and subject, when comparing ‘Letters’ and GV/AA it is possible to spot many similarities in terms of metaphors, language and concepts. It is also possible to say that GV/AA is the narrative re-elaboration of the social structures and changes that Blixen had witnessed in Berlin. Both texts mainly focus on rejecting the idea of the annihilation of human diversity as imposed by a totalitarian society. This idea is one that ties in with Blixen’s concept of femininity and gender in general. As Stecher has underlined ‘Karen Blixen’s observations about the forced strength and repressive power she observed in Hitler’s Berlin in 1940 are inextricably tied to the existential perspectives on women and women’s roles that she developed over her lifetime’.⁷ We can see how those same ideas of femininity that Blixen elaborates in her essayistic and fiction works are narratively expressed in the female characters of GV/AA. As discussed in the historical chapter of this thesis, ‘Letters’ were the product of Blixen’s visit to Nazi Berlin in 1940, a few months before Denmark’s occupation. The idea of a totalitarian state clashed tremendously with Blixen’s views, and it could be argued that the core themes of GV/AA, such as human commodification, Pennhallow’s plan in the creation of new womanhood, as well as the education of the existing one to a proper faith, derives directly from witnessing the Nazi state’s organisations like the *Reichsfraunbund*.

The core of ‘Letters’ is Blixen’s report of the visit to Berlin, described in “Great Undertakings in Berlin” and “Strength and Joy”. If the previous part was an introduction, a sort of reminder of what Germany used to be, this is a report of what Germany is at the time Blixen is visiting. Chaperoned by several Doctors (‘young Ph.D.’⁸) from the Ministry

⁶ SF, p. 11/ ‘On a day when her husband was away, the mistress of the villa found her way to the library’ LT, p. 6.

⁷ Stecher, p. 93.

⁸ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 102.

of Propaganda, in Berlin Blixen gets to see the structures that regulates Nazi society, and reflects on the people who runs it:

I et totalitær Stat maa der vistnok nødvendigvis, ved Siden af den egentlige Embedsstand, udvikle sig en Slags politisk Gejstlighed, en stab af sociale Sjælesørgere [...] De har en Magt af den samme Art som den katholske Kirke i dens store Tid. Folkets private aandelige Velfærd, især dets Oprdagelse til et Forbliven i den rette Tro er for en stor Del lagt i deres Hænder og føles af dem som deres Ansvar.⁹

The comparison to the Catholic Church suggests a parallelism between political and religious fanaticism – both have in common the feature of being an external imposition on the individual, rather than a free choice. As Mads Bunch has pointed out, according to Blixen ‘we as human beings must make our own experiences and form our own opinions and live by them and not blindly subscribe to an ideology, religion or philosophy created by others.’¹⁰ In ‘Letters’, Blixen stresses the parallelism between political and religious fanaticism by referring to this time in Berlin as one ‘hvor politiske Ideer forkyndes som Religion’.¹¹ The character of the Reverend Pennhallow in GV/AA, with his zealous education of the two girls and his fanatical faith, could be seen as the embodiment of those observations. Being a minister and the girls tutor, Pennhallow is the incarnation of both religious and ideological fanaticism, or in Blixen’s words, he represents ‘a kind of political clergy [...] a social and spiritual advisor’.¹² Appropriating a Christian paternalistic discourse and underlining his role of guide, in GV/AA Pennhallow often refers to himself as the ‘Hyrdes/shepherd’ and call the girls his ‘lammene/lambs’.¹³ The parallel between ideology and religion is further stressed in ‘Letters’ when talking about the concept of will:

⁹ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 102/ ‘In a totalitarian state, I suppose, there must necessarily develop in addition to the body of officials a kind of political clergy, a staff of social and spiritual advisors. [...] they have a power of the same sort as the Catholic church when it was at its most powerful. The private, spiritual welfare of the people, and in particular its education in the proper faith and its continuance in that faith has, to a large extent, been put in their hands, and is felt by them as a responsibility’ *Essays*, p. 132.

¹⁰ Bunch, p. 68.

¹¹ *Essays*, p. 160/ ‘when political ideas are being proclaimed like a religion’ *Daguerreotypes* p. 131.

¹² *Daguerreotypes*, p. 102.

¹³ See for example GV, p. 73/ AA, p. 81.

Det er da overalt Indtrykket a fen uhyre Viljesanspændelse, som behersker den Fremmede i Berlin. Viljekraften et Det tredje Riges Indsats – der, hvor Viljen slaar til, slaar det til, og alt eftersom man han Tro paa Viljens Magt, kan man tro paa dets Evangelium.¹⁴

The concept of will in the Reich is in conflict with Blixen's existential individualistic philosophy – since it is imposed from external forces, it becomes alien to the individual's own will. When one of her chaperones tells her that: 'Loven er vore højeste Lederes Vilje og skal opdrage Folket. Den skal ikke blot kontrollere dets Færd, men forvandle Folesjælen'¹⁵ she replies that 'Denne Forvandling af selve Sjælen gennem Loven er et Prgram, som har været fremsat nogle Gange før, men uden egentlig Succes'¹⁶ and, referring yet again to a parallel with the history of religion, Blixen underlines how, despite centuries of demonization, fines and punishments, even the Puritans of New England still committed adultery. The discrepancy between the imposition of will and the authentic essence of things, according to Blixen, is more strikingly evident in the propagandistic art. She reports her guide telling her that 'Vi af Det Tredie Rige siger: 'L'Art pour la Nation'; under det motto skal baade Kunsten og Folket blomstre'.¹⁷ In a society that lacks the interplay between different elements – as it aims to homogenise rather than celebrate diversity – Art, which in Blixen's universe represents the highest expression of creative interplay, loses its existential essence. She writes 'Jeg selv tror, at den daarligste Fremgangsmade for at skabe et Kunstværk er at *ville* være Kunstner, for at blive elsket at *ville* elskes, for at blive en Helt at *ville* være heroisk'.¹⁸ As Robert Langbaum has noted 'The thing that appals her about Nazi society is that it glorifies will power, that its achievement is not a growth but a mechanical tour de force that suppresses the human

¹⁴ *Essays*, p. 144 / 'Everywhere the stranger in Berlin is impressed by tremendous exertions of the will. The force of will is the Third Reich's achievement – there where will suffices, it suffices, and insofar as one believes in the power of the will, one is able to accept its gospel' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 115.

¹⁵ *Essays*, p. 145/ 'The law is the will of our foremost leaders and must educate people. It should not only control their conduct, but transform their soul' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 116.

¹⁶ *Essays*, p. 145/ 'This transformation of the soul by means of the law is a program which has been introduced several times before, without any real success' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 116.

¹⁷ *Essays*, p. 147/ 'We of the Third Reich say, 'L'Art pour la Nation', and under this motto both art and people will blossom' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 118.

¹⁸ *Essays*, pp. 147-148/ 'I myself believe that the worst method to try to create a work of art is to *will* to be an artist; or, in order to be loved, to *will* be loved; or, in order to be a hero, to *will* be heroic' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 118.

and natural desire out of which, for her, all good things come'.¹⁹ To support her argument further, Blixen compares National Socialism to Islam:

Af de Foreteelser, som jeg i mit Liv personlig har kendt til, er den, der kommer nærmest, Islam den muhamedanske Verden og Verdensanskuelse. – Ordet Islam betyder Hengivelse, det er vel det samme, som det Tredie Rige udtrykker i sin Haandsoprækning: Din i Liv og Død.²⁰

She however goes on to specify that 'Islam er af de to det højeste, fordi det er højere at tjene Gud end af tjene et Fædreland eller en Race.'²¹ and further specifies that the limitation of Nazism is precisely in its racist agenda:

En Racedyrkelse løber tilbage i sig selv, og selve dens Sejrsgang bliver en *circulus vitiosus*. Den kan ikke give og ikke tage imod. Al Kraft og Glæde tiltrods, og tiltrods for de store Fremtidshaab der holdes op her, er der da kun et kort Perspektiv i Nazismens Vista.²²

Blixen underlines how the faith in the Nazi ideal annihilates any kind of individuality: 'dens Mænd og Kvinder ligner alle hinanden – Troen lyser de mud af Ansigtet, de er utrættelige, nidkære indtil Døden, uden Tvilv eller Tøven i Sjælen'.²³ And this is the main point of her criticism towards Nazi society– the ban on being an individual and the imposition to conform to defined roles imposed by the totalitarian's state ideology. In 'Letters' Blixen concludes her thoughts on religion and faith by observing that, contrary to what she would have thought in a totalitarian state, at Easter time the churches in Berlin

¹⁹ Langbaum, p. 199.

²⁰ *Essays*, p. 137/ 'Of all the phenomena which I have known personally during my life, the one that approaches it most closely is Islam, the Mohammedan world and its view of life. The world Islam means submission, which is the same thing that the Third Reich expresses with its upraised arm. Yours in Life and Death' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 108.

²¹ *Essays*, p. 137/ 'Of the two, Islam is the more elevated ideal because it is better to serve God than to serve a country or a race' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 108.

²² *Essays*, p. 140/ 'The cultivation of race gets nowhere, for even its triumphal progress becomes a vicious circle. It cannot give and it cannot receive. Despite all strength and joy, and despite the great hopes for the future which have been praised here, the vista of Nazism has limited perspective' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 111.

²³ *Essays*, p. 133/ 'its men and women all resemble one another – their faces radiate their faith; they are untiring, zealous unto death, without any doubt or hesitation in their souls' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 103.

were so full that she could barely find a place, and reflects that the people were not listening to the sermon 'For mig saa det ud, som om alle disse mennesker, gamle o gunge, paa Kirkebænkene omkring mig, sad i deres egne tanker, og som om de var kommet herind for at kunne gøre det'.²⁴ The physical place of the church here loses its connection to religion, and yet maintains its function of a sacred space – last untouched bastion, it becomes the one place for reconnecting to the self that the totalitarian state has so consistently tried to erase.

The Reichsfrauenbund and Mr Pennhallow

Among the social organisations that regulate Nazi society, the one that seems to have made a lasting impression on Blixen is the *Reichsfrauenbund* [The Reich's Women Federation], whose function is 'først og fremmest Opdragelse af de tyske Kvinder, gamle og unge'.²⁵ The *Reichsfrauenbund* impresses Blixen with its meticulous structure, and with its invasive presence in people's lives. About the figure of the Block-Guard – the representative of the *Reichsfrauenbund* in charge of about thirty families and belonging to that 'political clergy' of 'social and spiritual advisor'²⁶ responsible of educating people to the 'proper faith' – Blixen writes that 'Hun venter ikke, til de Trængende søger hendes Hjælp, men det er hendes Sag at vide, hvor der er materiel eller aandelig Nød paa Færde, og at træde til med det samme'.²⁷ The Block-Guard urges the women of the families she oversees, to show 'godt Naboskab, saa at den ene tager sig af den andens Sager'.²⁸ What seems to be disturbing, in Blixen's view, is that this feeling of "neighbourliness", of solidarity, is a politically imposed behaviour and therefore loses its authenticity. Blixen reflects: 'jeg fik aldrig rigtig at vide, hvilke reelle, Magtmidler, *Reichsfrauenbund* har i Baghaanden til at drive sin Vilje igennem i Tilfælde af, at der nægtes Lydighed [...] Naar jeg spurte, svarede mig: "Det sker aldrig" – og dette Svar var maaske i sig selv lige saa

²⁴ *Essays*, p. 153/ 'It seemed to me as if all these people, old and young, in the pews about me, sat there examining their own thoughts, as if they had come to church in order to do so' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 124.

²⁵ *Essays*, p. 133/ 'first and foremost, the education of German women, old and young' *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 103-104.

²⁶ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 103.

²⁷ *Essays*, p. 133/ 'She does not expect that those who need will seek out her help; it is her job to know where there is material or spiritual need and to step in at once' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 104.

²⁸ 'neighbourliness, so that each one feels responsible for the other's affairs' *Ibid.*

oplysende som nogen Forklaring'.²⁹ Echoing the role of the Reichsfrauenbund Block-Guard, in GV/AA, during the first meeting with Zosine and Lucan, Pennhallow establishes their relationship of guardianship by saying: 'Det er en stor Lykke at faa Lov til at vejlede og skærme denne Verdens unge Kvinder paa deres farefulde Vej'.³⁰ Blixen further notes in 'Letters' an appalling lack of variety in gender roles in the gender's representation in Nazi art, which she had the opportunity to observe in the big mosaics and decorative paintings of the regime's new buildings:

De store nøgne, flade Figurer er saa agtværdige som muligt. Den agtværdige, nøgne unge Mand, med en Haand paa Ploven eller Sværdet og vidtaabne blaa Øjne, har ved sin Side er agtbar, sværlemmet, nogen ung Jomfru med lyst front Ansigt, der nogle Felter længere henne har udviklet sig til den af alle agtede, fysisk overdaadige, salige unge Moder, der flyder med Mælk og Honning.³¹

Blixen is here problematising the objectification of women, in Nazi ideology in which women solely embody roles set for them by a strikingly patriarchal point of view. As Jill Stephenson has underlined in *The Nazi Organization of Women* 'it is generally safe to say that in the Nazi view women were to be 'wives, mothers and homemakers'; they were to play no part in public life, in the legislature, the executive, the judiciary or armed forces'.³² Blixen notes how women's individuality in the Nazi ideology vanished in roles that were imposed on them and validated merely by their being in relation to a man – their wives, mothers and homemakers. In Blixen's conception of the two sexes – expressed throughout most of her writing but conceptualised especially in her essay 'Oration at a Bonfire'³³ – the Nazi representation of gender is existentially wrong. A creative union is made by the interaction between two different elements, each one assured by their own

²⁹ 'I never really found out what means the *Reichsfrauenbund* has up its sleeve to get its way in case someone refuses obedience [...] When I asked about it, they answered, "It never happens," and this answer was perhaps in itself quite as enlightening as any explanation' Ibid.

³⁰ GV, p. 73/'It is a privilege and happiness to be allowed to guard and guide the young women of this world upon their perilous road in life' AA, p. 81.

³¹ *Essays*, p. 154/ 'The great naked, flat figures are as respectable as they can be; the respectable naked young man, with a hand on a plow or a sword and wide open blue eyes, has by his side a respectable, heavy limbed, naked young maiden with a pale, pious face, who in some spaces further along has developed into a physically abundant happy young mother, respected by all, who exudes milk and honey' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 125.

³² Stephenson, Jill, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London: Croom Helm,1981), p. 13.

³³ *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 64-87/*Essays*, pp. 71-94.

individuality. She writes in ‘Oration’: ‘Jeg selv anser Inspiration for at være den højeste menneskelige Lykke. Og Inspirationen kræver altid to Elementer [...] Ja, jeg tror, at jo mægtigere denne gensidige Inspiration virker, jo rigere og mere levende vil et Samfund udvikle sig’.³⁴ In Blixen’s view, in Nazi society from the lack of individuality necessarily follows the lack of interplay – the dialectic exchange that characterizes a well-functioning society. As noted by Stecher, Blixen did reflect on her Berlin journey in another essay, published twenty years after her trip– in ‘Farah’ Blixen writes that ‘Et Samfund hvori der kun fandtes eet Køn, maatte blive uden Samlethed, som uden Bestaaen. Da jeg i 1940 var i Berlin [...] var Kvinderne, og Kvindernes hele Væsen, saa konsevent trængt tilbage elle fortrængt, at den hele Tilværelse tog sig deform ud, ikke blot som eenøjet men som blind’.³⁵ When comparing these observations with the plot and themes of *GV/AA*, it becomes evident that the Berlin trip did influence the content of the book. Blixen’s experience of the *Reichsfrauenbund* is mirrored in Reverend Pennhallow’s ideas of creating a new race of women – ‘Hvis den rene Kvindelighed ikke er til, maa vi skabe den’³⁶ – in his indoctrination of the girls to his beliefs, and in the girls’ struggle to define their identity outside of social expectations.

The representation of gender imposed by Nazi society as well as the indoctrination provided by the *Reichsfrauenbund* in order to maintain such situation, echoes for Blixen the kind of education women received in the 19th century which perpetuated their position of submission. Because it comes from a patriarchal system of morality, it disagrees with Blixen’s idea of expressing one’s individuality. The Nazi ideology of a society structured by the stereotypes of women’s passivity and men’s activity, was similar to the one that Blixen had used to stage most of her writings on women’s oppression. For example, in ‘Ib og Adelaide’/ ‘Copenhagen Season’ (*Last Tales*) set in the winter of 1870 in Copenhagen, Blixen offers a representation of society that she will also discuss in her essays ‘Oration’ and ‘Daguerreotypes’, but that also echoes her description of gender representation in the Nazi painting in ‘Letters’:

³⁴ *Essays*, p. 77/‘I myself look upon inspiration as the greatest human blessing. And inspiration always requires two elements [...] Yes, I think that the more strongly the mutual inspiration functions, the richer and more animated a society will develop’. *Daguerreotypes*, p. 70.

³⁵ *Skygger*, p. 9/‘A community of but one sex would be a blind world. When in 1940 I was in Berlin [...] the whole world of woman was so emphatically subdued that I might indeed have been in such a one-sexed community’ *Shadows*, p. 281.

³⁶ *GV*, p. 121/‘If pure and guiltless womanhood does not exist, we must create it’ *AA*, p. 141.

Aandens Verden var Adam underlagt. Eva var at finde ved sin Kniplepude og sine Husholdningsbøger eller hun vandede Urtepotterne i Vinduet. Hun var Hjemmets rene og bly Skytsengel, hendes aandelige og sjælelige Farve var hvid, og hendes Duder af mere passiv end aktiv Natur: Uskyld og Taalmod og et fuldkomment Ukendskab til de Dæmoner, som antoges at hemsøge hendes Bejlers og Ægtemands Indre. Bourgeoisiets Damer satte deres Pligttroskab og Handlekraft ind paa denne Verdens Ting fremfor paa Ideerne, og mere paa det nødvendige end paa det overflødige, der var kun faa Pragtblomster imellem dem.³⁷

This 19th century idea of men as active subjects and women as their passive appendages is constantly questioned and subverted in Blixen stories, and it could be argued that witnessing the same social situation in Nazi Berlin inspired her to write a story which analysed those problematic dynamics of submission and objectification. Significantly, Stecher writes that ‘Karen Blixen’s observations about the forced strength and repressive power she observed in Hitler’s Berlin in 1940 are inextricably tied to the existential perspectives on women and women’s roles that she developed over her lifetime’.³⁸ In *GV/AA*, Blixen stages a story of individual emancipation in which the female protagonists seems to gradually gain independence from their prescribed social roles and situations and become able to develop their individualities. This scenario is suddenly subverted by the double wedding at the end, but most importantly, throughout the novel, by the very thing that seemed to be the tool for their emancipation – namely, access to education. Pennhallow wins the girls’ loyalty because he introduces them to a world of knowledge that they were previously prevented from entering:

Hvis De, kære unge Kvinder, har noget Ønske om at udvide Deres Kundskaber og berige Deres Aand, da tror jeg at have Mulighed for at blive Dem til Gavn. Jeg vil forsøge at undervise Dem i Historie, Botanik og fremmede Sprog, ja hvis De

³⁷ SF, p. 220/ ‘The upholding of intellectual values fell to Adam’s sons. Eve was to be found at her lace pillow or her household accounts or watering the flowerpots in her windows. She was the pure and demure guardian angel of the hearth; her mental colour was white and her principal virtues more passive than active – innocence and patience and total ignorance of those demons of doubt and ambition which were supposed to harass the heart of her husband. The ladies of the wealthy bourgeoisie were solid and sensible women, consciously handling their domestic and social problems inside a restricted sphere of ideas’ LT, p. 249.

³⁸ Stecher, p. 93.

vil ddet, ogsaa i de klassiske Tungemaal, selv om der er Folk, der anser et saadant Studium for ikke fuldt kvinderligt.³⁹

Pennhallow's offer and indoctrination make such an impression, that soon Zosine starts 'dyrkede den Lærer'/'worshipping the old teacher'.⁴⁰ In 'Letters', returning from her visit to the Reichsfrauentbund, Blixen reflects that:

Det slog mig, at de Kvinder, der nu reger hele den tyske Kvindelighed, era f en Type, som iden det Tredie Riges Komme kun har haft ringe Mulighed for at faa Magt. Det er underligt at tænke paa, at en enkelt Mands Væsen, ligesom en Magnet, der bliver ført henover en SAMling Metalstykker, kan omgruppere og forvandle et Samfund.⁴¹

GV/AA renders those thoughts into narrative, exploring the causes and effects of the totalitarian state's ways of manipulating the masses while keeping them in a state of constant submission. Education, which initially seems to be the way to emancipation in GV/AA, is problematised by the fact that it is given to the girls by their very persecutor. Pennhallow embodies the very patriarchal discourse from which the protagonists are trying to emancipate themselves. Towards the end of the novel, Zosine and Lucan realises that:

Deres gamle Lærer havde i alle de Sager [...] været dem uendelig overlegen og havde næsten tilintetgjort dem under sin Lærdom og Idsigt. De skulde ikke, tænkte de nu, saaledes have ladet sig overtale til at fordybe sig i Historien of Filosofien og til at glemme, at de selv havde store Øjne og smaa Fødder.⁴²

³⁹ GV, p. 73/ 'If you, my dear young women, wish to extend your knowledge and to enrich your minds, I may still be of use to you. I shall endeavour to instruct you in the history of mankind, and in the languages of other countries. Yes, if you should want it, also in the classical tongues, although there are people who think such studies not quite womanly' AA, p. 81.

⁴⁰ GV, p. 86/AA, p. 96.

⁴¹ *Essays*, p. 134/'It struck me that the women who are now governing the entire German femininity are a type which, until the arrival of the Third Reich, had little opportunity to wield power. It is strange to think that the being of a single man, just like a magnet which is dragged past a collection of bits of iron, can regroup and change a society' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 105.

⁴² GV, p. 180/ 'Their old teacher had been so much their superior that he had annihilated them beneath his learning and insight. They should not, they now thought, have let themselves be persuaded to lose themselves in history and philosophy, or to forget that they still had big eyes and small feet' AA, p. 219.

Pennhallow's education is essentially wrong because it prevents the development of an authentic feminine discourse – it is an indoctrination perpetuating the very patriarchal culture that is oppressing the girls. GV/AA is urging individuals to find their own voice, to shape their own opinions, and not to trust unreliable narrations. Anticipating post-war French feminism, Blixen seems to be suggesting that to reach true emancipation women should be owning their own discourse and distancing themselves from a male one. In fact, in 'Oration' she criticises the first wave of feminism by underlining how it did not stay true to female individuality but 'de gjorde deres Indtog i Forklædning, i en mental og psykisk Mandsdragt'.⁴³ In *Seven Gothic Tales* Blixen's story "The Old Chevalier" treats the subjects of women's commodification, as well as that of women's emancipation. Here Blixen had also referred to the phase of the early women's movement, and reflected on why, according to her, women's emancipation had been overridden because it had adapted to a patriarchal discourse:

Nu var det saaledes, som De maaske nok ved, at alt dette hændte just som den Bevægelse, der kaldtes Kvindens Emancipation, kom op og tog fart. I de Dage gik mange Ting for sig. Jeg tror ikke, at Bevægelsen dengang gik videre dybt ned i Samfundet, men hos de unge Kvinder af Overklassen fandt den en rig Jordbund. Og her kom de saa, alle de aandfuldeste og drigtigste af dem, lige ud af deres tusindaarige Halvmørke, blinkende imod det nye Lys og helt vilde af Daadstrang og Lyst til at prøve deres Vinger. Der var jo nok dem iblandt dem, som spændte Jomfruen af Orleans' Brynje om sig,– hun var jo da ogsaa selv et slagfærdigt ungt emanciperet Fruentimmer,– satte hendes Glorie om Hovedet, og fløj op som hvidglødende Engle. Men Flertallet af Kvinderne vil dog altid, naar de kan følge deres eget Hoved, sætte af lige lukt til Heksenes Sabbath. Jeg personlig respekterer dem for det, ja, jeg tror ikke, at jeg nogensinde for Alvor kunde have tabt mit Hjerte til en Dame, som aldrig i sit Liv havde været oppe paa et Kosterkaft. Det har altid syntes mig, at der er blevet gjort stor Uret imod Kvinden derved, at hun ikke nogensinde har været alene i Verden. Adam havde jo dog en Tid, om den var lang eller kort, hvor han kunde vandre omkring paa en frisk og fredelig Jord, og

⁴³ *Essays*, p. 87/'they made their entrance in disguise, in a costume which intellectually or psychologically represented a male' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 80 .

se paa Dyrene i sine egne Tanker. Vi har nok alle, fra Fødslem af, en Erindring om den Periode. Men stakkels Eva kom lige ind i en Verden, hvor hun fandt sin Mand etableret, med alle hans Fordringer paa hende. Dette er da ogsaa et Klagemaal, som Kvinden længe har haft imod sin Skaber -: hun føler, at hun har et Krav paa ham, en ret til for et Tid at have Paradiset for sig alene [...] Den hele Theologi byggede de op ved, paa ortodoks Heksemaner, at læse Mosebøgerne baglæns. Var de blevet overladt til sig selv, kunde de da ogsaa nok havde faaet Metode i dem. Det var de stakkels tamme Emancipationsprofeter ad Hankønnet, Heksemestrene, der altid gør en sørgelig Figur paa Sabbathen, som tok Kraften ud af Evangeliet ved at trække det ned til sig paa Jorden og underlægge det den jammerlige mandlige Logisk Love.⁴⁴

The criticism of patriarchy is here extended to the Christian myths as well – Blixen criticises the founding structure of Western patriarchy that justifies women’s submission. The obvious starting point for a subversion of the Western Christian and patriarchal discourse, is the figure of Eve. The first woman, and her canonical demonization in Christianity and Western culture, is used by Blixen in order to foreground her criticism. To read the book of Genesis backwards, suggests going back to the original text. In fact, as Carol Meyers writes, the conception of Eve in our current cultural context has been distorted by several layers of religious interpretation which are always imposed from a male point of view: ‘we inevitably look at it through their interpretative eyes without realizing that translations and expositions of Genesis 2-3 may distort or misrepresent the

⁴⁴ SGF, pp. 81-83/ ‘Now you will know that all this happened in the early days of what we called then the ‘emancipation of women’. Many strange things took place then. I do not think that at the time the movement went very deep down in the social world, but here were the young women of the highest intelligence, and the most daring and ingenious of them, coming out of the chiaroscuro of a thousand years, blinking at the sun and wild with desire to try their wings. I believe that some of them put on the armour and the halo of St Joan d’ Arc, who was herself an emancipated virgin, and became like white-hot angels. But most women, when they feel free to experiment with life, will go straight to the witches of Sabbath. I myself respect them for it, and do not think that I could ever really love a woman who had not, at some point or other, been up on a broomstick. I had always thought it unfair to woman that she has never been alone in the world. Adam had a time, whether long or short, when he could wander about on a fresh and peaceful earth, among the beasts, in full possession of his soul, and most men are born with a memory of that period. But poor Eve found him there, with all his claims upon her, the moment she looked into the world. That is a grudge that woman has always had against the Creator: she feels that she is entitled to have that epoch of paradise back to herself [...]. All this they got from reading – in the orthodox witches’ manner – the book of Genesis backwards. Left to themselves, they might have got a lot out of it. It was the poor, tame, *male* preachers of emancipation, cutting, as warlocks always will, a miserable figure at the Sabbath, who spoiled the style and the flight of the whole thing by bringing down to earth and under laws of earthly reason’. SGT, pp. 55-56.

meaning and function of the tale in its Israelite context'.⁴⁵ Re-reading the text that had the biggest influence on the definition of gender roles in the Western context, means allowing Eve to re-appropriate her own narrative from her own point of view. The subversion of the traditional perception of Eve, necessarily ties in with Blixen's conceptualization of witches – in Blixen's subversion, Eve becomes the witch, because from the point of view of a patriarchal society, she becomes an individual shaped from her own, independent feminine voice and identity, not created from Adam's rib, but existing in her own right. The tale of "The Old Chevalier" blames society for having tamed the original 'witches' uprising of women: when the women's emancipation movement got absorbed into the patriarchal discourse – the poor, tame, male preachers – it lost its original essence, its genuine feminine voice. The subversion of Christian patriarchal morality by Blixen, has been the subject of Mads Bunch's work, especially elaborated in his book *Isak Dinesen reading Soren Kierkegaard*, where he underlines how Blixen can be seen as 'the female, subversive correlative to her great male precursor and fellow countryman Soren Kierkegaard – even his nemesis'.⁴⁶ Bunch writes that 'Dinesen's oeuvre can be regarded as a subversion of what has traditionally been valued as the highest within Christian Western culture'.⁴⁷ Bunch also underlines that Blixen's atheism allows her to view Christianity with a critical eye: "Thus, Christianity is nothing more than a figment of the human imagination, created by humans in order to explain human longings (the quest for immortality), to justify gender roles and to account for the organization of (patriarchal) society".⁴⁸ "The Old Chevalier" refers to the witches not only for their typical anti-Christian feature – the witch is in fact an essential figure in Blixen's universe because, as she writes in 'Daguerreotypes', she represents 'en Kvinde som, længe inden Ordet "Kvindeemancipation" blev brugt, eksisterede uafhængig af Manden og havde sit Tyngdepunkt i sig selv'.⁴⁹ The witch embodies the authentic feminine subversion not only because of her independence from a male authority, but also because of her distancing from a Christian morality. The figure of the witch in GV/AA can be identified in Olympia, who emphasises her distancing from the Western Christian system of values

⁴⁵ Meyers, Carol, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ebook, p.3 'Eve in Eden'.

⁴⁶ Bunch, p. 172.

⁴⁷ Bunch, p. 172.

⁴⁸ Bunch, p. 39.

⁴⁹ *Essays*, p. 39/ 'a woman who, long before the words "emancipation of women" came into use, existed independently of a man and had her own center of gravity' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 33.

several times in the novel, notably when referring to the Bible and stating ‘det forstaar jeg mig ikke paa’.⁵⁰

In GV/AA the repressive system that prevents education for women is narratively expressed not only with the story of Pennhallow’s lessons, but also with the side story of Madame de Valfonds, Zosine’s grandmother. This tale mirrors the difficulties for women in reaching independence through education within a patriarchal system of values, and anticipates another story that Blixen will publish in 1957 in *Last Tales*. The story ‘Kardinalens første historie’/ ‘The Cardinal’s First Tale’, contains the theme of women’s education, but contrary to Zosine and Lucan, the female character here, Princess Benedetta, educates herself by choosing her own readings: ‘En dag da Husets Herre var hjemmefra, fandt dets Frue Vej herind [på biblioteket]’.⁵¹ When her husband realises, he gets worried that ‘Prinsesse Benedettas pludselige, velholdende Læselyst [...] kunde være skadelig for hendes Helbred og sjælelige Ligevært’⁵² so he encourages her instead to sing – music being a traditionally more suitable pursuit for a woman. The discrepancy between a more joyful and authentic (feminine) expression as opposed to a patriarchal religious tradition (masculine) that Bunch has talked about in his work, in “The Cardinal’s First Tale” is put into narrative form in the disagreement between wife and husband regarding their future plans for their coming child. The husband informs the wife that he has taken the decision that the child ‘skulde [...] blive en vægtig Stræbepille for vor Hellige Kirke’⁵³ and as a name for the child ‘var standset op ved den store Kirkefader St. Athanasius, der er kendt som “Ortodoxiens Fader”’.⁵⁴ The wife ‘meddelte roligt sin Mand, at ogsaa hun havde tænkt over sin Søns Fremtid og havde taget en Bestemmelse. Hun havde født sin Ægtefælles Hus een Søn, Huset og hun var nu kvit. Det Barn, der ventedes, skulde være sin Moders Søn, og Musernes Gudson. Hans Navn skulde være Dionysio, efter Guden for Inspirationens Ekstase’.⁵⁵ Stambaugh has pointed out that in this story ‘the conflict over what the child is to be named reflects the struggle over whether he is to be claimed

⁵⁰ GV, p. 56/ ‘of those things I know nothing’ AA, p. 59.

⁵¹ SF, p. 11/‘On a day when her husband was away, the mistress of the villa found her way to the library’ LT, p. 6.

⁵² SF, p. 12/ ‘Such excessive reading [...] might be harmful to his wife’s health and mind’ LT, p. 6.

⁵³ SF, p. 15/‘should become a pillar of the Church’ LT, p. 11.

⁵⁴ ‘he had settled upon the great Father of the Church St. Athanasius, who is known as “the Father of Orthodoxy”’ Ibid.

⁵⁵ SF, pp. 15-16/‘very quietly informed her husband that she too had been pondering the future and the name of her son, and had made up her mind. She had borne the house of her husband one son; now she was free. The child to come was to be the son of his mother, and the godson of the Muses. His name should be Dionysio, in reminiscence of the god of inspired ecstasy’ LT, p. 11.

by the matriarchal or patriarchal system of values'.⁵⁶ Princess Benedetta's situation is echoed in GV/AA in what occurs to Zosine's grandmother. When she tells her story to Zosine and Lucan, she says that as a young wife she 'kedede sig paa Joliet. Hun drømte om at rejse og se fremmende Lande [...] hun var en begavet og urolig Natur, i sin Ørkesløshed gav hun sig til at læse de nye Filosooffer og til at lege med Tidens mægtige og farlige Tanker. Hun troede ikke paa Kongedømmet af Guds Naade og snart næppe nok paa Guds Naade selv'.⁵⁷

Madame de Valfonds and Princess Benedetta both independently start to form their own opinions, and to affirm their individual identity they necessarily need to subvert the system that oppresses them. Therefore to the Church Benedetta opposes Dionisus, and to the Ancient Régime Madame de Valfonds opposes the French Revolution. The reaction of their husbands is also very similar: in "The Cardinal's First Tale" the Prince is 'først forbavset, derefter rystet ved at høre sin Kone i hans aabne Ansigt trodse Himlen og ham',⁵⁸ and in GV/AA 'Hendes Mand smiled vel af hendes Uforstand, men efterhaanden som Tiderne blev mørkere og hun selv mere haardnakket i den, ængstede den ham'.⁵⁹ In GV/AA it is ultimately the husband who triumphs – he dies because of his wife's revolutionary lover, and she as a reaction turns her back to the Revolution and reassesses herself as the guardian of her husband's estate and social system. Not only does she decide to never leave the estate herself, but she makes sure that all of her heirs will do the same 'ingen af min Slægt [...] skal nogen Sinde forlade vor Provins for at fordærvs af Verden uden for den'.⁶⁰ However, when Madame de Valfonds wants to convince Zosine to marry her grandson she promises 'I will give up this tradition, and you and he may go together to see all the beauty of the world'.⁶¹ Freedom is given to Zosine, on the condition that she will be accompanied by her husband. The ending of GV/AA is not entirely victorious for the girls. The ending of the "The Cardinal's First Tale" is equally

⁵⁶ Stambaugh, p. 25.

⁵⁷ GV, p. 226/'young wife was bored at Joliet. She dreamed of travels and romance [...]she was a brilliant and passionate young woman, in her idleness she began to read the new philosophers and to play with the mighty and dangerous ideas of the day. Soon she did not believe in the Divine Right of Kings, and hardly in the grace of God itself. AA, pp. 281-282.

⁵⁸ SF, p. 16/ 'firstly deeply surprised, then even more deeply shocked, to hear his wife, to his face, defy Heaven and him' LT, p.11.

⁵⁹ GV, p. 226/'Her husband first smiled at her folly, but little by little, as time grew darker, and she herself became more obstinate, it alarmed him' AA, p. 282.

⁶⁰ GV, p. 228/'None of my descendants [...] from this time shall leave our province to be corrupted by the outside world' AA, p. 284.

⁶¹ This sentence is not present in the Danish version of the text. AA, p. 281.

ambiguous, but perhaps more interesting. When eventually Benedetta gives birth to a pair of twins, one takes his mother's chosen name and ambitions, the other the father's name and impositions. One of the twins dies, and the surviving one becomes the Cardinal who is telling the story – the question, however, remains regarding his true identity. At the end of the tale he is asked: 'kan De være sikker paa [...] at den Herre som De tjener [...] at der er Gud?'/ 'Are you sure [...] that is God whom you serve?'⁶² to which he replies 'Dette, Madame, er en Risiko som Kunstnere og Præster i denne Verden altid maa løbe'/'That, Madame, is a risk which the artist and the priests of the world have to run'.⁶³ This tale ends by underlining the duplicity and unreliability of Christian patriarchal moral discourses. The next part of this chapter will analyse how those discourses in Blixen are expressed through clothing.

⁶² SF, p. 29/LT, p. 26.

⁶³ SF, p. 29/LT, p. 26.

Part 2: Clothing – cages and wings

*'Vi vil tage Vore fine Kjoler paa [...] vi bliver os selv igen'.*⁶⁴

According to Blixen, Berlin under Nazism 'has lost its luster' / 'Glansen er gaaet af'⁶⁵ and the Nazi society's lack of multiplicity and of interplay is also signalled by the lack of variety in clothing: 'Folk gaar forsigtigvis i deres Tøj fra ifjor, jeg har ingen Pjalter set, men heller ingen Elegance. I en stor By er, mere en andetsteds, "le superflu le nécessaire", og uden en kulturel Elite virker den ulideligt ensformig, som Haabløsheden slev'.⁶⁶ In his memoir on the war years *Oplevelser i krig og fred*, the Danish journalist and author Jacob Kronika, who worked as a correspondent in Berlin during the war, also relates these impressions of and opinions on Berlin as expressed by Blixen when she would come and visit him: 'Hun var nærmest fortvivlet over krigsvinterens mørklagte nazi-Berlin. Hitlerismen massedyrkelse, som hun oplevede hver eneste dag, var jo absolut ikke noget for en super-individualistisk digter!'.⁶⁷

Clothing in Blixen is always a serious matter. It is an essential element in understanding a society, as well as a means to express one's individuality. Clothing can be a constriction, a disguise, or a mask – and as such it can also be a means of empowerment. This is especially true in the case of women clothing, as Stecher has pointed out: 'In Blixen's texts, representations of feminine attire often suggests women's potential for mimicry and subversive duplicity'.⁶⁸ It is particularly women's clothing of the 19th century that is under Blixen's scrutiny, and this remains a discussion that she develops in several of her stories, such as "The Old Chevalier", "The Deluge at Norderney", "The roads around Pisa", and in the two essays "Dagurreotypes" and "Oration at a Bonfire". GV/AA establishes with those particular texts an interesting dialogue, and explores various possible scenarios. In GV/AA clothing is connected to the idea of performativity and

⁶⁴ GV, p. 180 / *'We will put our frocks on [...] we will be ourselves again'* AA, p. 219.

⁶⁵ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 113 / *Essays*, p. 142.

⁶⁶ *Essays*, p. 143 / 'People walk cautiously in their last-year's clothes; if I have seen no rags, neither have I seen any elegance. In a large city, more than in other places, is "le superflu le nécessaire", and without a cultural élite the city seems insufferably monotonous, like despair itself' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 114.

⁶⁷ Kronika qtd in Günter, p. 69 [She was almost in despair over the war's darkened Nazi Berlin. Mass worship of Hitler, as she experienced every single day, was definitely not something for a super-individualistic poet!].

⁶⁸ Stecher, p. 55.

mask, as well as the possibility of shaping identities – here performativity in clothing has the double function of allowing some freedom in the disguise, but also to underline the deceptiveness of the role it represents. The fixity of gender roles witnessed by Blixen in Nazi Berlin had an impact in the development of the ideas for GV/AA. The historical displacement of the novel from her current time offered her a degree of protection from censorship, but it was not the only reason for returning to her preferred ‘gothic’ historical setting to stage her occupation story. The 19th century of Blixen’s tales is a period characterized by individuals struggling to define themselves outside of socially imposed roles. Her Third Reich interlude, and the witnessing of a regressive and oppressive vision of gender roles, triggered back the same discourse of the previous century, characterized by the equivalent restriction in developing individual freedom and by the same constriction of gender in predefined social roles. This constriction is represented in most of Blixen’s writing in the characters’ clothing, and GV/AA is no exception. In the next section we will see how in GV/AA Blixen reutilises, and sometimes subverts, some of the same motifs of her earlier writing, as well as anticipating some of her later essayistic production.

‘En Mode har altid nogen Betydning’:⁶⁹ clothing as cage

The reflections on the standardization of women imposed by the Western patriarchal society, which had characterized much of her earlier narrative prose, was also reiterated by Blixen in 1951 in ‘Daguerreotypes’. Here Blixen reflected on what the skirt symbolised in the 19th century, but she also offered an interesting point of view on the fashion of the 1920s. When discussing the changing styles, Blixen noted that after the First World War people: ‘forelskede sig i Afkaldet, og forsagede Yppighed i alle Former. Den indskrænkede Kvindernes Klædedragt til det mindst mulige, klippede deres Haar helt af og krævede af dem at de skulde gennemføre den lodrette Linie’ and she adds ‘En Mode har altid nogen Betydning’.⁷⁰ It is important to underline the use of terms and expressions, such as ‘demanded’ and ‘had them cut’, in this passage which emphasises the imposition of yet

⁶⁹ *Essays*, p. 61/‘A fashion always has some meaning’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Essays*, p. 61/‘people became enamoured of renunciation and gave up luxury of all kinds. They limited women’s clothing to the least possible, had them cut their hair short, and demanded that their dress should adopt vertical lines’/‘A fashion always has some meaning’ *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 54-55.

another restraint on women. To underline the absurdity of this new fashion, Blixen goes on to explain the obsession with weight and filiform figures that characterized the era:

Da jeg i 1920, paa Vej fra Afrika til Danmark, var i Paris og søgte at sætte mig ind i de nyeste Moder og Regler for god Tone, forklarede en fransk Veninde mig, at man nu for Tiden aldrig saa en virkelige Dame paa et Konditori. ”Og bliver vi bedt ud til Middag”, sagde hun, ”nyder vi en Kop consommé og tre Asparges! Men Jeg kender ogsaa” sluttede hun i dyb Alvor ”mere end een, der er død af Sult”. Disse virkelige Damer var ubarmhertigt prisgivne en evig Hunger.⁷¹

Here again it is important to note how Blixen underlines her displacement from contemporary Western dominating trends by highlighting her choice of living in marginal, rather than central spaces with the phrase ‘on the way from Africa to Denmark’. Just as for her storytelling technique, this voluntary displacement from the centre gives her enough space to understand the meaning of those ‘newest fashion rules and manners’ and understand them as further impositions on women’s life. Despite the many victories of the 1920’s with regards to women’s emancipation, Blixen viewed those fashions critically because they were not coming from women themselves – and thus allowing them to develop their individuality – but rather from external, patriarchal, influences meant to keep women in their position of weakness, heightened by the status of eternal hunger, and therefore, submission. If a fashion always has some meaning in the Blixenian universe, the same can apply to the fashion described in GV/AA. The story actually opens with the description of Lucan’s outfit:

Hendes gyldne Haar hang hende, efter *Tidens Mode*, i lange Slangekrøller ned ad Nakken, hun havde en enkel, sort Kjole paa. Af og til knugede eller vred hun sagte sine Fingre i Skødet, mellem dens tætte Folder, og dette var hendes eneste Bevægelse.

⁷¹ *Essays*, p. 61/ ‘when in 1920, on the way from Africa to Denmark, I was in Paris and tried to familiarise myself with the newest fashions rules and good manners, a French friend of mine said that one no longer saw a real lady in a patisserie. “And if we are invited out for dinner,” she said, “we have a cup of consommé and three pieces of asparagus. I also know” she said and she was profoundly serious, “more than one person who has died of hunger”. These ladies were unmercifully devoted to eternal hunger.’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 54.

After the *fashion*⁷² of the 1840s, her rich golden hair was hanging down her neck and shoulders in long ringlets. She had on a plain, black frock that fitted tightly round her delicate bosom and arms, but was amply folded and draped below the slim waist. From time to time she gently pressed or wrung her fingers between these black folds; this was her only movement.⁷³

The first lines of the novel are dedicated to the description of clothing, through which the text situates the story in a precise historical setting as well as giving information regarding the social situation of the character described. As the reader learn a few lines later, Lucan is a governess – ‘en fattig, forældreløse Pige’⁷⁴ Her clothing mirrors both her place in society and the ‘sadness’ of her situation. Again, the reference to the fashion of the 1840s suggests the imposition of ‘fashion rules and manners’ that mirrors the imposition of social rules and manners that gave a very limited choice of which social role to occupy for a woman like Lucan, with no connection to a male figure, such as a husband or a father, and no wealth of her own. In her case, her social role is that of a governess – the stillness of her pose reflects the impossibility of movement from her situation, and the constriction of this role is underlined by the tightness of her dress. It is no coincidence that it is a description of women attire that launches the story. Clothing in GV/AA, as in all of Blixen’s other stories, is a symbol for something else, and in this case, of a cage representative of women’s oppression and commodification.

The idea of clothing as a cage, is for Blixen particularly representative of 19th century Western society. This is the period in which most of Blixen’s stories are set, and women’s clothes here are often explained in details in order to offer the reader a picture, or a daguerreotype, of the kind of society that they represent. In fact, in her historical essay “Daguerreotypes”, Blixen uses female clothing – and especially the skirt – to explain gender relationships in the 19th century. At the opening of this essay Blixen states ‘nu er det ikke Billeder af Fortidens Mennesker, som jeg holder op for Dem, – det er Gengivelser af deres Ideer eller Forestillinger, og af deres Syn paa Livet’⁷⁵ in order to maintain a façade

⁷² My emphasis.

⁷³ GV, p. 15/ AA, p .3.

⁷⁴ ‘an orphan and sadly situated in life’ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Essays*, p. 23/‘It is not a picture of people from an earlier day that I shall hold up for your inspection; it is rather a reproduction of their ideas and concepts and their view of life’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 17.

of neutrality. However, when reading the essay in connection to her other writings, it is fair to say that this kind of clothing for Blixen represented the way in which a patriarchal society constricted women in subdued roles, and invented justifications for it. As Stambaugh has noted, in Blixen ‘the most important of the ways in which women forfeited their humanity and became symbols was through dress’.⁷⁶ According to Blixen, during this period, women embodied roles that were created by men, and were forced to see themselves through a man’s glaze: ‘denne gamle Generations Mænd saa Kvinderne under tre Synsvinkler, eller i tre Grupper.’⁷⁷ This classification reflects the idea of women’s objectification by men as commodity, and is found in several of her stories, such as in “The Old Chevalier”, and GV/AA. In “The Old Chevalier” Blixen writes:

I min Ungdom, da var Kvindens Legeme en dyb Hemmelighed, som hendes Klæder med stor Troskab og Opfindsomhed gjorde deres bedste for at bevare [...] der var i de Dage en Mening med Kvindernes Klædedragt, den røgtede et Kald. Med en saadan værdig Alvor, som det ingenlunde var givet enhver at gennemskue, tog den sig for at omskabe det Legeme, som den skjulte, i en Form, saa forskelligt som muligt fra dets virkelige Væsen. Det blev gjort til en Gaade for os, en sindrig Gaade, som der hørte Naade til at faa Lov til at løse. De lange, stramme Snørliv dengang, og det hele Parafenalia af Fiskeben, Silketøjer og Kniplinger, alle de Stomfasser, hvori min Tids Kvinder var begravet overalt, hvor de ikke var snørede sammen, saa haardt som de paa nogen Maade kunde udholde det,— alt stræbte imod det samme Maal: at dølge.⁷⁸

Women’s clothing of the time was a disguise made to create an idea rather than a depiction of reality: ‘Min Tids Kvinder var andet og mere end en Samling Personligheder af

⁷⁶ Stambaugh, p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Essays*, p. 35/ ‘the men of that older generation viewed women from three points of view or as three groups’, she writes in “Daguerreotypes”, ‘Kvinderne var for dem enten Skytsengle eller Husmøder, eller [...] Bajaderer’/‘Women were for them either guardian angels or house wives [...] or bayadères’ *Daguerreotypes*, p. 29.

⁷⁸ SFF, p. 89/ ‘In those days a woman’s body was a secret which her clothes did their utmost to keep. [...] Clothes then had a being, an idea of their own. With a serenity that it was not easy to look through, they made it their object to transform the body which they encircled, and to create a silhouette so far from its real form as to make it a mystery which it was a divine privilege to solve. The long tight stays, the whalebones, skirts and petticoats, bustle and draperie, all the mass of material under which the women of my day were buried where they were not laced together as tightly as they could possibly stand it – all aimed at one thing: *to disguise*.’ SGT, p. 60.

Kvindelkøn. De symboliserede, de repræsenterede selve Kvinden'.⁷⁹ The protagonist of this tale, the old chevalier, tells the story of how, in his youth, he met a girl called Nathalie after having almost been poisoned by his aristocratic lover. He initially believes Nathalie to be an ethereal creature, a gift from destiny to him, but she turns out to be a prostitute. Under the disguise of Nathalie's clothing, when he finally undresses her he realises that: 'indtil hun stod helt nøgen, da havde jeg for mig det største Naturens Mestværk, som det nogensinde har været mine Øjne forundt at hvile paa, en Skønedsaabenbaring, som kunde tage Vejret fra En'.⁸⁰ Because she is naked, and not constricted in her disguise anymore, they are both able to relax and the male narrator says 'aldrig i noget andet Kærlighedsforhold [...] har jeg paa same Maade some med hende følt mig fuldkommen fri og tryk'.⁸¹ It seems that is only once the clothing – the disguises – are off, that individuals can meet in their authenticity. However, still unaware of Nathalie's profession, in a moment of post-sexual bliss, the narrator philosophically ponders at his happiness 'jeg ved, at jeg skal betale for dette, men hvad er det, jeg skal betale?'.⁸² The romantic tone of the text is completely subverted in Nathalie's response the morning after: twenty francs, is the price for happiness. The male protagonist removed the disguise, but is still unable to see under the mask. The story voices the difficulties of establishing authentic relationship in a world ruled by imposed social performances. In Blixen, as a modernist author, the theme of the mask is particularly relevant and expresses the discrepancy between the true self and the self as performed in society, and according to society's rules and conventions. Stambaugh underlines that this discrepancy is even more pronounced for women: 'her interest stems primarily from her position as a woman who knew what it was to lead a double life: the private one in which she existed as a human and the public one manipulated and conditioned by the image she projected. Certainly, the discrepancy between the two is a favourite subject, which she explores to show the effect upon her female characters of being seen by men not as humans but as symbols, if not as stereotypes'.⁸³

⁷⁹ SFF, p. 90/ 'The women of those days were more than a collection of individuals. They symbolized, or represented, Woman' SGT, p. 61.

⁸⁰ SFF, p. 93/ 'until she stood naked I had before me the greatest masterpiece of nature that my eyes had ever been privileged to rest upon, a sight to take your breath away' SGT, p. 63.

⁸¹ SFF, p. 95/ 'I have never in any other love affair [...] had the same feeling of freedom and security' SGT, p. 65.

⁸² SFF, p. 98/ 'Am I to pay for this? What am I to pay?' SGT, p. 67.

⁸³ Stambaugh, p. 5.

In “The Old Chevalier” it is the man who removes the woman’s disguise and recognizes her value underneath it – not the woman herself – it is therefore not an entirely self-affirming moment for Nathalie. This scene is reversed in GV/AA where the protagonists affirm their individuality by owning the disguises. As Stecher has noted, in Blixen women’s attire can ‘hold the potential to function both as a disguise (in the service of an idea) and as the artistic expression of individuality’.⁸⁴ In GV/AA both those options are explored. When Lucan wakes up at Tortuga, Zosine’s family home ‘hun saa forundret paa sine egne Arme, der stak i Ærmer af Batist med brede Kniplinger’.⁸⁵ Lace and baptiste are here used as symbols of femininity, therefore to wake up covered in them represents for Lucan almost a rebirth, characterized by a rediscovery of what had made her feel ashamed in Mr Armworthy’s house – namely her femininity. This process of re-appropriation of her individuality continues when she looks at her reflection in the mirror wearing the dress Zosine had given her for the ball: ‘Foran Spejlet saa den unge Pige med stigende Bevægelse sig selv forvandlet til en fornem Dame og en Skønhed saa fortryllende, at hun tabte Vejret derved’.⁸⁶ It is important to underline Blixen’s self-pastiche and self-subversion in this passage that dialogues with the one in “The Old Chevalier”. There, it was the man who looked at the woman and determined her value ‘a sight to take your breath away’,⁸⁷ but in GV/AA it is Lucan herself who looks at her own reflection and determines that ‘the sight took away her own breath’.⁸⁸ A similar scene, where a woman re-appropriates her femininity through her own gaze, is to be found in another of Blixen’s stories “The Deluge at Norderney”, where the character of Calypso, as Hansen has noted, ‘is the keenly drawn emblem of that category of women in Karen Blixen’s works who have an extreme problem with the issue of identity because they are kept in total ignorance of their femininity’.⁸⁹ Calypso is brought up by her misogynist uncle in total ignorance of her femininity. When her womanly forms start to show up ‘vendte han gysende sit Blik fra hende og *tilintetgjorde hende*’.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Stecher, p. 61.

⁸⁵ GV, p. 38/ ‘she gazed in surprise at her own arms protruding from sleeves of baptiste and lace’ AA, p. 34.

⁸⁶ GV, p. 40/ ‘In front of the looking-glass the girl, with growing excitement and delight, watched herself transformed into a great lady and a beauty so enchanting that the sight took away her own breath’ AA, p. 37.

⁸⁷ SGT, p. 63.

⁸⁸ AA, p. 37.

⁸⁹ Hansen, p. 17.

⁹⁰ SFF, p. 223/ ‘with a shiver he turned his eyes from her forever, and *annihilated her*.’ SGT, p. 153.

The same imagery will be used in GV/AA when Lucan finds the letter to Pennhallow that describes the death of Rosa: ‘det forekom hende, at dette Brev og hun selv ikke kunde være i Verden paa samme Tid. Det *tilintetgjorde hende*’.⁹¹ The annihilation derives not only from the knowledge of the brutality that has brought Rosa to disfigure her own face to become unsellable and get herself killed – but also from the sudden awareness of a situation that forces them to annihilate their true self by denying their femininity. In “Deluge”, Calypso ‘hun havde gennem saa mange Aar indsuget disse falske Profeters gruelige Vranglære og var saa længe blevet truet med Helvedes Ild, at hun tilslut var parat til at fornægte enhver Guddommelighed i Himlen eller paa Jorden [...] Calypso besluttede at afskære sit lange Haar og afhugge sine unge, runde Bryster, saa at hun skulde blive sine Omgivelser lig’.⁹² But when she undresses, Calypso sees in the reflection of the mirror a painting with fauns and centaurs adoring young naked nymphs. For the first time she recognises herself and her own value ‘Hendes Hjerte svulmede af Stolthed og taknemlighed, for her hørte hun hjemme’.⁹³ Significantly her recognition comes from the representation of an ideal society, not the 19th century patriarchal and misogynistic one that had annihilated her. If one considers Blixen’s life mantra of being true to oneself, clothing that concealed, disguised, and – most of all – was the result of a misrepresentation of reality (not woman as she is, but as she is seen by a man), it is easy to see how essentially wrong women’s clothing in the 19th century was for Blixen. This kind of attire served the purpose of justifying predetermined sexual roles, and the relation of subordination between men and women.

In “The Old Chevalier”, “Deluge” and GV/AA, the most freeing moments are when the characters take off their clothing, and are able to truly see themselves. But is in GV/AA and “Deluge” that this moment is even more powerful because the female characters are able for the first time to see themselves through a woman’s gaze, thus outside a patriarchal oppressive glance. “The old Chevalier”, “Deluge” and GV/AA are stories that deal with the commodification of women, but while the first two provide a

⁹¹ GV, p. 153/ ‘It seemed to her that she could not possibly remain in the same world as this letter. It *annihilated her*’ AA, p. 184.

⁹² SFF, p. 225/ ‘had been for such a long time brought up in the wicked heresies of those falsifiers of truth, and so thoroughly tortured and threatened with the stake, that she was now ready to deny any god. [...] Calypso resolved to cut off her long hair, and to chop off her young breasts, so as to be like her acquaintances’ SGT, pp. 154-155.

⁹³ SFF, p. 228/ ‘Her heart swelled with gratitude and pride, for here they all looked at her and recognized her as her own’ SGT, p. 156.

representation of the oppression of women in the 19th century, the female characters in GV/AA represent the effects and consequences of following, or not following, women's standardization in predefined roles. Some of the choices of dissent are represented by Lucan's escape from her governess/mistress situation, as well as by Rosa's radical decision of self-mutilation to avoid objectification. On the other hand, characters such as Mrs Pennhallow represent the annihilation of one's individuality by merging completely in a man's view. Therefore, because for the female characters femininity is used as the representation of their individuality, Mrs Pennhallow is depicted as un-womanly as possible, her clothes grey – mirroring the denial of the joyous multiplicity that otherwise characterizes the other characters' clothing: 'damen var klædt i graat og havde et lille graat Slør paa Hatten'.⁹⁴

The inauthenticity and unjustifiability of patriarchal gender expressed by the clothing of 19th century, are underlined in Blixen's stories and essays by several comparisons to religion and rituals. In an effort to underline the inauthenticity of those performances, with regards to women's clothing Blixen writes in "The Old Chevalier" that the entire enterprise of getting dressed and disguising their body was characterized by 'disse Præstinders, disse gamle o gunge, ærefrygtindgydende Augurerinder, der til Døden røgtede de hellige Ritualer ved et Mysterium, som de kendte ud og ikke troede paa'.⁹⁵ And referring to the scene in "The Old Chevalier" where the protagonist is undressing Nathalie, Stambaugh highlights that: 'Dinesen's description emphasizes the falseness of the image projected by such ritualistic dress'.⁹⁶ The same can be observed for when Blixen in 'Oration' describes the clothes worn by priests and judges:

For dem, der holdt paa, at Kvindeligheden maa skurre paa Prækestolen of i Dommersædet, vil det være værd at lægge Mærke til, at de mandlige Sagkyndige, der saa selvfølgelig har indtaget deres Pladser der, gerne – ligesom drevene af et særligt Instinkt – har ændret deres Apparition hen imod den kvindelige. Vor Præstekjole med den hvide, pibede Krave er jo en smuk og værdig Kvindedragt, Lægerens og Husmødrenes Kilter har meget tilfælles, og de høje Dommere bærer

⁹⁴ GV, p. 32/ 'the lady was dressed in grey and had a small grey veil on her bonnet' AA, p. 25.

⁹⁵ SFF, p. 92/'the cynicism of these little priestesses, augurs all of them, performing with the utmost conscientiousness all the rites of a religion which they knew all about and did not believe in, upholding' SGT, p. 62.

⁹⁶ Stambaugh, p. 5.

i Funktion folderige Klæder og forhøjer i nogle Lande deres Værdighed med langlokkede, krusede Parykker.⁹⁷

The performativity of these types of clothing combined with their perceived ambiguity – men at the head of patriarchal institutions in society dressed in what could now (albeit anachronistically) be regarded as feminine clothing – enhances the unreliability and questionability of their discourse. These ambiguities help Blixen in unravelling the anachronisms of 19th and early 20th century patriarchal society. The parallelism between women’s clothing and religious clothing as ambivalent performances is also underlined in Blixen’s story “The Roads round Pisa” in a statement regarding trousers, which, as opposed to a skirt, are considered as ‘some forekom ham at væreden naturlige Paaklædning for Mennesker. “Alle de Falbelader” tænkte han ”hvormed Damer ellers fremæver deres Kvindelighed, bidrager til at gøre deres Konversation lige saa tom som Officeres i Uniform eller Præsters i Ornat’.⁹⁸ In both cases those ritualic dresses are disguises, worn to perform and to conform to an idea. The importance of clothing in GV/AA, and the reflection about their ambivalent power of both self-affirmation and annihilation, was reinforced by the Berlin visit. Here the use of uniforms and the resulting lack of diversity, conflicted greatly with Blixen’s ideas about self-affirmation.

Clothing and self-affirming performances

Clothing is a cage not only when it constricts into predefined social roles, but also, according to Blixen, when it becomes a disguise that distances one from one’s true self. To be true to oneself, the disguise must represent one’s true nature, and this thought is developed in GV/AA in several scenes which include clothing. Before feeling afraid of their own corporality, after the discovery of the Pennhallows’ trafficking, the experience

⁹⁷ *Essays*, p. 91/ ‘For those who have believed that femininity would grate in the pulpit and on the bench, it is worth observing that the male experts who have, as a matter of course, taken their places there have, driven as it were by a special instinct, willingly changed their appearance somewhat towards the womanly. Our clergyman’s robe with its white ruff is a beautiful and noble woman’s costume; the physician’s and house-mother’s white coats have much in common; high-ranking judges wear flowing robes when on the bench and in some countries enhance their dignity with long, curly wigs’. *Daqurreotypes*, pp. 84-85.

⁹⁸ SFF, p. 48/‘the normal costume for a human being. The fluffs and trains with which women in general accentuate their femininity are bound, he thought, to make talking with them much like a conversation with officers in uniform or clergymen in their robes’ SGT, p. 33.

of the ball in the first part of the book is used as a moment that helps Zosine and Lucan to affirm the joyous aspect of their corporality:

Et Bal er for en ung Pige ikke alene en Oplevelse, men en Aabenbaring. Naar hun danser, forstaat hun, hvorfor hun er til. Ligesom Digteren i Inspirationens Øjeblik, henrykt og svimlende, ser sig selv som Verdensaltets Fortolker, saadan fatter den unge Pige, idet hun danser ud, sit eget og hele Verdens Væsen. Digteren er i et saadant Nu kun Aand. Men en ung Pige er i høj Grad Legeme, og Saligheden bestaar for hende i den fulkomne Harmoni mellem Aand og Materie.⁹⁹

In a paper that reflects on the duality of body and mind in Blixen, Laurie Brands Gagne writes that ‘By being true to what is in ourselves, by embracing the tension between mind and body, Dinesen is saying, we can come to participate in the integral life of loving.[...] It is only the individual in whom soul has awakened – in whom mind and body are integrated – who can know this kind of connection to others’.¹⁰⁰ In ‘Oration’, when discussing the essential difference between the sexes, Blixen states that ‘Mandens Tyngdepunkt, hans Væsens Gehalt, ligger i, hvad han i Livet udfører og udretter, Kvindens i, hvad hun er’¹⁰¹ When the essay was first published in 1953, this statement caused quite a stir among the feminists of the time, but as Stecher has demonstrated,¹⁰² it is actually the expression of Blixen’s belief in the necessity of the existence of different elements in order to create interaction and interplay.

One can argue that in GV/AA these ideas are put into narrative form. To the programmatic intention to annihilate diversity, witnessed in Nazi Germany, GV/AA opposes a celebration of spontaneous variety, an example of which is represented in the scene of the ball by women’s clothing: ‘Dameners Silkekjoler var selv som store

⁹⁹ GV, p. 42/ ‘A ball to a young girl is not only an experience or an adventure, it is a revelation. When she dances she realizes why she exists and why she was born. As the poet in the moment of inspiration, transported and beautiful, sees himself as the interpreter of the universe, so does the girl, as she glides over the floor, conceive the truth both about herself and about life. The poet in such a second is solely spirit. But a young girl is eminently body, and the beatitude to her lies in the perfect harmony between matter and spirit.’ AA, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Brands Gagne, Laurie ‘The Artist as Peacemaker: "Babette's Feast" as a Narrative of Reconciliation’, *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, Spring, 2008, Vol.60(3), p. 224.

¹⁰¹ *Essays*, p. 80/ ‘A man’s center of gravity, the substance of his being, consists in what he has executed and performed in life; the woman’s in what she is.’ *Dagurreotypes*, p. 73.

¹⁰² See Stecher, pp. 27-90.

Blomsterbuketter'.¹⁰³ The parallel between women and flowers will recur throughout the novel, for example: in remembering her youth Olympia says 'da var jeg saa nydelig som en Blomst',¹⁰⁴ and when displaying the girls to the judge of Lunel 'det var, som om Fru Pennhallow var kommet tilbage til det dystre Rum og det skæbnesvanger Møde med en buket Roser i hver Haand'.¹⁰⁵ Underlining the use of flower imagery as the symbol of one's true self, and as emphasizing the importance of celebrating the diversity of individualities, Lucan affirms 'Blomster kan man dog altid kende igen [...] duften er ikke til at tage fejl af. Den kan ikke udgive sig for andet, end de er'.¹⁰⁶ The metaphor of the flower is chosen in order to represent something vulnerable, yet unmistakable in its essence, and it thus conveys once again the encouragement to preserve the dignity in being true to oneself. But is also an image used by Blixen in *Out of Africa* when describing the Somali Women's clothing: 'de var saa friske og brogede som en Buket Blomster'¹⁰⁷ and, importantly, Blixen underlines that 'alle de unge Kvinder havde høje Tanker om deres eget Værd',¹⁰⁸ as opposed, one might argue, to the women portrayed in Blixen's 19th century stories of Western society, whose value is often determined by their relation to a man. It is important to notice the parallel between the two texts here, because for Blixen, as she writes in her essay "Blacks and Whites in Africa", at the time when she was living in Kenya, African clothing, differently from Western clothing, matched the true expression of the people who wore it:

It seems to me a great difference between the blacks and the whites that the blacks, to a much higher degree than us – as long as they keep to their old, traditional attire and adornment – have a sense of *style*. You have the feeling that they look the way they are supposed to look. Their adornments, the great headdresses they wear at dances, and their jewellery and colours have all slowly developed from the life and history of their tribes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ GV, p. 43/ 'The lace frocks of the ladies were themselves as gay and varied as big bouquets' AA, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ GV, p. 55/ 'I was as pretty as a flower' AA, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵ GV, p. 135/ 'it was as if Mrs Pennhallow had come back to the fatal meeting with a bunch of roses in each hand' AA, p. 161.

¹⁰⁶ GV, p. 46/ 'Flowers [...] one can always recognize. You cannot mistake one perfume for another. They cannot possibly pretend to be anything but what they are' AA, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ DAF, p. 156/ 'they dressed up as pretty as a bouquet of flowers' OOA, p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ DAF, p. 152/ 'all the young women had a high idea of their own value' OOA, p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ Blixen in Stecher, p. 243.

Clothing in this case is not an imposition meant to justify their social roles, but rather a way to affirm their identity and celebrate their cultural heritage.

The idea of interplay, which Blixen theorises in 'Oration', also forms an integral part of GV/AA. The next chapter will discuss this with regards to the dialectic discourse staged by the gothic genre, but it is worth noting here the continuation between the scene of the ball and the idea of interplay between sexes as theorised in 'Oration'. In 'Oration' Blixen writes 'skal jeg her give min egen Opfattelse af det formaalstjenlige i Spaltningen i to Køn, da kommer jeg tilbage til min gamle Trop aa Vekselvirkningens Betydning og til min Overbevisning om den store Rigdom og de ubegrænsede Muligheder, som rummes i to forskelligartede Enheders Fællesskab og Samspil'.¹¹⁰ This idea of interaction occurs in GV/AA during the scene of the ball given in honour of Zosine's birthday in the first part of the novel when both girls are still at Zosine's family home Tortuga. During the ball, after the portrayal of women as flowers: 'de kjoleklædte, sorte Herrer syntes kun være til for at fremhæve den muntre, kvindelige Ynde, en enkelt af dem, som var i Uniform, gjorde paa Lucan Indrtryk ad med ridderligt Koketteri paa eengang at kappes med og at strække Vaaben for hendes eget Køn'.¹¹¹

The concept of joyous femininity, figuratively represented through clothing, is reiterated in the course of the story in moments where the young protagonists need tools to reaffirm themselves. The first moment, as previously analysed, is Lucan's re-appropriation of femininity through the pink frock. It is important to underline that in the previous chapter, when considering what she thought would be Mr Armorthy's marriage proposal, she imagines herself in a dress just like that, so when Zosine presents her with the pink dress 'det var for Lucan, som om hun drømte, da hun i den ene Kjole saa næsten Magen til den, som hun havde set i sin gamle Frøkens Hus, og siden saa ofte havde tænkte paa'.¹¹² This gesture seals the friendship between the protagonists and celebrates the concept of female solidarity, which is a fundamental concept in the novel, as noted also by Kastbjerg who underlines that in GV/AA 'the possibility for

¹¹⁰ *Essays*, p.76/ 'If I here must give my own interpretation of the expediency of the division of the two sexes, I will return to my old belief in the significance of interaction, and to my conviction regarding the opulent and unlimited possibility which arises from the fellowship and interplay of two different individuals' *Dagurreotypes*, p. 69.

¹¹¹ GV, p. 43/ 'The black cavaliers seemed to be there only to set off the joyous feminine grace. A few of them, who were dressed in uniform, impressed Lucan as being at the same time chivalrously competing with, and chivalrously laying down their arms before, her own sex' AA, p. 41.

¹¹² GV, p. 40/'Lucan could hardly believe that she was not dreaming, as, in the frock held up by Zosine, she perceived the exact duplicate of the one of which she had so often thought' AA, p. 37.

completeness lies in the possibility of a community of women'.¹¹³ Being gifted the dress from Zosine signifies for Lucan the possibility of self-fulfillment without the obligation to marry, or conform to restrictive social roles. It represents another stepping stone in the growing awareness of her power as an individual. After this, it is just before moving in with the Pennhallows that the girls decide to travel in their best clothes:

Jeg vil have en net Kjole at rejse i. Og du, Lucan, skal tage en anden der er lige saa pæn. Selv om vi i Frankrig, til at begynde med [...] ikke bliver andet end et Par Præstegaards-Mamseller, saa vil vi dog endnu engan tage os ud, idet vi forlader England [...] som to unge Damer uden nogen Bekymring her i Verden.¹¹⁴

Clothing will also be the means through which the girls repossess their offended femininity, after the discovery of Pennhallow's evil's plan: 'vi vil tage vore fine Kjoler paa, som vi rejste herover i fra England [...] vi bliver os selv igen'.¹¹⁵ Zosine and Lucan:

De to Halvnøgne Piger saa [...] paa hinanden. De var saa unge, at Tanken om en smuk Kjole satte deres Sind i stærk Bevægelse. De følte i dette Øjeblik begge og paa samme Maade, at de i disse Maaneder havde gjort deres Ungdom og Kvindelighed Uret. Det Blik, hvormed Pastor Pennhallow og hans Hustru havde betraget deres Skønhed, var endt med næsten at indgyde dem selv Skræk for den. Nu spejlede de sig for første Gang i lang Tid i hinandens Øjne.¹¹⁶

In the story, this is an important moment of recognition and re-appropriation of their own individuality, occurring significantly before the last encounter with Pennhallow. This thought of recognition of the self is echoed in what Blixen writes in "The Old Chevalier",

¹¹³ Kastbjerg, p. 335.

¹¹⁴ GV, p. 76/ 'I will have a pretty frock to travel in, whatever is going to happen to me. And you Lucan, must take out one just as nice. Even if in France, to begin with [...] we shall be nothing but the adopted daughters of an old country parson and his wife, we will still look as lovely as we leave England [...] like two young ladies without a care in the world' AA, p. 86.

¹¹⁵ GV, p. 180/ 'we will put on our nice frocks, in which we have travelled from England [...] we will be ourselves once more' AA, p. 219.

¹¹⁶ GV, p. 180/ 'half- naked [...] looked at each other. They were so young that the idea of a pretty frock put their minds into strong motion. They felt this moment, both and in the same way, that during these months they had wronged their beauty and womanhood. The glance wherewith MrPennhallow and his wife had eyed their beauty in the end had made them afraid of themselves. Now each of them saw it again, reflected in the eyes of the other' AA, p. 219

once the clothes are off 'saa var det dog altid Eva selv, der aandede og bevægdes under det altsammen',¹¹⁷ and she reiterates this further in 'Oration': 'under Forklædningen er vi, hvad vi er, og hvad vi gennem Tiderne har været. [...] i fuld Troskab mod vort kvindelige Væsen, og med fuld Overholdelse af vor kvindelig Værdighed'.¹¹⁸

Marianne Stecher has underlined that the conclusion of 'Oration' encourages women to 'repossess their femininity' and that this encouragement 'may be read as a call for modern women to reject both imitation (male mimicry) and protest and turn to the female experience as an autonomous source of art. In this context, one may well argue for Blixen as a forerunner to essentialist New French feminist theory'.¹¹⁹ In light of this, and considering in GV/AA clothing as an essential way for the protagonists to affirm their individuality, one of the most unsettling scenes of the novel, is when the Pennhallows steal Zosine and Lucan's clothing. This last masquerade is the most terrible one: the clothes representing the girls' identity are stolen and ridiculed by being worn by their persecutors. It is the ultimate act of aggression. Pennhallow is the representation of Western Christian patriarchal morality, and the appropriation of the girls' clothing signifies their final annihilation within a system against which they had tried to resist throughout the book. The next part of this chapter is going to examine the character of Olympia, as the embodiment of an anti-patriarchal way of living femininity.

¹¹⁷SFF, p. 89/'underneath all this Eve herself breathed and moved' SGT, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ *Essays*, p. 88/ 'Under the disguise we are what we are, and what we have been throughout time. With complete loyalty towards our female being and in complete accord with our female dignity' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 81.

¹¹⁹ Stecher, pp. 66-67.

Part 3: I am a wild woman: Olympia and the anti-western patriarchal discourse.

Jeg vil finde Olympia igen. Jeg har tænkt meget paa Olympia i Nat. Hendes eget Folk blev solgt af os, og vi har vist gjort det stor Uret. Jeg vil bede Olympia om Forladelse herfor.¹²⁰

In GV/AA Olympia is Zosine's old nurse and her father's maid. Olympia is a character that has been widely overlooked. Even in Kastbjerg, who otherwise rightly underlines female solidarity as one of the grounding aspects of GV/AA, Olympia is not fairly analysed. Kastbjerg notes that the figure of Olympia is used to create a sense of continuity from Papa le Roi to his descendent Mr Pennhallow, both involved in slavery. Olympia's tale of her past as a slave and as a sexual commodity for her master is 'an analogy to the white-slave trade the Pennhallows are engaged in'.¹²¹ According to Kastbjerg, however, Blixen's intention is not that of providing a criticism of the slave trade, but rather 'a critique of middle-class gender construction'.¹²² As will be evident by now from the analysis offered in this thesis, the critique of gender stereotyped roles is central to my reading as well. However, I believe that the figure of Olympia plays a central function in this critique, a function that is connected to Blixen's experience of colonialism as well.

As pointed out by Alain Badiou in *The Century*,¹²³ it is impossible to discuss the great wars without considering the European heritage of colonialism. Western societies were not unfamiliar to the atrocities of war and occupation – they had constructed their wealth upon it. It is a conscious choice by Blixen in 1944 to use, as her story's time frame the preferred epoch of a certain tradition of female writing – such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), or the Austen novels, where colonialism played an important part. Blixen uses themes that are all connected to this literary tradition, for example the wealth of Zosine's family in England comes from the colonies, and as Franco Moretti has pointed out, the colonies, in this literary tradition, have the narrative function of being 'a mythic geography – *pecunia ex machina* – of a wealth that is not really produced (nothing is ever said of work in the

¹²⁰ GV, p. 149/'I will look up Olympia. I have thought much of Olympia tonight. Her own people, her brothers and sisters, were sold by us, and we have wronged them greatly. I will beg Olympia's forgiveness' AA, p. 178.

¹²¹ Kastbjerg, p. 320.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Badiou, Alain, *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

colonies), but magically ‘found’ overseas whenever a novel needs it’.¹²⁴ Money is displaced, as it is not elegant to talk about income – neither is it elegant to discuss what the source of this income is, and what exploitation and atrocities it takes. In the same way, a discourse on prostitution and sexual depravity, is not non-existent in this kind of society – is simply displaced, thus hidden. GV/AA subverts this tradition, and presents in Olympia the analogy of the two great sins of Victorian society – colonialism and sexual exploitation. GV/AA uses the same colony motifs described by Moretti: Zosine’s father, Mr Tabbornor, disappears to the colonies in the start of the novel and comes back at the end, his fortune magically restored. But on the other hand, at the start of the novel, once he has left, in the chapter titled “Mr Tabbornor’s Epitaph”, Olympia openly talks about her time in the colony of Santo Domingo, where she was the maid and sex slave of the Tabbornor’s family. Instead of creating a victim, Olympia is presented as the character that embodies the virtues that are fundamental in Blixen’s life philosophy: courage, authenticity, and the strength to be true to oneself.

Olympia is also a storyteller, another fundamental figure in Blixen’s universe. Her use of storytelling is a way to define her identity, as well as a way to transmit her legacy, and the testimony of her abuse. It is only when Zosine and Lucan are facing the same danger – that of sexual exploitation – that they understand her stories. And significantly it is Zosine, the heiress of the colonialist family, who states: ‘Jeg vil finde Olympia igen. Jeg har tænkt meget paa Olympia i Nat. Hendes eget Folk blev solgt af os, og vi har vist gjort det stor Uret. Jeg vil bede Olympia om Forladelse herfor’.¹²⁵ As discussed earlier in this thesis, the form of the novel is what Blixen identified as a genre able to express social critique. In GV/AA, this critique encompasses, and links together, the damage of colonialism and the results of a repressive Western patriarchal society. Both these themes, a subtext that characterizes all of Blixen’s writings (both fiction and non-fiction) in GV/AA are taken to the extreme, as the result of the shocking encounter with National Socialism, in whose forced homologation processes Blixen saw magnified the same human commodification. There is a thread that goes throughout Blixen’s writing, and it

¹²⁴ Moretti, Franco, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 27.

¹²⁵ GV, p. 149/ ‘I will look up Olympia. I have thought much of Olympia tonight. Her own people, her brothers and sisters, were sold by us, and we have wronged them greatly. I will beg Olympia’s forgiveness’ AA p. 178.

is that of the importance of recognising and celebrating individual diversity. Anything that moves against this basic principle, is problematised in Blixen's production.

Begging for Olympia's forgiveness – questioning colonial practices in *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*

As Badiou writes 'the blessed period before the war is also that of the apogee of colonial conquest, of Europe's stranglehold over the entirety of the earth, or very nearly. And therefore that elsewhere, far away but also very close to everyone's conscience, in the midst of every family, servitude and massacre are already present'.¹²⁶ With GV/AA, and its inevitable spiral towards the horror of sexual exploitation and slave trade (always presented as the two sides of the same crime) Blixen seems to warn the wartime reader that even the pre-war period (before WW1), the apogee of bourgeoisie and Victorian idealism, was in fact characterized by violence. Via her storytelling technique, GV/AA invites the audience to always question the reliability of narrations, be it a story, a religion, or a political discourse. Badiou also underlines that the idea that characterizes the big movements of the century, fascism and communism, is that 'of creating a new man.[...] Creating a new humanity always come down to demanding that the old one be destroyed. A violent, unreconciled debate rages about the nature of this old humanity. But each and every time, the project is so radical that in the course of its realisation the singularity of human lives is not take into account'.¹²⁷ This is certainly a theme that recurs in Blixen as well, from OOA to 'Letters', and in GV/AA Mr Pennhallow states the urge of creating a new womanhood, for which the women that do not fit in will have to be eliminated:

Og vi handler saaledes [...] i et Ideals, i den rene Kvindeligheds Tjeneste. [...] Hvis den reneKvindeligheid ikke er til, maa vi skabe den. Derfor støder vi den ene Del af Kvinderne i Afgrunden og holde den anden i Uvidenhed derom, for at de ikke skal besmittes af Medynk.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Badiou, p. 7.

¹²⁷ Badiou, p. 8.

¹²⁸ GV, p. 121/ 'and we are acting so [...] in the service of an ideal, of pure and guiltless womanhood [...] If pure and guiltless womanhood does not exist, we must create it. To this end we thrust one group of women into the abyss, and keep the others in ignorance thereof, so that they shall not become defiled by compassion' AA, p. 141.

This plan of mass extermination sinisterly echoes the Nazis final solution. Knowing the historical context in which the novel was written, it is difficult for the contemporary reader to not see the connection. Interestingly, what has for a long time been perceived as the lightest piece of writing in the Blixenian oeuvre, turns out to be one of the most politically engaged. It is inevitable that the discussion of slave trade and human exploitation are compared in an author that had lived the barbarism of colonialism in the first person. Although Blixen's position as a colonialist in the postcolonial debate has always been quite awkward for literary criticism, as it has recently been pointed out by Lasse Horne Kjældgaard and Marianne Stecher, *Out Of Africa* is a text that actually stages an important criticism of colonialism. Stecher writes that 'In the context of postcolonial criticism, it is a literary work that indulges the reader in the tropes of colonialist discourse, while at the same time offering subtle and strategic criticism of the unjust practices of British colonial rule. Recent postcolonial criticism has established that *Out of Africa* embodies a subversive subtext'.¹²⁹ And according to Kjældgaard:

Både i denne og andre sammenhænge tilkendegav Karen Blixen en dokumentarisk intention med værket, som rækker ud over den private levnedbeskrivelse. Hun ville udbrede kendskabet til "Afrika" og dets befolkning og bevidst skrive sig op imod gældende konventioner for, hvordan man skrev om disse emner. Det var altså ikke noget litterært tomrum, hun stod for at ville udfylde, men et allerede eksisterende litterært felt, som hun ønskede at skrive sig op imod.¹³⁰

According to Stecher, from Blixen's lecture 'Sorte og hvide i Afrika' it is possible to understand that she herself knew in 1938 that 'it was too late for colonial redemption. Blixen also knew that posterity's judgement of the European influence on the African continent lay far in the future, but that ultimately it was a negative, shameful legacy.'¹³¹ In GV/AA the conflictual legacy of colonialism is represented through the character of

¹²⁹ Stecher, p. 162.

¹³⁰ Horne Kjældgaard, Lasse 'En af de farligste bøger, der nogen sinde er skrevet om Afrika? Karen Blixen og kolonialismen' in *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* vol.30 (2009), nr.2, p. 122 [Both in this and in other contexts, Karen Blixen showed a documentarist intention with her work, which would move beyond her personal testimonials. She wanted to divulge the knowledge of "Africa" and its people, and consciously abstain from the conventions on how to write about these topics. She was not filling a literary void, but rather wished to side against an existing one].

¹³¹ Stecher, p. 163

Olympia, through her story of objectification and exploitation, and through her relationship to Zosine and Lucan. Although Olympia embodies the legacy of the horrors of colonialism, her displacement from a Western discourse and system of oppressive Christian morality makes her, at the same time, the opposite of the patriarchal stereotype of femininity. As shall be analysed in the following chapter, GV/AA is based on the fear of the feminine body – Olympia’s use and abuse of her body represents simultaneously an accusation towards the brutality of colonial practices, and the possibility of a different way to conceive femininity outside of a Western patriarchal discourse.

Olympia and the alternative way of living femininity

When Olympia enters the room and Lucan sees her for the first time – after having only ever imagined her from Zosine’s stories- ‘Her var det kun, som om Zosine viste hende Blad efter Blad i en Billedbog, som hun selv havde kendt som Barn. Olympia saa, da hun viste sig i Døren, nettop ud, som Lucan havde forstillet sig hende’/‘it was as if Zosine was quietly and playfully holding up before her every fantastic picture of a picture-book which she had already known as a child. Olympia was just the exotic and wonderful person Lucan, years ago, had figured to herself.¹³² Olympia is presented as a mythical figure, representing initially the stereotypical exotic other. To underline her displacement in the Western context, and her detachment from the stereotypically Western feminine dressing up activities before the ball, Lucan notes that Olympia remain silent, in ‘en Slags vild, tavs Fortivevelse’.¹³³ Her voice, however, will be loud and clear when she starts telling her story. Storytelling is Olympia’s vehicle for self-affirmation, so when she starts her story, in the English version of the text, she repeats her pronoun twice ‘I, I will tell you of my master’.¹³⁴ To underline her displacement she warns her audience that she will ‘nu vil jeg raabe og klage, som om jeg stod i Urskoven’¹³⁵ To underline her true self, and her refusal to integrate in the Western context into which she had been brought, she concludes ‘Jeg er en vild Kvinde’.¹³⁶ To be a wild woman is the opposite of the constructed identities and femininities of the 19th century described in Blixen’s stories. The pride in

¹³² GV, p. 39/AA, p. 36. A slight difference in the Danish and English version of the text here, with the Danish one missing the adjectives to describe Olympia as ‘exotic’ and ‘wonderful’.

¹³³ GV, p. 40/ ‘a kind of wild and mute despair’. AA, p. 36.

¹³⁴ AA, p. 57/ ‘Jeg skal fortælle om min Herre’ GV, p. 55.

¹³⁵ ‘moan and wail, as if I stood in the virginal forests of my own country’. Ibid.

¹³⁶ ‘I am a wild woman’ Ibid.

her identity, and the awareness of her corporeality, makes Olympia the ideal feminine role model of GV/AA, and it is in fact through her presence that Zosine and Lucan eventually manage to fight off Pennhallow's threat of objectification:

Zosine [...] følte med Svimlen, at denne gamle Mand, hvis de to havde været alene i Huset, endnu en Gang kunde have tvunget hende tilbage i den Verden af Løgn of Forstillelse, hvori hun havde levet med ham. Men Olympia stod imellem dem paa Gulvet som en massiv o urokkelig Virkelighed, og hendes Skrig genlød endnu fra Væggene [...] alligevel var det hendes Nærværelse, der tvang Løgnen paa Saint-Barbe tilbage.¹³⁷

Olympia embodies life's authenticity because of her corporeality. In the initial part of the novel, Olympia tells Zosine and Lucan that she was a maid for white people in Santo Domingo since she was a young girl. Olympia is given by her employer to his son, Ambrose: 'de brugte det saadan i de gode Familier, saa længe Sønerne ikke var gamle nok til at gifte sig med hvide unge Damer af andre gode Familier, da at give dem en pæn, anstændig Negerpige'.¹³⁸ The discourse of the female body as an exchangeable commodity, which had been introduced in the story by Mr Armorthys' proposal to Lucan, is here accentuated by the position of forced submission of Olympia as a black maid in a white colonialist family. And the difference between her position and the one of the women that she serves is pointed out by Olympia herself, who remarks how they were kept ignorant of this brutal use: 'den Slags Ting kendte de fine unge Piger rigtignok ikke noget til, de Engle'.¹³⁹ Olympia here also underlines how her situation of submission comes from the same repressive patriarchal influence that aims to keep the Western young ladies ignorant of their corporeality by reiterating the stereotype of the Victorian angel of the house.

¹³⁷ GV, p. 210/ 'Zosine [...] felt with a horrible giddiness, that the old man, if the two had been alone in the house, once more could have forced her back into the world of lies and deceit which they had been living together for months. But Olympia stood on the floor between them like a solid and unshakeable reality, and her shriek still re-echoed from the walls [...] it was her presence which drove back the falsehood at Saint-Barbe.' AA, p. 258

¹³⁸ GV, p. 55/'They had that way with them in the great families, as long as the sons were not old enough to marry a white young lady out of another great family, then to give them a pretty, decent black girl to please themselves with' AA, p. 58.

¹³⁹ 'nice young ladies had nothing to do with those things, the sweet angels' Ibid.

Because Ambrose falls in love with Olympia, thus dangerously crossing the borders of both racial and class division, he is sent away and Olympia is hurriedly married to ‘en rigtig god Neger, som jeg ikke kan huske, hvad hed’.¹⁴⁰ Although Olympia’s fate is determined by the choices forced upon her by the male figures in her life – her master, her husband, Papa le Roi, the refusal of a wedding imposed on her is implied in her willing forgetfulness of her husband’s name. Her passive-aggressive dissent to a Western tradition forced upon her, is to indulge her needs and her traditions and to go ‘om Natten og ude i Skoven’.¹⁴¹ Here Olympia performs her people’s indigenous magic rituals, supervised and performed by Papa le Roi, ‘den store Præst, ligesom her i England Ærkebiskoppen selv’.¹⁴²

When the old Papa le Roi dies, significantly, what breaks the balance of the indigenous spiritual tradition, is the appearance of a Western white man, a rich and old slave trader, who takes his place in the woods ritual: ‘Han var nok en hvid Mand, men han var graa [...] ja, forfærdelig var han’.¹⁴³ Grey, as for Mrs Pennhallow, will be the characterising color of the evil couple. Grey, or the absence of colour of the Pennhallows, is juxtaposed to the girls’ voluptuousness of colours in their constant comparison with flowers. The new Papa le Roi is ‘an awful man’ and a cannibal: ‘der var ogsaa dem, der sagde, at han havde solgt sig til den Satan, som de hvide Folk har, og som der staar om i Biblen. Det forstaar jeg mig ikke paa’.¹⁴⁴ Olympia’s sentence is not merely admitting her unfamiliarity with the main religion of the Western world, it is an implied refusal of it. It is also a juxtaposition to her previous statement on Western women – ‘the sweet angels’ – that knew nothing about sexuality, and in the same way Olympia by refusing to know Christianity, is also rejecting its patriarchal morality. Bunch maintains that to Christianity Blixen opposes instead ‘the gospel of nature and joy’¹⁴⁵ and I believe that in GV/AA this can be applied to Olympia. She is the representation of a spirituality that is both physical and joyful. Olympia continues to underline the unjustifiability of white colonizers’ forceful intrusion over indigenous spirituality by stating: ‘At sorte Folk laver Trolderer i

¹⁴⁰ ‘a quite respectable Negro, whose name I no longer remember’ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ ‘at night, in the woods’ Ibid.

¹⁴² ‘the big priest on our isle, just as here in England the Archbishop himself’ Ibid.

¹⁴³ GV, p. 56/ ‘He was a white man all right, but he was gray to look at, his face was gray, and so were his hands [...] he was an awful man!’ AA, p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ GV, p. 56/ ‘There were also people who told that he had sold himself to the Devil of whom the white people speak, and of whom they read in the Bible. But of those things I know nothing’ AA, p. 59

¹⁴⁵ Bunch, p. 43.

den Sorte Nat, det er, som det skal være. Men hvad skal en Englænder der?'.¹⁴⁶ In *Out of Africa*, the same kind of intrusion and imposition, is noted by Blixen in the mission of the Church of Scotland in Kenya:

Den laa højt, med dejligt Udsigt over hele det omliggende Kikuyuland, men Missionen selv gjord paa mig Indtryk af at være blind og ikke at kunne se den. Den skotske Kirke satte meget ind paa at faa Indfødte til at tage europæiske Klæder paa, og arbejedede gennem mange Aar utrætteligt for denne Sag, som jeg ikke syntes var til Folkets Gavn fra noget som helst Synspunkt set.¹⁴⁷

While Olympia seems to accept being offered as a sexual object to the young aristocratic Ambrose, she does not accept the intrusion of a Western white man in the realm of her spirituality – as this is the only thing left to be performed as free people. As analysed earlier in this chapter, this same idea of spirituality, rather than religion, as a last bastion of one's individuality, occurred in Blixen's description of the churches in Nazi Berlin, where people took refuge from the overwhelming presence of the totalitarian state.

Olympia's body is often depicted in the book, and described at several stages of her life. Pretty as flower when she was young – with a slimmer waist than any of the other girls she works for, heavy as an elephant in her older days – yet still as flexible as a feline. Olympia's femininity is embodied by her use – and abuse – of this body, which fascinates and comforts the girls, as a maternal haven and as an inspiring idol. Her body, as opposed to the other bodies represented, is the most sexualized, the only one that admits its needs, as opposed to the Western young ladies she serves. Olympia rebels against her master's forced marriage – which is imposed on her to tame her exuberance and conform her to a Western standard of femininity – by returning to the woods, the space where she can be herself and reconnect to her own heritage. But here, with the new Papa le Roi, her last place for freedom is violated as well. Significantly, Papa le Roi uses her child for one of the rituals, a metaphor, once again, for the brutal human commodification of colonialism.

¹⁴⁶ GV, p. 56/ 'That black people make magic in the black night, that is as it should be. But what has a white man got to do there?' AA, p. 59.

¹⁴⁷ DAF, p. 36/ 'There was a splendid view, from up there, over all the surrounding Kikuyu country, but all the same the Mission station gave me an impression of blindness, as if it could see nothing itself. The Church of Scotland was working hard to put the Natives into European clothes, which, I thought, did them no good from any point of view' OOA, p. 32.

Olympia had initially refused this child, as the fruit of her forced marriage: ‘men jeg havde jo tænkt, at jeg skulde have en hvid Mands Barn, unge Hr. Ambroses Søn’,¹⁴⁸ but once the child disappears, as a victim of Papa le Roi: ‘jeg husked da, at det var mit Barn, og jeg syntes just, at det var dejligt, at det var kulsort’.¹⁴⁹ So if Olympia initially refuses maternity, as the product of a marriage imposed upon her, it eventually becomes the experience that leads her to the acceptance of her identity, that takes her back to her body and thus – to her individuality.

The feeling of revenge, that she will harbour throughout the years towards Papa le Roi and the Western brutal colonizers that he represents, starts here, with the loss of her child: ‘saadan maa jeg skribe, til jeg har faaet den hvide Papa le Roi slaet ihjel’.¹⁵⁰ The solution to soothe her distress found by one of Ambrose’s sisters, is to make her the nurse of her own child, Zosine’s father: ‘der var saadan en Kraft i hans lille Mund, at den sugede Fortivlesen og Raseriet ud af mit Hjerte’.¹⁵¹ Maternity is yet again what gives her back to herself and where she finds her absolution. And importantly, this solution is found by another woman, thus confirming the necessity of female solidarity that the novel reiterates throughout the text. But it also anticipates Zosine’s plea for Olympia’s forgiveness, as Ambrose’s sister’s gesture can also be interpreted as a request for absolution for the damage caused by her own father. Importantly it is one of the ‘sweet angels’ who has been kept in forced ignorance of those brutalities who understands Olympia, moving, perhaps, from a similar position of submission. Sidonie Smith had already pointed out the parallelisms between the oppression of women and colonial practices in OOA, and writes that Blixen:

contests the denigrating embodiment of native and of women by turning the ideology of sexual contamination on its head, enabling the body – of the African, of women. Celebrating African culture, she resists the colonizing tendency to stabilize, explain, judge, and hierarchize the other’s difference...Dinesen’s keen consciousness of her own marginality as a woman who sought to “achieve

¹⁴⁸ GV, p. 57/‘had I not meant to have a white child, the child of Master Ambrose?’ AA, p. 60.

¹⁴⁹ ‘I then remembered that it was my own baby, which I had borne from my body, and it seemed to me only the more lovely because it was black’ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ GV, p. 58/‘I must go on shrieking in this way, until I have got the gray Papa le Roi killed’ AA, p. 61.

¹⁵¹ GV, p. 58/‘there was such strength in his little mouth that it sucked the fury and the despair from my heart’ AA, p. 61.

something as myself’ and of the larger cultural politics of gender, and of her consequent positioning herself as an “outsider” in the British colony, encouraged her to embrace native African culture in more sympathetic ways than the British colonials who assumed their privileges and their cultural superiority unquestioningly.¹⁵²

Olympia then represents the continuation of a discourse and a reflection on femininity, and colonialism, that Blixen had started in *Out of Africa*, and that she will develop in ‘Daguerreotypes’, ‘Oration’ and *Shadows on the Grass*. Olympia will eventually have her revenge on Papa le Roi, as she will rescue Zosine and Lucan from Mr Pennhallow. When she enters in Saint Barbe, she is depicted as a ‘den mørke, mægtige Kvindeskikkelse’,¹⁵³ as an ancient idol, or deity, the incarnation of the feminine itself, finally coming to rescue the girls from their nightmare. This image echoes the one described by Blixen in OOA when visiting the Somali women:

Inde i den afsondrede Kvindeverden, og saa at sige bagved dens Mure og Bastioner, følte jeg er særegent, stærkt og mægtigt Ideals Nærværelse [...] Tanken om et Tusendaarige, hvori Kvinderne skulde herske over Verden. Da paatog den gamle Moder sig en ny Skikkelse og tronede som et svært, mørkt Symbol paa den store, kvindelige Guddom, der havde været til i de gamle Tider, inden selve Profetens Gud.¹⁵⁴

Concluding Remarks

As Bunch has underlined, ‘Dinesen’s major critique is that ‘nature’, ‘sensuousness’ and ‘woman’ within the notion of Christianity have been looked down upon as ‘being-for-other’ and suppressed, even associated with the Devil, when these categories in fact belong to the (organic) phenomena from where all life, thinking, arts and religion

¹⁵² Smith in Stecher, p. 178.

¹⁵³ GV, p. 201/ ‘huge, dark, female figure’ AA, p. 247.

¹⁵⁴ DAF, p. 154/ ‘Within this enclosed women’s world, so to say, behind the walls and fortifications of it, I felt the presence of a great ideal [...] the idea of a Millennium when women were to reign supreme in the world. The old mother at such times would take on a new shape, and sit enthroned as a massive dark symbol of that mighty female deity who had existed in old ages, before the time of the prophet’s God’ OOA, p. 131.

derive'.¹⁵⁵ It is the 'wild woman', the woman displaced from the Christian Western patriarchal discourse and from its oppressive conventions, who in Blixen represents an alternative, and ideal, matriarchal society, and in *GV/AA* is represented through Olympia and her body, which 'udgik Varme og Haab'.¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, as Stecher has noted when analysing "Sorte og Hvide i afrika":

Blixen suggests that forced "external" power or dominance, whether by one nation over another, by one race over another, or by one sex over the other, is an unsatisfying and ultimately infertile interaction; it certainly does not represent the dynamic reciprocity, that is, "sammenspil" or "vekselvirkning," which she celebrates as a life-affirming principle in her literary fiction and essays'.¹⁵⁷

This concept of 'dynamic reciprocity' and 'life-affirming principle' is put into narrative form in *GV/AA*. Through Pierre Andrézel, Blixen discusses gender, totalitarianism and colonialism in new and subversive ways. At the same time, she engages in a dialogue not only with previous literary traditions, but also with her own texts, re-using and often subverting some of her own stories. Because of this dual aspect of continuity and subversion within Blixen's authorship, *GV/AA* deserves the place it has recently acquired in the Danish literary canon,¹⁵⁸ and provides new and existing readers with a fertile field for further explorations. The following chapter seeks to understand the use of the gothic mode in *GV/AA*, considering it as the fitting mode to express the duality and interplay that represents Blixen's 'life-affirming principle'.

¹⁵⁵ Bunch, p. 132-133.

¹⁵⁶ *GV*, p. 207/ 'radiated a kind of warmth and hope' *AA*, p. 255.

¹⁵⁷ Stecher, p. 189.

¹⁵⁸ Thanks to the 2013 critical edition curated by Gyldendal & Det Danske Sprog og Litteraturselskab.

Chapter 6: **When the Angels of the House Rebel, Gothic Practices and Feminist Criticism in *Gengældensens Veje/The Angelic Avengers***

Nu venter hun af os, at vi skal skaffe hendes Ret. Hun venter, at vi skal hævne hende.¹

Introduction

As should be clear by now, GV/AA is a book that has been labelled and classified in various ways – including that of being an unclassifiable book.² Being a pastiche text, most of those genre classifications can be applied to it without clashing with each other – GV/AA is at the same time a crime novel, a thriller, and a romance. This chapter, however, proposes a reading of it as a gothic text, and this choice of reading, as shall be demonstrated, synthesises all the concepts discussed in this thesis – namely, the re-assessment of GV/AA through its contextualisation, reception and intersectional reading into Blixen’s historical, cultural and literary context.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the use of gothic in GV/AA and in Blixen’s writing, using close readings of the novel. This reading proceeds from, and complements, Kastbjerg’s thesis, which has been the only specifically gothic reading of GV/AA to this day. Kastbjerg’s excellent analysis of GV/AA is part of her pioneering study of gothic fiction in the Danish literary panorama, and she defines GV/AA as ‘the most conventionally gothic text in the history of Danish literature’.³ Kastbjerg reads GV/AA as ‘a stylized pastiche bordering on parody [that] eludes heavily on the Female Gothic and mass-market romance’,⁴ and although this thesis agrees with her understanding and her gothic analysis, it endorses a reading which considers the text as inextricably connected to its historical context. Gothic becomes the mode that best expresses the reaction of dissent towards Blixen’s Berlin and occupation experience. In light of the historical

¹ GV, p.162/ AA, p.194 ‘Now she is waiting for you and me to see justice done to her. She expects us to avenge her’.

² As seen in some of the reviews in Chapter 3.

³ Kastbjerg, p. 313.

⁴ Kastbjerg, p. 314.

context of publication, the objectification of the female body, which is the central source of gothic terror in *GV/AA*, can be understood as the staging of the realistic fear of human objectification and commodification experienced under a totalitarian state.

This chapter also employs the use of Helene Cixous' theory in order to justify my reading of *GV/AA* as a text that, through the use of gothic mode, criticizes a western patriarchal system of values. This especially applies to the characterization of Mrs Pennhallow and Olympia. Those two characters have a fundamental role in the development of this criticism, and this chapter presents an unprecedented analysis of their ambiguities and functions. While Mrs Pennhallow embodies a grotesque exaggeration of the western woman who has assimilated the western patriarchal values to the point of abhorring her own essential femininity, Olympia represents her non-western counterpart. As seen in the previous chapter, Olympia is the only character in the novel who succeeds in affirming her individuality, because of her displacement from a western system of values. This empowers her to become in the novel, the embodiment of an unpolluted reality, an isolated vessel of authenticity in *GV/AA*'s terrifyingly misogynistic world.

Kastbjerg has noted that *GV/AA* 'uses the gothic mode not exclusively to say something allegorically about depth and deep meaning – although its contemplation of the nature of evil certainly pertains to the historical time and place in which it was written – but first and foremost plays around with the Gothic conventions that continually dissolve and disrupt the subject'.⁵ While the following analysis certainly agrees with Kastbjerg's understanding of *GV/AA* pastiching of literary gothic conventions, it further reflects on the importance of gothic as a subversive theoretical tool, able to provide the author and the text with the necessary discourse to express powerful dissent. As Blixen herself wrote in *Shadows on the Grass*, *GV/AA*, the book that was initially meant as an entertainment and divertissement for the author, 'udviklede sig [...] til en gyser'/'developed in a tale of darkness' and 'det blev for mig en uhyggelig og uværdig Opgave for Spøg at kappes med Virkeligheden i Gru og Brutalitet'.⁶ Gothic is a mode that has traditionally been used by female writers to express dissent under disguise, thus serves Blixen/Andrezel well in the context of Nazi censorship. It is also a mode that is characterized by the ability to express a dualistic discourse, which as discussed in the

⁵ Kastbjerg, p. 314.

⁶ *Skygger*, pp. 111-112/ 'it started to look crude and vulgar to me, compete to the surrounding world in creating horrors' *Shadows*, p. 344.

previous chapter, is Blixen's preferred way to express her understanding of the world, and life's dualism. Because of this dualism, gothic also allow Blixen to expose, distance and displace, problematic matters in a subversive way. If the core of Blixen's criticism of Western patriarchal society was directed to its restrictive and oppressive standardization of gender roles, GV/AA takes this subject matter to the extreme in a story that revolves around human commodification. The first part of this chapter will contextualise GV/AA within the gothic literary tradition, specifically the female gothic, while the second part will provide a close reading of the text as a gothic novel.

Part 1: Karen Blixen and the Gothic Mode

Gothic in Danish literature

Harald Mogensen, who had included GV/AA in his canon of Danish literary crime fiction *Mord og Mysterier, Den Danske Krimi Historie*,⁷ saw no conflict in considering GV/AA as both gothic and crime fiction, and underlined that gothic actually was to be considered as a precursor of crime fiction.⁸ Mogensen had also underlined the similarities between GV/AA and Victorian gothic fiction (the like of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon) such as the epigraph (in GV/AA only in the Danish edition) that warns the reader of being a story based on true events. Mogensen considered the book to be Blixen's 'gotiske mesterstykke'[gothic masterpiece].⁹ On the same wavelength, Gunhild Agger had also understood gothic as the primary feature in GV/AA,¹⁰ and also underlined that the choice of gothic, understood as a mainstream genre, was a conscious choice that would allow Blixen to reach a wider audience. Agger also notes that this was a choice that had characterized various other female gothic writers, such as Daphne du Maurier, and underlined that GV/AA was very intentionally created as a bestseller. Finally, Agger had also underlined that Blixen's use of gothic, and of strategies borrowed from thrillers, horrors, and suspense mainstream literature, agrees with the grounding dualism and duplicity of the text itself, as Blixen takes those modes and subverts them.¹¹ The back cover of the first Danish edition of GV (1944) defined it as a 'forrygende uhyggelig Spændingsroman'[a disturbing and scary thriller],¹² and mentioned the literary tradition to which the novel could be ascribed, by comparing Pierre Andrézel to authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson and Stein Riverton. Since Gothic as a literary phenomenon is a mainly English tradition, 'forrygende uhyggelig Spændingsroman' is probably the most comprehensive translation of gothic novel that the Danish language could offer. While gothic in Anglo-American literature is a well-established tradition, in Danish literature it is a territory that only a few authors have explored. As Kastbjerg has argued in her study on Danish Gothic:

⁷ Mogensen, pp. 82-90.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ Mogensen, p. 86.

¹⁰ Agger, 1988, pp. 71-90.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Andrézel, Pierre, *Gengældelsens Veje* (Gyldendal, Copenhagen: 1944).

Despite a relentless critical and popular interest in all things Gothic in recent years and the resulting awareness of Gothic traditions outside the established Anglo-American literary canon, Danish Gothic remains unexplored and undefined. That is perhaps of little surprise, given the Scandinavian predilection for realism; and Denmark has arguably not had a very strong tradition of what are usually seen as fantasy modes, Gothic often being identified somewhere in this non-realistic spectrum.¹³

Showing significant cultural awareness of her audience's response, when Karen Blixen first published her debut work *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) in Denmark, she changed the title to *Syv Fantastisks Fortællinger* (1935). Significantly, when she prepared the Danish edition of the book, she carried out a peculiar process of self-translation through which she adapted the contents of her text for her countrymen,¹⁴ and in noticing the lack of a fantastic tradition in Danish literature she stated: 'I still believe that the Danish readership, which has not the slightest tradition for this kind of fantastical,- or nonsense,- type of literature, will ask with some indignation: what is this all about?'.¹⁵ However, with GV/AA, Blixen consciously engaged in a literary dialogue with a properly Anglo-American gothic tradition, situating Pierre Andrézel as part of it. This is signalled by the back cover of the first Danish edition in 1944, which states:

Forf. behersker sit Stof og udnytter det med en Præcision og raffineret Beregning, der løfter hans bog højt op over den kriminale Underholdningsgenre, helt ind i en artistisk intellektuel Sfære, der bringer Poe, Stevenson og Stein Riverton i Erindring.¹⁶

¹³ Kastbjerg, p. 1.

¹⁴ She later declared in an interview: 'When, for my own amusement, I wrote this book in English I didn't think it would have any interest for Danish readers' (Thurman, p. 313).

¹⁵ Blixen in Hansen, p. 14.

¹⁶ [the author masters his material, and utilizes it with precision and sophisticated intention, raising his book well above the crime fiction entertaining genre, into an artistic and intellectual sphere that brings Poe, Stevenson and Stein Riverton to mind].

As Kastbjerg underlines, Karen Blixen's novel 'first and foremost plays around with the Gothic conventions'.¹⁷ With her new authorial identity, Karen Blixen/Pierre Andrézel used gothic as a way to engage with her audience, in an attempt to entertain and encourage them under a crucial historical period. By displacing themes and issues that were uncomfortably close – such as resistance, collaboration and revenge – she gives her readers an opportunity to understand them better, and perhaps to rethink and challenge some of the categories that ruled their society. As Susan Hardy Aiken has noted, in Blixen 'despite their superficial traditionalism, her narratives deploy a deconstructive poetics that challenges conventional categories of writing and reading'.¹⁸ Gothic serves Andrézel's purposes very well, being a mode characterized primarily by its flexibility and adaptability to different contexts and circumstances. Since its origin in the eighteenth century two main features have characterized the success of the gothic novel: the enthusiastic reception of its readers – which inscribes this genre in the cultural system of mainstream culture – and its narrative combined with its fantastic aesthetic, which gives this genre an incredible trans-genre power, meaning that the gothic can easily adapt to various forms of performance, but also that it can easily move from one literary register to another. Since its first appearance in 1764 with Horace Walpole *The Castle of Otranto*, gothic's extreme versatility, its collocation in between high and low brow literature, the incredible success in the publishing industry, and the enthusiastic reception received by its readership, make the gothic novel the cultural phenomenon that anticipates the industry of the popular novel of the following century. Gothic is something malleable, applicable to various contexts, various communities of readers, and various historical times. Although gothic is a malleable genre, there are nonetheless in gothic novels some traits that make it easily recognizable for the reader and that have contributed to its long lasting popularity. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*: 'A Gothic tale usually takes place in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey...within this space, or a combination of those spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters...those hauntings can take many forms, but they frequently assume the features of ghosts'.¹⁹ GV/AA fulfils all the required criteria to be classified as a gothic novel – St Barbe is the foreign house

¹⁷ Kastbjerg, p. 314.

¹⁸ Hardy Aiken, p. 70.

¹⁹ Hogle, p. 2.

haunted by secrets and ghosts of the past, Zosine and Lucan the two young heroines alone in the world, Mr Pennhallow the proper villain persecuting them, moonlight and darkness are two of the preferred atmospheres, and supernatural and magic are ascertained presence. But, what makes this novel gothic is most of all its structure. If gothic is a mode characterized by conflicts, GV/AA assimilates this concept to its maximum, creating a story structurally built on conflicts.

Gothic and the past

A fundamental aspect of traditional gothic writings is to set the story in the past, and how gothic deals with the representation of the past has been a major question for gothic criticism. Thurman reports that when Karen Blixen started publishing her gothic tales and was asked why she had chosen to set them in the past, she had stated that ‘With the past I find myself before a finished world, complete in all its elements, and I can thus more easily recoumpound it my imagination. Here, no temptation for me to fall back to realism, nor for my readers to look for it’.²⁰ The use of the past thus connects to the storyteller methodology of distancing the story enough to give both the author and the readers enough space to interact with it. But the choice of the past is not a casual one – as discussed in the previous chapter, in GV/AA the past chosen has a specific meaning, which is to provide a theoretical tool for the criticism of the present situation. The past of GV/AA specifically refers to a historical time characterized by unbalanced gender and class relationships, and by restrictive and oppressive social roles: the same kind of oppression felt under a totalitarian state.

Robert Mighall, in his study of the geography of Victorian gothic fiction, has pointed out how important and entangled places and historical settings are in gothic novels.²¹ The aim of Mighall’s study is to underline that the use of the settings, in the history of the gothic genre, will always be connected to the idea of somewhere alien to common values of civilization. This choice is not linked to a critique of medieval times, but rather is supposed to direct the reader to question the present and its supposed civilization and Enlightenment. Mighall also argues that gothic is a *mode* rather than a

²⁰ Blixen in Thurman, p. 264.

²¹ Mighall, Robert, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1999).

genre, characterized by a certain attitude towards the past. According to him ‘Gothic writings [...] are not mere fantasies isolated from ‘reality’, as perceived and represented in contemporary discourses; rather they depend upon, engage with, and explore history and its representation’.²² The relationship between gothic and the depiction of the past seems to be characterized by a need, shared between the author and its readers, to understand present circumstances by analyzing something diametrically opposite. As Mighall states ‘clashes between the ‘old centuries’ and ‘modernity’ define the gothic mode’.²³

It is important to underline the clashing aspect of gothic’s representation of the past, as gothic represents the past not by a-critically assimilating all of its aspects, but by actively questioning them. Setting stories in a displaced space and time serves indeed the main purpose of questioning the same social issues in contemporary times– gothic allegorically criticizes society under the mask of literary fiction. Therefore it is a form that has been largely used by authors in the need to criticize their society under disguise – and no better definition could be applied to Pierre Andrézel’s *GV/AA*. As Hardy Aiken has underlined, for Blixen ‘Writing Gothic [...] provided an ideal means for dismantling traditional codes in the very process of appropriating them’.²⁴ Here the text engages in a continuous dialogue with a close past’s social conventions – it stages the idyllic bourgeois life in St Barbe, the ideal gender roles of a Victorian society, to then radically subvert this image. As Kastbjerg has brilliantly put it, in *GV/AA* the *hyggeligt* is rendered *uhyggeligt*,²⁵ the safety of the domestic space is subverted into the major space of danger. Blixen as Andrézel uses, and subverts, gothic mode’s strategies and conventions. Maggie Kilgour writes that ‘gothic is symptomatic of a nostalgia for the past’,²⁶ and *GV/AA* is also characterized by a relationship to the past, but the past is no longer a place of inspiration and safety – the past becomes instead the representation of the circularity of certain dangers. In *GV/AA* the story becomes a warning, what has happened before can happen again. The reader is left with the inspiration of the tales of dissents and subversion – how can individuals react against danger? By resisting and trying to fight back, the story of Zosine and Lucan seems to suggest. Seen under this angle, and considering that Blixen

²² Mighall, p. xxiii.

²³ Mighall, p. xx.

²⁴ Hardy, p. 69.

²⁵ Kastbjerg, p. 318.

²⁶ Kilgour, Maggie *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 12.

had already assimilated the idea of a novel as the most adequate form to express dissent,²⁷ it can be argued that GV/AA uses the gothic in one of the ways theorized by Kilgour: ‘The gothic exposes the gothic reality of modern identity, and by failing to represent an adequate solution it forces its readers to address them in real life, thus (ideally) using literature to encourage social change’.²⁸ If we play with the meanings of both the Danish and English title, Blixen in her novel makes Lucan and Zosine, the angels of the house, become avengers (The Angelic Avengers) consumed by finding ways of retribution (Gengældenses Veje/ The ways of retribution). No other genre could have allowed the space, language, structure and metaphors to stage such dialectic discourse as well as the gothic.

Blixen’s gothic: a dialectic discourse

Gothic’s relation to the past is stylistically expressed by its continuous reference and use of preceding literary and cultural tradition. Kilgour notes that the gothic ‘cannot be seen in abstraction from the other literary forms from which it arises’ and underlines that ‘the form is thus itself a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of bits and pieces of the past’.²⁹ As such, gothic can be considered as a highly pastiched form. GV/AA engages with previous tradition of gothic and romance literature from the very start of the book. The initial situation of Lucan is a reference to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and the rest of the novel includes many literary references, as for example Robert Stevenson’s *Olalla*. Pastiche is a form that is very aware of its own artifice, and very open about its imitation, and imitation in pastiche, differently from the parody, implies that the pastiching author is paying homage to the author he is emulating. As Richard Dyer underlines, in pastiche: ‘Emulation and homage both express an attitude of admiration towards what they imitate. They come out of different sets of cultural assumptions: emulation models itself on predecessors as a matter of course, whereas homage is a conscious act of acknowledgement in a culture where this is not the norm’.³⁰ In a culture like Denmark, where gothic was not an established form, GV/AA’s use of gothic, and especially of female gothic, was a conscious act of acknowledgement of the previous literary tradition,

²⁷ See Chapter 4.

²⁸ Kilgour, p. 10.

²⁹ Kilgour, p. 3.

³⁰ Dyer, p. 35.

and of its subversive potential. As Hardy has pointed out ‘Dinesen’s use of Gothic is not the reactionary reprise of an obsolete form that such echoes might suggest. Indeed, what emerges most clearly from her comments is her distinctive perception of the peculiarly modern theoretical potential of Gothicism’.³¹

The need for a subversive genre in the historical and political context in which GV/AA was written has already been explored, and in this chapter is going to analyse how the gothic mode is employed, and how and why it is the most fitting genre to dismantle a Western Christian patriarchal system of values.

The strategy used in the representation of the past shows one of the main characteristics of gothic mode – namely that of displaying clashing oppositions. This strategy includes the character depiction as well as the narrative structure itself, and provides the reader a space to question them. As Jerrold E. Hogle states in the introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*: ‘no other form of writing or theatre is as insistent as the gothic on juxtaposing potential revolution and possible reaction – about gender, sexuality, race, class, the colonizers versus the colonized, the physical versus the metaphysical, and abnormal versus normal psychology- and leaving both extremes sharply before us and far less resolved than the conventional endings in most of these works claim to be’.³² In creating spaces of conflict that mirror society’s ambiguity, gothic appears to be a mode particularly predisposed to dissent. This same trait characterizes Blixen’s essayistic style of writing as well, as Stecher has pointed out ‘As well as being in a classical philosophical tradition, these essays seem to employ a “dialectic method” in their approach to the subject matter; the essayist considers opposing viewpoints and the contradictions within them before arriving at an alternative and original viewpoint that represents a synthesis of perspectives’.³³ And this is exactly what happens with the gothic discourse in GV/AA. Gothic is the mode that most represents Blixen’s dualistic discourse. This kind of discourse represents Blixen’s view of the world, as discussed in the previous chapter:

³¹ Hardy, p. 69.

³² Hogle, Jerrold E. eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 13.

³³ Stecher, p. 12.

Blixen's aesthetic vision holds that all great art, and indeed most great occurrences in human history, have as their origin the dialectical tension between opposing forces. Gender relations are thus placed amongst other binary categories which are fundamental to the underlying thematic of Blixen's fiction: Nature/Culture; European/African; Man/Woman, and so forth. It is the idea that only through the dynamic meeting of diametrically opposing forces – meaning and art are produced.³⁴

Presenting the reader with a dualistic discourse means suggesting a view of the world that is dynamic and multifaceted, that celebrates multiplicity and differences. Thus, in the historical context of publication, *GV/AA* becomes a text of dissent, since its gothic dualistic discourse necessarily subverts the surrounding totalitarian and homologated view of society.

Blixen and the female gothic

Together with the trait of clashing oppositions, it is gothic's marginal position in the literary canon – due to its constant crossing of the boundaries of high brow and low brow literature – that has made this mode particularly appealing to women writers since its first appearance in the 18th century. Gary Kelly writes 'The virtual exclusion of women writers – and women in general – from the learned discourse and 'noble' genres left women with socio-cultural license to engage in kinds of writing that were usually regarded as minor'.³⁵ Gothic's marginal and ambiguous position mirrored women's marginal position in society, as well as allowing them to express dissent under disguise. Marginality in Blixen is further emphasized by her being a woman writer, from a small marginal country – as compared to the mainstream literary culture – writing in English. Marginality and displacement also characterize the start of her professional writing career – the return to Denmark from Kenya and her displacement from her own homeland and culture, and while in Kenya her marginal position as Danish, single woman and farm owner, in a British colony. Gothic thus becomes the mode that best expresses this sense of marginality and displacement, and as Lynn Sukenich has underlined in *Female Gothic*: 'The

³⁴ Stecher, p. 48.

³⁵ Kelly, Gary, *Varieties of Female Gothic* (London: Pickering & Chatto; 2002), p. xvi.

gothic has consciously been chosen by writers like Isak Dinesen to stress the woman writer's separation from her culture'.³⁶ While in her short stories production the focus is often on the attempt to answer the modernist question 'Who am I', and the narrative thus often falls into an introspective exploration of the characters, in GV/AA Blixen explores the creation of female individuality in relation to the social surroundings. This attention to the social surroundings of the characters in GV/AA can be seen in the first draft of the typewritten manuscript of GV/AA, where on page five a handwritten note by Blixen above Lucan's name specifies that although she and Zosine attended the same school, they belonged to different social backgrounds, which Blixen refers to as different 'sociale og økonomiske sfaer' [social and economic sphere]. This attention, together with the clear reference to *Jane Eyre*, further signals Blixen's conscious alignment with an established tradition of female writers, and fittingly Sarah Stambaugh has noted that: 'It was probably the Brontë sisters who helped Dinesen to formulate and express her discontent as a woman in an incompatible world. She claimed to know them well and drew extensively from imagery and themes used by all three. All the sisters examine her central themes of misogyny and the defence of women'.³⁷

Being the gothic also a very popular genre, it was the first example of bestselling literature. As Maggie Kilgour has observed, in the late seventeenth century, with the rise of literacy and the increase of press, the act of reading ended up being linked to a bigger cultural debate concerning the influencing power of literature on weaker minds – such as women, children and generally uneducated people. Kilgour writes: 'Prose fiction was particularly suspect: romances, for giving readers unrealistic expectations of an idealized life, novels for exposing them to the sordidness of an idealized life. As a hybrid between the novel and the romance, the gothic was accused on both accounts'.³⁸ A perfect example of this concern, is Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), a notable parody of the gothic genre, where the heroine – an avid reader of gothic romances – ends up confusing it with her real life. It was not only the trait of identification that was a concern, but probably also the fear of losing control of the cultural education of the subordinated classes – a definition that in the eighteenth century applies to women as well. Indeed, gothic romance became a particularly feminine genre, as readers and authors of a literature that allowed

³⁶ Lynn Sukenich 'Introduction', in Fleenor, Juliann, *Female Gothic* (Montréal: Eden Press; 1983), p. 8.

³⁷ Stambaugh, p. 111.

³⁸ Kilgour, p. 6.

them to express veiled criticism towards their present condition. Lynn Sukenich suggests in *Female Gothic*: 'Like the minority writer, the female writer exists within an inescapable condition of identity which distances her from the mainstream of the culture and forces her either to stress her separation from the masculine literary mainstream or to pursue her resemblance to it'.³⁹

Being a genre marginalized from the canon of literature for most of its existence – given its hybridism and its variegated community of readers – gothic adapts well to minorities in need of criticizing their times and expressing themselves. The appropriation of this genre by a wide community of female authors – and readers – also holds an important dissent trait. If indeed Gothic has been seen as a form of social critique, when used by female writers this critique characteristic is stressed even more. The disguise offered by the gothic does not only refer to the diffuse choice of a pseudonym, but it also applies to the displacement strategy. Indeed, placing a story in a different time and space from the author's circumstances allows her an effective way to indirectly express dissent. As early as 1983, in her publication *Female Gothic* Sukenich had equated female gothic adaptability to a form of protest against society: 'the gothic world is one of nightmare, and the nightmare is created by the individual in conflict with the values of her society and her prescribed role. It is also created by women writers writing within a literary tradition which reveals limitation and transcendence. Ambiguity rules such world'.⁴⁰ In GV/AA gothic is the vehicle through which express discontent towards society, where this feeling equally applies to women's situation in society and to the Danes situation under Nazi occupation. What characterizes both situations is an unjustified position of submission, allegorically represented by the two 'canary birds', the main characters Zosine and Lucan. Gothic offers a way to display through the story the injustice of a condition of submission, by using the gothic strategy of displaying conflicts. Blixen use of gothic suggests her awareness of the form as a critical tool, thus confirming her place in a long tradition of women writers.

³⁹ Sukenich, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Fleenor, p. 7.

Part 2: When Hyggeligt becomes Uhyggeligt – Gothic in *Gengældenses Veje / The Angelic Avengers*

GV/AA is a story that moves between opposites, continuously juxtaposing good and evil, truth and falsehood, and light and darkness. The strategy of juxtaposing conflicting elements starts from the title of the novel itself, *The Angelic Avengers*, which juxtaposes two terms from different spheres of significance, *angelic* and *avengers*. This coexistence of opposing concepts expresses Blixen's own understanding of gothic as something that could express both sides of life. When after the publication of her first book Blixen was asked to define gothic, and to explain her choice for a genre that at the time, 1934, was not the most popular, she stated: '[Gotisk er] noget, der baade er ophøjet og kan slaa ud i Spøg og Spot, i Djævlerier og Mystik [Gothic is something that is elevated and can yet break out in joke and mockery, devilish things and mystique]'.⁴¹ Her understanding of gothic thus is exactly that of being the genre that better represents life's dualism, the necessary co-presence of light and darkness makes it the ideal space for clashing oppositions. Significantly, Blixen's English title choice – and its implicit gothic linguistic game – which an attentive reader could interpret as an intentional engagement with the gothic tradition, is absent from the Danish version of the title, where it would have been lost, considering the lack of specifically gothic cultural references.

The Gothic coexistence of opposing elements also means that in GV/AA nothing is what it appears to be, and everything seems to contradict everything else. The employment of gothic discourse conveys this permanent unreliability of the narration, mirroring, the unreliability of current historical discourses. This duplicity and uncertainty is narratively represented by the Reverend Pennhallow, who covers under his clerical disguise a worship for the devil which he practices by being the head of a women trafficking organization. Even in the final moments of his defeat, when Olympia orders him to put the rope he had planned to use on Zosine and Lucan around his own neck, he underlines this duplicity: 'Om min hals? [...] Ja, jeg skal lægge det om min Hals. Jeg kan have Lyst til selv at føle, hvordan det fornemmes der. Det er en pyntelig Præstekrave'.⁴²

⁴¹ Blixen quoted in Juhl, p. 133.

⁴² GV, p. 211/ 'Round my neck? [...] Aye, I will put it round my neck. I have a mind to know for myself how it feels there. It is a graceful clergyman's collar' AA, p. 261.

Because of this combination of religion and diabolic belief, it can be argued that the reverend Pennhallow embodies the gothic strategy of clashing conflicts himself.

Pennhallow also functions in the narrative, as the element that introduces, gradually, the uncanny. Indeed, the way GV/AA employs the gothic discourse by clashing oppositions is figuratively represented by making the familiar uncanny. For example, since the moment in which he is introduced in the novel, Pennhallow's depiction is quite ambiguous: 'En from Herre, en Præst, Pastor Pennhallow og hans Frue ønsker, for at gøre en god Gerning, at tage to dannede, ubemidlede unge Piger i Huset, uden Vederlag, og at undervise og uddanne dem der'.⁴³ Even in these introductory lines there is something disturbing – the idea of receiving the girls in order to educate and perfect them is an introduction to Pennhallow's idea of creating a race of womanhood characterized by his own criteria. Despite Pennhallow's paternalistic and seemingly comforting approach to Zosine and Lucan, after their first meeting with him: 'De to unge Piger havde ikke været aldeles besluttede paa at tage imod Pastor Pennhallows Tilbud'.⁴⁴ This moment of indecision is important – not only does it signal the girls' subconscious understanding that there is something odd about the old man – it also represents an underlined resistance to accept the umpteenth decision imposed upon them by a male. When they move to London, after the escape from Tortuga, both Zosine and Lucan have lost their social status – Lucan is no longer a governess, Zosine is no longer an heiress, and the city becomes the place of displacement where the girls struggle in starting to define their own identity. London also becomes the place where they become commodities. While staying in London could have represented an alternative to a life as subordinate subjects, going with Pennhallow symbolizes their entrapment in a patriarchal social system:

Der var efter deres Møde med Pastor Pennhallow, kommet en egen Stilhed eller Undseelse mellem de to Piger. De fantaserede ikke længere om Aftenen spøgende efter deres Fremtid. De følte, at Terningerne var kastede, og de havde længe været

⁴³ GV, p. 72/ 'A worthy, pious and learned gentleman, the Reverend Pennhallow, and his lady, to do a good deed, will receive, free of charge, two well-bred girls of limited means into their own house, and will teach and perfect them there' AA, p. 80.

⁴⁴ GV, p. 75/ 'the two girls [...] had not made up their minds whether to accept the Reverend's Pennhallow's offer or no' AA, p. 84.

forberedt paa en saadan Situation. Men det var nu for dem, som om de var kommet i et andet Menneskes Magt.⁴⁵

Pennahallow quickly wins the girls' trust, to the point of convincing them to call him and his wife father and mother, and Zosine and Lucan believe in their foster parents' devotion: 'Det var tydeligt, at de var deres Plejeforældre Ganske uunderværlige, en dyrebar Besiddelse i deres ensom Liv, deres Øjestene'.⁴⁶ The most disturbing subversion of GV/AA, and what makes it a gothic text, is this subversion of sacred spaces and assumptions, such as the idea of the safety of the house and the idea of family love— even if from foster parents. And as Kastbjerg has underlined, Mr Pennahallow is 'an eerily powerful figure, a study of evil unmatched in Danish literature, as he constantly appropriates the discourse, symbols and attire of Christianity to further his own cause'.⁴⁷ As previously analysed,⁴⁸ Mr Pennahallow in re-appropriating and subverting those Western pillars of safety and security – such as Church and family – also represents the unreliable narrator. And when comparing the character to the experience of Nazi Berlin described in Blixen's *Letters*, he can be interpreted as a narrative embodiment of religious and political fanaticism.

While the first part of the novel 'To veninder' (Danish version)/ 'Rose-Strewn Roads and Thorny Paths' (English version) pastiches the tradition of Sentimental Romance and Victorian novel – drawing from sources such as *Jane Eyre* and *Northanger Abbey* (1817) – the proper gothic element is introduced with the appearance of Pennahallow and the main characters' move to France, to the reverend's farm Saint-Barbe. The change of status of the girls' situation from freedom to captivity is signaled, in the English version, by the title of this part of the book: 'The canary birds (while the Danish version is titled 'Saint-Barbe'). Saint-Barbe is appropriately isolated from the rest of civilization: 'Nogle Mil fra den lille By Lunel o gen halv Mil fra Landsbyen Peryac'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ GV, pp. 76-77/ 'Since their meeting with the old clergyman peculiar silence or shyness had come upon the two girls. They no longer, in the evening, laughingly drew up pictures of the future. They felt the dice to be thrown. And in a strange way it seemed to them that they themselves had had nothing to do with the event. They had got into the power of another person' AA, p. 85.

⁴⁶ GV, p. 88/ 'It had soon become obvious to the girls that they were indispensable to the old people, yes, that they were indeed their most precious belonging and the apple of their eyes' AA, p. 98.

⁴⁷ Kastbjerg, p. 340.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ GV, p. 81/ 'six miles from the small town of Lunel, and about a mile and a half from the village of Peryac' AA, p. 89.

Displaying again the mechanism of subverting the familiar into the uncanny, Saint-Barbe is depicted as a 'lyserødt Hus'/pink house⁵⁰ that after the Pennhallow's arrival has lost its French esprit: 'det franske Forpagterhus havde faaet et smukt, engelsk Præg'/ 'the old French farmhouse had taken on a pretty English look' with reassuring 'bibelske Billeder paa Væggene' / 'biblical picture on the walls'.⁵¹ However, the house 'havde haft en ejendommeligt Historie' / 'had a strange history' because at the time of the Revolution a tragedy had taken place there, which had lead the mistress of Joliet, the aristocratic estate to which Saint-Barbe belonged, to leave the house to itself because 'Det var, sagde hun, et af Gud sel forbandet Sted'/'there was, she said, a curse on the house'.⁵² As David Punter writes:

Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, pictures, spaces and themes: horrors become explicitly located within the world of the contemporary reader [...] the exotic and historical settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the reader in earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world.⁵³

In GV/AA with those conflicting images of homely comforts and hinted (and hidden) tragedy, the gothic tale is launched. To complete the gothic picture, Saint-Barbe is fully-equipped with fittingly gothic inhabitants. Baptistine Labarre, the housekeeper and owner of Saint-Barbe is the older, moody lady who inherited the house, and its curse, and is seen by the villagers like an outcast. The other inhabitant of Saint-Barbe is Clon, also a suitably gothic character, as the naïve, young man fallen into the trap of the villain and too weak to react by imposing his own will. Through Clon Blixen conveys several images from the gothic tradition, for example the character is heavily inspired by the character of Felipe from Stevenson's gothic short story 'Olalla' (1855). When Lucan in the middle of the night wanders in the garden for a walk: 'Stansede hun forskrækket ved inde fra Skuret [...] at høre et langtrukken Stønnen eller Jamren, som om et Menneske var spærret inde der'. Here Lucan finds Clon: 'Han syntes at være ude af Stand til at rejese og Ganske vild

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ GV, p. 83/AA, p. 91.

⁵² GV, p. 81/AA, p. 89.

⁵³ Punter, David and Byron, Glennis, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.26.

af Rædsel, han skælvede fra Hoved til Fod, og blev ved med at jamre og stønne sagte'.⁵⁴ Clon is characterized by ambiguous behaviors, he is shy and distrustful of the girls, but also boasts to them: 'Han var meget stolt af sine svære Kræfter of forklarede alvorligt, at han kunde grave en Grav hurtigere og bedre end selve Graveren i Peryac'.⁵⁵

The odd reference to the grave, that suggests Clon's involvement in the homicide of Rosa – the ghost girl that Zosine and Lucan will seek to avenge – is almost casually dropped in an idyllic scene of gardening between Lucan and Clon, once again playing with opposites and contrasting images in order to create a remotely disturbing image: 'En smuk, skyfri Dag var hun og Clon alene og travlt beskæftiget i Melonbedet'.⁵⁶ The gardening idyll is disrupted when Lucan finds Clon torturing a squirrel (in a scene that deliberately echoes Olalla's exact same scene)⁵⁷ and she scolds him by reminding him of a Christian inspired Sermon she gave him the day before: 'husker du ikke, hvad jeg sagde dig i Gaar om ham, som ser alt? Hvad vilde han vel sige, hvis han saa dig pine et forsvarsløst Væsen, der intet har gjort dig?'.⁵⁸ That Clon misunderstands God for Mr Penhallow is clear when he replies: 'Han vil nettop synes godt om det'.⁵⁹ At this stage of the narration the girls are still unaware of their dangerous situation, so Clon's behavior serves the function of introducing them to disturbing feelings of mistrust, which he enhances when he asks Lucan when she and Zosine will go away: 'Bort! Af sted! Væk! ... Ligesom de andre Frøkener, der var her før!'.⁶⁰

Saint-Barbe's initial depiction as an idyllic pink farm where the girls lead a serene existence under the vigilant surveillance and loving care of their guardians the Pennhallow, quite soon starts to inspire some anxiety in the girls : 'Og der var paa Sainte-Barbe noget, som Lucan ikke kunde forklare sig selv. Undertiden forekom det hende, som

⁵⁴ GV, p. 93/'she stopped, terrified at hearing a long, low wail from inside it. It sounded as if a human being had been shut up there' / '[he] seemed to be beside himself with terror, and unable to rise. He trembled from head to foot, and kept on crying hoarsely and miserably' AA, p. 105.

⁵⁵ GV, p. 91/'He was very proud of his great strength, and haughtily confided to the girls that he could make a grave quicker than the grave-digger of Peryac himself' AA, p. 102.

⁵⁶ GV, p. 91/'on a beautiful, cloudless day she and Clon were alone and at work in the melon beds' AA, p. 103.

⁵⁷ 'By some swiftness or dexterity the lad captured a squirrel in a tree top [...] I saw him drop to the ground and crouch there, crying aloud like a child [...] but as I bettered my pace to draw near, the cry of the squirrel knocked upon my heart', Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Olalla* (London: Penguin Little Black Classics, 2015), p. 13.

⁵⁸ GV, p. 92/ 'do you remember what I told you yesterday of Him, who sees all? What would He say to you, do you think, if he saw you torturing a meek creature which has done you no harm?' AA, p. 104.

⁵⁹ 'would He not just like it? Would He not just think it a fine thing?' Ibid.

⁶⁰ 'Away! Off!...away from here! Like the other Mesdemoiselles, who were here before' Ibid.

om Huset havde en hemmelig Beboer, som hun ikke havde set'.⁶¹ Kastbjerg has interestingly noted that the name Saint-Barbe could refer to the tale of Bluebeard, given Pennhallow's role. Bluebeard is also a favourite tale in feminist gothic literary criticism, as a metaphor it adapts well to the representation of the imprisonment and exploitation of women in a patriarchal society. For example, Diana Wallace states that 'The basic structural elements of the Bluebeard story are also those of a typical Female Gothic plot. The bluebardesque figure who murders or imprison his wife appears repeatedly: Radcliffe's Mazzini and Montoni, Bronte's Rochester, Austen's spoof villain General Tilney, and du Maurier Maxim'.⁶² Besides Saint-Barbe, all the houses in GV/AA have this gothic ambiguous atmosphere lingering about them.

The house in GV/AA is always haunted, by a ghost (Mr Ambrose's wife in his house, and Rosa in Saint-Barbe), an upcoming financial disaster (Tortuga), or by human evil (Saint-Barbe). It is not only the subversion of the safety of the domestic space that makes the houses gothic in GV/AA, it is mostly the absence of a space that feels safe that creates the underlining feeling of constant anxiety in the novel. The underlining feeling of unsafety is a constant feature of the text, the reader feels that there is always something that is not quite right – yet it is difficult to grasp what it is. As Eugenia Delamotte points out 'Not knowing for sure is the primary source of gothic terror'.⁶³ After the girls' discovery of the letter that testifies Rosa's murder, Saint-Barbe becomes the proper gothic house, almost merging with the Pennhallows themselves: 'De kan høre os gennem Dørene. De er her inde, selv om vi ikke ser dem!' / 'they can hear us through the walls. They will be here even if we do not see them'– Saint-Barbe now is 'Morderhus, der lukkede sig om demtil alle sider' / 'the house of murder, which closed round them on all sides'.⁶⁴ And the girls are suddenly seized with 'Bevidstheden om Mørket omkring Huset'.⁶⁵ Darkness/ Mørket is a term that recurs constantly in the last part of the novel, as to underline and constantly remind the reader of the oppressive feeling of danger experienced by the girls. After their decision to stay, in order to avenge Rosa, despite the

⁶¹ GV, p. 102/ 'And yet there was at Saint-Barbe something that Lucan could not explain to herself. At times it seemed to her as if the house had a secret inhabitant on whom she had never set eyes' AA, p. 116.

⁶² Wallace, Diana 'Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 2004, Vol.6(1), p.57-68, p. 59.

⁶³ DeLamotte, Eugenia, *Perils of the Night: a Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 48.

⁶⁴ GV, p. 157/AA, p. 188.

⁶⁵ GV, p.1 58/ 'the consciousness of the darkness round the house' AA, p. 190.

Pennhallows awareness of their discovery, the girls start playing a game of deception with the old reverend and the chapter dedicated to this is significantly titled ‘Masker/Masks’. The themes of masks, theatre, masquerade, and deception is underlined throughout the whole novel, with several scenes and references, starting already from Zosine’s ball party in the first part of the novel. The last part of the novel, all built on the girls decision to stay and avenge Rosa, is mainly structured around deceptions and masks, putting on stage the same idyllic life that the girls had carried on so far with the Pennhallows– although they all know that the truth has been uncovered. This set up of domestic terror that mirrors the artificiality of social conventions, reminds of Victorian gothic tales, such as *The Woman in White* or *Lady Audley’s Secret* but also more recent novels such as *Rebecca*. GV/AA share with those texts the same concern– as Diana Wallace writes: ‘The Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women’s powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy’.⁶⁶

Masks and deceptions are also discussed by the characters themselves in GV/AA, for example Zosine declares ‘Jo, det er en lystig Maskerade! [...] Vi har Masker paa, og de gamle har Masker paa!’.⁶⁷ GV/AA constantly plays on doubles, unmasking and revelations, mirroring the hypocrisy of bourgeois social conventions, where nothing is what it appears to be. For example, when the policemen arrive in Saint-Barbe to question Mr Pennhallow, the language and the images used to represent the Judge of Lunel expresses this internal dichotomy between wanting to believe in the appearances, and sensing the truth: ‘Dommeren fra Lunel var en meget smuk, gammel Herre med sølhvidt, bølget Haar. Han førte sig med Anstad, men syntes bag denne urolig elle oprørt’. After being convinced by Pennhallow’s defence, or wanting to be convinced, he defines Saint-Barbe as et ‘Eksempel paa menneskelige Dyder’⁶⁸ – the perfect Victorian house for the sweet angels that inhabit it.

⁶⁶ Wallace, p. 57.

⁶⁷ GV, p. 166/AA, p. 201.

⁶⁸ GV, p. 126/‘The judge of Lunel was a handsome old gentleman with silvery hair. He carried himself out with grace and dignity, but he appeared alarmed and revolted’/ ‘a noble example of high human and domestic virtues’ AA, p. 149.

Women in *Gengældens Veje/The Angelic Avengers: Wives, Prostitutes, Ghosts, and Rebellious Angels*

The gothic mode's use of displaying conflicts in GV/AA finds its best expression in the depiction of femininity. The novel displays a varied range of female characters each one representing an aspect of femininity, and each one contributing to an overall depiction that celebrates femininity's essential and powerful duplicity. The main characters of GV/AA represents two very different types of women, the introvert and melancholic Lucan, and the exuberant and lively Zosine. However, it is not only their character that establishes their difference – it is most of all their different social background. Following the structure of binary oppositions, GV/AA chooses to depict two girls from different social spheres in order to give a more comprehensive picture of what it meant to be a woman in the late 19th century, and thus providing a depiction that aims to be inclusive of various social situations.

Women in GV/AA are divided into two main categories: those who define themselves *in contrast* to a male influence, and those who define themselves *because of* their relation to a male. Those categories mirror Blixen's representation of women in her essay 'Daguerreotypier'/'Daguerreotypes' (1951), where she explained that 19th century society viewed women from three points of view: 'enten Skytsengle eller Husmødere, eller [...] Bajaderer'.⁶⁹ Those categories of women all 'deres Kald, deres Beretningelse og deres Betydning i Forholdet til Manden',⁷⁰ but the only woman who did not, and therefore lived outside patriarchal categories of recognition, was, according to Blixen, the witch/heksen who 'eksisterede uafhængig af Manden og havde sit Tyngdepunkt i sig selv'.⁷¹ In GV/AA those categories are all represented: Lucan and Zosine are trained to become guardian angels, Mrs Pennhallow is the housewife, Rosa the prostitute, and Olympia the witch. However, all of those roles are only performances, and not interiorized by the characters – Lucan and Zosine's training to be submissive angel is subverted by their discovery of the brutalities of St Barbe, Mrs Pennhallow housewife role is a façade, and Rosa becomes a ghost rather than being a prostitute. Olympia is the only character that fulfils her individuality, significantly because of her displacement from

⁶⁹ *Essays*, p. 35/ 'either guardian angels or housewives or, [...] priestesses of pleasure' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 29.

⁷⁰ *Essays*, p. 39/'had her calling, her justification, and her importance in relationship to man' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 32.

⁷¹ *Essays*, p. 39/'existed independently of a man and had her own center of gravity' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 33.

a Western Patriarchal system of morality. The exploration of female sexuality, its abuse, fear and repression in Victorian society, symbolizes in GV/AA a broader plea for individuals to have the freedom to affirm themselves. Publishing such a story in a moment where the Danish readership was experiencing another kind of repression, has a twofold function. It provides them, on a superficial level, with a cathartic, classic terror tale that eventually ends with a seemingly happy ending, as Hans Brix noted in the first analysis of the book: 'Læserne lever op igen i sin egen fredelig stol i sin egen hyggelige stue. Hans hår falder til hvile'.⁷² On the other hand, the text seems to use the parallelism to raise the reader's awareness of a situation that for women was still similarly limiting and oppressive. The female body in GV/AA becomes a commodity, and this is evident in the focal point of the novel being Mr Pennhallows trafficking of women. This theme of commodification is also repeated with Olympia's story of sexual slavery in the family where she worked as a maid, and it is introduced at the very beginning of the book with Lucan's description. As sexuality has such an important role in the final message of the novel, it is significant thus that already in the opening lines of it, so much emphasis is put on Lucan's appearance. The depiction plays on stereotypical feminine attribute, such as: 'hendes gyldne Haar'.⁷³ The main characters' body and their blooming sexuality will be in the story their main source of danger, but also their source of self-affirmation. Before becoming a governess, Lucan was a companion for a rich old lady, covering so the few available professions for a woman of her background at her time. The powerful creative function of using those two professions in order to discuss women's position had already been explored by two famous gothic novels that Blixen herself read and assimilated.⁷⁴ Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. It is important to notice the variety of gothic models Blixen refers to in order to fully grasp the potential for subversion she saw in the gothic form, as a flexible genre adaptable to various historical period and social issues.

The description of the young, naïve and hopeful Lucan follows the first part of the description of the book, and echoes many other young female characters in the

⁷² [The reader comes back to his peaceful armchair in his cosy living room. His hair is no longer standing on end] Brix, p. 235.

⁷³ GV, p. 15/ 'her rich golden hair' AA, p. 3. The English version also includes her 'delicate bosom'(3) and her 'slim waist'(3), in the list of feminine attributes.

⁷⁴ As reported by Bondesson, Pia, *Karen Blixen's Bogsamling på Rungstedlund: en Katalog* (København: Gyldendal, 1982) which documents the content of Blixen's library at Rungstedlund. *Jamaica Inn* in particular, Bondesson reports, contains several of Blixen's pencil notes on the margin, p.62 and p.53.

tradition of romance and sentimental novel: 'Men hun var saa ung, at hun, gennem alt, I sit Hjerte bevarede Troen paa, at noget smukt og lykkeligt var i Vente for hende. "Det bliver snart alt sammen helt anderledes", tænkte hun'.⁷⁵ But it also serves the purpose of giving the story a certain circularity. The book opens on the description of an innocent, yet unfortunate heroine, who wishes for that 'it will soon be all otherwise', and ends with the 'otherwise' resolved in a happy marriage (it will be discuss further whether marriage is the desirable solution). However, how the happy ending is reached is through the horrors of a proper gothic tale. Opening the book on this sentimental note also prepares the text to play on the two main opposition of the story: innocence and evil, launching the main strategy of the text of building on opposition and contrast.

The first menace encountered by Lucan comes from her employer, Mr Armworthy. The situation – an employer falling for her governess – would seem to strongly recall Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, however Blixen subverts it. Mr Armworthy, fittingly in the initial pastiche of romance and sentimental novel, is at first depicted as a melodramatic hero– widower, with a blind son, unable to be happy again. And also his initial proposal starts by employing a sentimental discourse, for example when he states that the strength of his feelings has 'overrasket og foruroliget migselv'/'surprised and alarmed' him, and that it is for him 'Det er mig Ganske uventet, at min hele Skæbne, om jeg maa bruge dette Ord, skal være afhængig a fen anden Person'/'an extraordinary thing to realize that my whole destiny, if I may use that word, should depend upon another person'. The suspicion that this might not be a wedding proposal is installed in the reader when Mr Armworthy starts talking about the importance of having 'fast materielt Grundlag'/'proper material foundation'⁷⁶ and of his desire to safeguard Lucan's existence. He eventually proposes to Lucan to become his mistress, offering her a pretty little house– conveniently out of town – where she can grow 'Deres smukke musikalske Anlæg',⁷⁷ entertain herself with gardening, flower arrangement and all things necessary to make a woman feminine enough – according to his criteria. Mr Armorthys' proposal is not only outrageous for Lucan as a Victorian woman with defined values about virtue, it is – most of all – the ultimate threat to the affirmation of her individuality. In the pages preceding

⁷⁵ GV, p. 15/'But she was so young that, through solitude and depression, in her heart she preserved an invincible faith in something beautiful and happy which must be awaiting her somewhere in the world. 'It will soon be otherwise', she thought' AA, p. 3.

⁷⁶ GV, p. 23/AA, p. 14.

⁷⁷ GV, p. 23/'her pretty talent for music' AA, p. 15.

this proposal indeed, Lucan had believed that Mr Armworthy was about to propose, and – after a prolonged session of self- inquisition, had ultimately decided not to marry, despite the advantages of such a union for a woman in her position– at the idea of a loveless marriage ‘blev hun kold, som om hun var steget ned i en Kælder’.⁷⁸ It is important to notice that despite her innocence and inexperience, Lucan already starts off the novel, and her journey towards self-affirmation, by deciding to refuse what would seem the most sensible, and socially acceptable, decision: ‘det forekom hende, at alle de Mennesker, hun kendte, hvis hun havde fortalt dem om hæs Tilbud, vilde havde raadet hende til at tage imod det’.⁷⁹

That a whole chapter, although very brief, is dedicated to Lucan’s self-inquisition upon an hypothetical proposal, serves the purpose of making the real proposal of Mr Armworthy even more shocking. It also mirrors the chapter ‘Zosines beslutning’/‘Zosine’s resolution’, in part two of the book that deals with Zosine’s decision to remain at Saint-Barbe to avenge Rosa. The parallel between the chapters, although they concern different decisions, mirrors the characters fundamental difference and different approach to life, as well as reflecting different reactions to patriarchy: Lucan escapes, Zosine seeks revenge: both are signs of dissent against being forced into a social role. This difference in approach also mirrors their different social background: Lucan deals with practical problems, Zosine is occupied with fighting noble ideals, a difference that is expressed by Zosine, when she differentiates her and Lucan’s kind of courage: ‘der her i Verden er to Slags Mod. Han kaldte dem de adelige og det borgelige Mod [...] den ene Slags Mod har den Mand der ikke frygter Døden selv, naar det gælder, hvad han har kært. Den anden Slags Mod er at elske Faren’.⁸⁰

It is fundamental that the novel starts off with Lucan’s flight from Mr Armworthy’s proposal, as it introduces the reader to the main theme of the novel– the exploitation of the female’s body. Mr Armworthy’s proposal turns him from the melodramatic hero into the first villain of the novel, threatening to objectify Lucan

⁷⁸ GV, p. 20/ ‘she grew cold, as she had descended into a cellar’ AA, p. 10.

⁷⁹ GV, p. 19/‘It seemed to her that all the people she knew, if she had told them about this offer, would have advised her to accept’ AA, p. 8.

⁸⁰ GV, p. 168/ ‘In this world there are two kinds of courage. The bourgeois courage belongs to the man who, without trembling, will give his life to a cause dear or sacred to him. But the aristocrats loves danger for its own sake’ AA, p. 203.

according to his need. Without being explicit in any way, the text evokes the menace of rape and sexual possession:

Hans Øjne hvilede paa den unge Piges Skikkelse [...] Han var i dette Øjeblik stolt, baade af hende, som var saa yndig og uskyldig, og af sit eget Herredømme over hende. Han vendte igen Blikket bort for ikke at fristes til at tage hende I sine Arme og trykke det unge, blomstrende Legeme til sig.⁸¹

The will to possess Lucan and confining her in a doll's house, grotesquely fully-equipped with supposedly womanly objects and activities, makes Mr Armworthy the first gothic villain in the novel. Recurring to the gothic discourse GV/AA continuously subverts familiar and expectedly harmless situations and people, into uncanny and unexpected places of evil. Evil is found in domestic situations, and this serves the purpose of criticizing the very nucleus of the bourgeois, patriarchal society. Blixen adds a further level of subversion to the gothic discourse though, wandering away from its conventions. This first villain, after his threat, is depicted as a ridiculous man suffocated by his own social restrictions, as to underline the absurdity and the effects of repressed sexuality: 'Et Godnatkys vilde maaske ikke være mere end min Ret. Men jeg vil ikke hævde denne Ret nu, og ikke her. Snart – snart haaber jeg at kunne kræve det[...] Han brød brat af. Den satte, tilbageholdende Mands Ansigt farves dybt rødt, han blev tavs og glemte at følge den unge Pige til Døren'.⁸²

There is a further subversion, this time of a romantic discourse, during Lucan's escape from Mr Armworthy. The window from which she escapes has 'en Altan, og en gammel Vedbend snoede sig fr Jorden helt op om dens Balaustrede. Hun havde før, i Leg, tænkt paa, at man ad den, som en stige, kunde komme op til hendes Værelse'.⁸³ The balcony that in Lucan's girlish dreams should have brought her love, will be instead the

⁸¹ GV, p. 24/ 'His eyes rested upon the young girls form [...] He felt, at his moment, proud both of her, who was so lovely and innocent, and of his own power over her. Once more he turned away his eyes, so as not to be tempted to take her in his arms, and to press that delicate, pure and blooming body to him' AA, p. 15.

⁸² GV, p.25/ 'A goodnight kiss might perhaps be no more than my right. But I will not claim it here, and not at the present moment. Soon [...] I might be claiming more than.. He stopped. The face of the sedate and reserved, colored into a deep, burning red; his high fine stock suddenly appeared to have become too tight for him; he grew silent, and forgot to accompany the girl to the door' AA, p. 17.

⁸³ GV, p. 27/ 'a balcony, and an old ivy twined its strong stems all the way from the ground to the balaustrade. She had, before now, playfully pictured to herself how, by these, as by the steps of a ladder, Romeo might climb to her room' AA, p. 19.

medium through which escape from the biggest threat she has met so far – a man claiming to possess her. While descending the ivy Lucan's skirt get caught in the foliage og blev løftet op over hendes Knæ, saa at hun i Mørket, med blussende Kinder, tænkte:”det et godt, ingen kan se mig”.⁸⁴ This image introduces the idea of shame of the protagonist's own body that will recur in the story when the body becomes a commodity through a man's eyes. Otherwise the body is the source of affirmation of one's individuality – as it is for Olympia. The story constantly moves between the main characters' consciousness of their own femininity - ‘men hun var en ung Pige og vidste, at hun var smuk’⁸⁵– and the shame of it. It will be only through the ultimate threat of being sold as commodities that the girls will use the same thing that puts them into danger – their being female – as a weapon to affirm their individuality.

Women in GV/AA are often compared to flowers throughout the novel,⁸⁶ and the choice of the flowery imagery represents the multifaceted aspects of femininity. This comparison is applied to the characters when they are conscious of their sexuality, such as Zosine and Lucan while they are dancing, or Olympia in her young days. While those women are defined in their own feminine essence– whose multifaceted subjectivity is figuratively represented by flowers – Mrs Pennhallow in denying her own feminine being is depicted as grey, or colorless Mrs Pennhallow first appearance mirrors her husband/brother's function of introducing the uncanny and danger. During Lucan's first flight from Mr Armworthy, Mrs Pennhallow seems to appear magically:

Taaen var blevet tættere, og Dampen fra Hestene blandede sig med den. I det same blev hun opmærksom paa en Dame, som stod og saa paa hende. Damen var klædt i graat og havde et lille graat Slør paa Hatten. Hun var kommet saa lydløst, at det for den unde Pige saa ud, som om hun var eet med Morgendisens, og var traadt lige ud af den.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ ‘and was lifted over her knee, so that, in the dark, with burning cheeks she thought ‘it is a good thing that nobody can see me!’ Ibid.

⁸⁵ GV, p. 22/ ‘she was a young girl, and she could not fail to know that she was pretty’ AA, p .11.

⁸⁶ See chapter 5.

⁸⁷ GV, pp. 31-32/ ‘the mist had grown thicker, and the steam from the horses mixed with it. At the same moment she became aware of a lady who stood and looked at her. The lady was dressed in grey and had a small grey veil on her bonnet. She had come so noiselessly that it seemed to the young girl that she must be one with the morning mist, and had just stepped out of it’ AA, p. 25.

Mrs Pennhallow's apparition subverts the traditional image of a fairy godmother coming to rescue the heroine in time of distress, whereas she has, in fact, the very function of introducing misery to Lucan's path. Mrs Pennhallow's greyness represents the denial of her own subjectivity in blindly following her husband/brother. The Pennhallows' incestuous relationship seems to metaphorically hint at the injustice of a relationship based on such premises, which denies one of the two individuals to develop, outclassing her in a constant position of submission. Figuratively this suppression of subjectivity is represented in her body features, almost a caricature in the exaggerate lacking of any feminine traits: '[Hun var] kantet og flatbrystet, med et langt Ansigt og en bred Næse. Det saa ud, som om hun havde altfor mange Tænder, til at der kunde være Plads til dem i hendes Mund. Hendes Ansigt og Hænder havde næsten samme graa Farve som hendes Hat og Shawl'.⁸⁸ Mrs Pennhallow's servitude to her husband makes her lose the connection to her own body, and she seems to represent Hélène Cixous' 'false woman', as she described her in 'The Laugh of the Medusa': 'A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow'.⁸⁹ The girls' distance from Mrs Pennhallow's life choices is represented in their difficulty in relating to her, sensing the unnatural injustice of her situation, even before knowing the truth about her: 'Nej, hun er ikke lykkelig',⁹⁰ says Zosine after their first meeting, and at the end of the novel, after having learnt that she committed suicide after the death of her husband, Lucan notes 'Den arme- tænkte Lucan - hun kunde ikke overleve ham! Men i sin sidste Stund, da han talte til os, nævnede han ikke hendes Navn'.⁹¹ When during their stay at Saint-Barbe the Pennhallows invites the girls to call them mother and father 'the girls did indeed at times, in a kind of gratitude, when speaking to Mrs Pennhallow, make use of the word 'Mother'- although they did so somewhat shyly or reluctantly, for there was in the dry and spare figure of the old woman but little of the attributes which one generally attaches to that sweet and sacred name'.⁹² Mrs Pennhallow's

⁸⁸ GV, p. 32/ 'She was small, angular and flat-breasted, with a long face and a broad, flat nose. She had such big and long teeth that there hardly seemed to be room for them in her mouth. Her face and hands were almost as grey as her hat and shawl' AA, p. 26.

⁸⁹ Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *Signs*, 1 July 1976, Vol.1(4), pp. 875-893, p.880.

⁹⁰ GV, p. 77/ 'She seems to me so unhappy' AA, p. 86.

⁹¹ GV, p. 231/ 'Alas [...] poor unhappy woman! She could not bear to live when he had died. But in his last hour, when he spoke to us, he did not mention her name' AA, p. 288.

⁹² AA, p. 99. Interestingly, this short paragraph is absent from the Danish version. It could be argued that this particular connotation of Mrs Pennhallow, a sort of gothic distortion of motherhood, was perhaps

absence of body contrasts with Olympia's corporality, which, as discussed in Chapter 5, is an inspiring and maternal haven to the girls. The disconnection between body and individuality also translates in the awkwardness of Mrs Pennhallow's behaviour when teaching the girls:

Præstens frue havde intet af hans magnetiske og inspirerende Kraft eller af hans tankefulde Ro. Alt, hvad hun foretog sig, gik ligesom stødvis [...] Dog kunde Bøgerne slaa Gnister ogsaa af den fladbrystede, kejtede gamle Kvinde, og hun underviste da i en Art Herykkelse [...] hun kunde ogsaa til Tider gaa helt i Staa i Undervisningen.⁹³

Mrs Pennhallow is not moved by her own curiosity towards knowledge, but is mimicking her husband, a man, therefore appropriating a discourse that does not belong to her individuality. Mrs Pennhallow is the representation of a woman who has lost sight of her own feminine individuality – metaphorically depicted with ‘flat-breasted chest’- in her choice of blindly following her husband. By contrast, Olympia's body, as well as the girls' body, are constantly celebrated in their feminine characteristics: beautiful, big, motherly, womanly. Mrs Pennhallow's speech about women reflects exactly this conflict and rejection of her own self. She starts by accusing the Catholic Church of being ‘formørkede Religion’ for worshipping a woman ‘Dette er Gudsbespottelse’.⁹⁴

Manden [...] er skabt i Guds Billede, det staar at læse i Skriften. Men Kvinden er den hæsligste af alle Skabninger. Den nøgne Kvinde er saa afskyelig, at Tanken viger tilbage for hende. Aldrig har jeg vovet virkelig at tænke paa den nøgne Kvinde. Hvis det var hændt mig, at jeg havde set mig selv nøgen i et Spejl, da maatte jeg havde lukket mig inde i et mørkt Værelse for Resten af mit Liv. Kvindernes særligt Funktioner er saa vederstyggelige, at de selv, imellem sig, kun hviskende kan omtale dem. Det er en rædsom Lod for et menneskeligt Væsen

considered by the author as more fitting for an audience that was more used to a gothic discourse, such as the Anglo American one, rather than the Danish one.

⁹³ GV, p. 87/ ‘Mrs Pennhallow had none of her husband's magnetic and inspiring power, nor his deep, thoughtful equanimity. Everything she undertook was done in fits and starts [...] all the same the books would strike sparks from the flat-breasted, awkward figure, too, and she would teach in a kind of passion or ecstasy, like the man, and, like him, lose herself in her occupation and forget the hours’ AA, p. 97.

⁹⁴ GV, p. 100/‘a benighted religion’ / ‘This is blasphemy!’ AA, p. 110.

saaledes at maatte foragte og gysse for sig selv og at vide, at der ikke findes nogen Udvej fra den Foragt og Gru. Nogle af os har maaske haabet, at Manden som den højere Skabning skulde vise Overbærenhed med vor Elendinghed.⁹⁵

Again, Mrs Pennhallow seems to embody Cixous' description of the result of Western patriarchal oppression on women: 'Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves'.⁹⁶ Mrs Pennhallow represents the result of a patriarchal and sexually repressed society that neglected women's individual femininity and feared sexuality. As opposed to Mrs Pennhallow's terror of the female body, the girls are always represented in various feminine bodily characteristics, the most emblematic scenes being the ones in which they look at their reflection in the mirror, or in each other's eyes, and re-discover themselves. This scene recurs significantly after happenings that have distressed their confidence as women, or make them feel ashamed of their femininity.

The first time the girls undress together is after Lucan arrives at Tortuga escaping from Mr Armworthy, the second one is after they discover at Saint-Barbe the Pennhallows business of women trafficking. There is also the significant scene just before their arrival at Saint-Barbe in which they decide to travel in their best frocks. In all scenes, the emphasis is put on their appearance, on their body or on their clothing. The pivotal function of this is to reinforce the feminine grounding aspect of their identity, which in all situations has been neglected, humiliated or put them in danger. The strength underlining this narrative choice is that of inspiring the courage to be true to oneself as the only way to lead a dignified life. In the climate of the German occupation, with deceptions and false narratives, this theme would have had a certain resonance. Interestingly, it is Mrs Pennhallow herself – the character that in the novel represents par excellence the neglected self – to state: 'Det er en rædsom Lod for et menneskeligt Væsen

⁹⁵ GV, p. 100/ 'Man [...] is made in the image of God, so it is written in the Scriptures. But woman is the most hideous of all creatures. The naked woman is so loathsome that thought shrinks from her. Never have I dared really to put up before myself the picture of a naked woman. If it happened to me to view myself naked in a looking glass, I should have had to stay in a dark room for the rest of my life. The particular functions of women are so abominable that even among themselves women will only mention them in a low voice. It is a terrible lot for a human being thus to despise and shrink from itself, and to know that there is no escape from the horror and debasement. A few of us, perhaps, have lived in the hope that man, as the higher being, would show forbearance with our misery' AA, p. 110.

⁹⁶ Cixous, p. 878.

saaledes at maatte foragte og gyse for sig selv'.⁹⁷ Mrs Pennhallow has assimilated her husband's gospel to the point that she becomes one with him, not as an equal partner, but as his shadow. To underline her willingness to submission, Mrs Pennhallow concludes her speech by stating how the only salvation for women lies in being redeemed by a man:

Manden [...] af hvem vi ikke turde haabe paa Tilgivelse, se, han tilgiver os ikke, men han tilbeder os! [...] dette er Naaden! Dette er Kvindens Oprejsning og Helliggørelse ved Manden. Det er det store Under i vor Tilværelse. [...] Og hvor maa vi da ikke [...] sidenefter og bestanding, indtil vi dør, take og tjene ham. Vi maa underkaste os ham og trælde for ham, hans Vilje maa være os alt. Ved hans Blik er vi blevet skønne.⁹⁸

Mrs Pennhallow represents the abnormality of socially imposed gender roles. Her role as wife should make her the representative of Blixen's 'Daguerreotypes' Victorian category of the ideal housewife – however, her representation is subverted and distorted in a gothic version of the housewife – an awkward and self loathing individual who has 'internalized the message to the point where she conceives of female existence as a Gothic hell.'⁹⁹

GV/AA contains some of Blixen's most forthright opinions regarding women's emancipation – if we consider the English title *The Angelic Avengers*, it can be interpreted as a subversion of the ideal of the Victorian angel of the house. The literary figure of the angel of the house, which characterized domestic imagery during Victorian period, was introduced by Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' in 1854¹⁰⁰, but made even more popular by Virginia Woolf's lecture 'Profession for Women' in 1931. Woolf's symbolic killing of the angel of the house, aimed to liberate women from social expectations of the social roles they were supposed to perform, granting them instead the freedom to be individuals. There is no copy of Woolf's oration in Blixen's library at

⁹⁷ GV, p. 100/ 'It is a terrible lot for a human being thus to despise and shrink from itself' AA, p. 114.

⁹⁸ GV, pp. 100-101/ 'Man, from whom we could not hope for forgiveness – see, he does not forgive us, he worships us [...] this is the rehabilitation and sanctification of woman by man. This is the great miracle of our existence [...] And must we not [...] after that moment forever thank and serve him? We must submit to him, and toil for him; his wish must be law to us. Through him we have become beautiful' AA, p. 115.

⁹⁹ Kastbjerg, p. 325.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Angel in the House' in Page Frederick, eds., *The poems of Coventry Patmore*/ edited with an introduction by Frederick Page (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp.61-210.

Rugstedllund,¹⁰¹ but she must have been familiar with the text, as the description of the angel of the house provided in her own 'Daguerreotypes' seem to dialogue with Woolf's 'Profession'. Woolf describes the angel of the house as such:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily [...] Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel.¹⁰²

And Blixen writes in 'Daguerreotypes' that: 'Det virkelige Livs Kvindeideal var en Blanding af Skytsenglen og Husmoderen [...] Skytsenglen – i Rendyrkning – stod himmelsk lysende ved Mandens Side og skærmede ham mod Mørkets Magter'.¹⁰³ The housewife, writes Blixen 'Husmoderen – enten det saa er Slotsfruen, Præstefruen eller Gaardmandskonen – er naturligvis mere haandgribelig. Men hun er dog i ærbart lange Klæder. I det 19.Aarhundrede [...] den daglige Tilværelse religion of Poesi under Kvindernes Departement'.¹⁰⁴

GV/AA's story is staged mainly inside, in a domestic space, and the stereotype of women as the angel, with her characteristic innocence and submission, is often reiterated. For example, when Olympia tells her story, she refers to her previous white mistresses as 'de Engle'/'the sweet angels',¹⁰⁵ Lucan and Zosine are often referred to as 'lamb', 'good child', or 'sweet innocent girl', in order to continuously reinforce the image of gracious, submissive, guardian angel. However, these traditional female roles and their representation, are subverted by gothic juxtaposition of opposites. So if Mrs Pennhallow becomes the gothic subversion of the housewife role she represents, Zosine and Lucan, the angels, become instead avengers. They refuse to turn their back to the danger of sexual

¹⁰¹ As reported in Pia Bondesson's catalogue of Blixen's library at Rungstedllund.

¹⁰² Woolf, Virginia, *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanich Publication, 1974), p.150.

¹⁰³ *Essays*, p. 35/ 'The ideal woman of real life was a mixture of guardian angel and housewife. [...] The guardian angel – unadulterated – shed a heavenly light at a man's side and protected him against the power of darkness' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ *Essays*, p. 36 /'whether she is the mistress of a castle or of a manse or is a farmer's wife – is naturally more tangible. But she nevertheless wears decent long garments. In the nineteenth century [...] the religion and poetry of everyday existence belonged to woman's domain' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ GV, p. 55/AA, p. 58.

exploitations and instead remain to fight back. If read carefully, most of the characters in GV/AA behave in contrast to a social imposition. Ambrose's sister, Olympia's first mistress – the sweet angel who has been kept ignorant of her sexuality by her father—rebels by taking the initiative of giving her son to Olympia as an act of absolution (for the damage caused by her father), Madame de Valfonds rebels against her husband and the ancient regime, Rosa rebels by burning her face, and Olympia by refusing to forget her cultural background and going to the woods to perform the rituals of her own faith. GV/AA is a novel that is a collection of stories, and a great part of those stories tell about acts, big and small, of rebellion and self-affirmation.

'Paa hvilken Side var den Døde Kvinde?':¹⁰⁶ On ghost women and the suppression of female subjectivity.

As opposed to the categories of women characterized by their body, in GV/AA the ghost women are identified by its absence, or its loss— always as a result of a decision imposed upon them by a male. As the conceptualization of femininity is existentially connected to corporality in GV/AA, ghost women represent those individuals who have lost their identity. The first ghost woman to appear in GV/AA is the ghost of Mr Armwhorthy's wife, described as: 'svag af Helbred, saa at hvert Barn Fødsel hendes Liv havde svævet i Fare'.¹⁰⁷ This is the first representation of marriage and maternity in the novel and it implies the idea of sacrifice. Diana Wallace has pointed out how the images and metaphors of spectrality typical of gothic discourse, can often be found in feminist criticism in relation to topics such as marriage and imprisonment within constricted patriarchal roles. To demonstrate the longevity of this practice, she quotes Margaret Cavendish's 'Female Orations' (1662) where she discusses the inequality of the marriage system and domestic life and states that 'men are so unconscionable and cruel against us, as they endeavor to bar us of all sorts and kinds of liberty, so as not to suffer us freely to associate amongst our own sex, but would fain bury us in their houses and beds, as in a grave'.¹⁰⁸ The concept of the domestic space as the main source of individual erasure, is particularly relevant in GV/AA, and the comparison between an imposed marriage and

¹⁰⁶ GV, p. 22/ 'On which side was the dead woman?' AA, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ GV, p. 15/ 'delicate and ailing, so that at the birth of each child her life had been in danger' AA, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Cavendish quoted in Wallace, Diana; Smith, Andrew, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2009), p. 28.

darkness is frequent. For example, when Lucan at the start of the novel considers what she believes will be Mr Armworthy's marriage proposal, she concludes that she 'Hun selv havde aldrig [...] tænkt sig Muligheden af et kærlighedsløst Ægteskab. Ved Forestillingen om et saadant Ægteskab blev hunk old, som om hun var steget ned i en Kælder.'¹⁰⁹

Wallace writes that in gothic writings and feminist criticism alike 'the metaphor of the burial then, is a particularly powerful way of figuring the erasure of the female self within a construct of marriage which only allowed the legal existence of one person – the husband'.¹¹⁰ This threat of individual erasure, or ghostification, in GV/AA is underlined in the scene of Mr Armworthy's proposal by the presence of the late Mrs Armworthy's wife: 'et Potræt af Mh. Armworthys afdøde Hustru, alt som Luerne steg eller Sank syntes det at bevæge sig. Lucan mødte Potrættets Øjne, det var, som om de hvilede sørgmodigt paa hende. De var maaske to mod een her i Stuen,– og paa hvilken Side var den døde Kvinde?'.¹¹¹ The juxtaposition between the young Lucan and the late, nameless, Mrs Amrworthy introduces the threat of the loss of the self that will characterize the rest of the novel, and serve as a warning to Lucan encouraging her reaction to escape from the situation. Wallace notes that using ghosts: 'has allowed women writers special kind of freedom, not merely to include the fantastic and the supernatural, but also to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realist genre'.¹¹² In GV/AA the figure of the ghost is used as a metaphor of socially constructed roles – such as wife or prostitute – imposed upon women. All those roles are shaped from a male point of view, imposing on women identities that are not shaped according to their own essential discourse, thus preventing them to experience the freedom to affirm their own subjectivity. As Kastbjerg has underlined, the presence of the ghost characters subverts the 'fun and glossy romanticized surface' of the novel by juxtaposing 'female sexual slavery with marriage'.¹¹³ Significantly, Lucan escapes from a proposal of what she thought would be marriage, but is actually prostitution. This creates a parallel between the two situations that will characterize the entire novel, and will only

¹⁰⁹ GV, p. 20/ 'had never imagined the possibility of a loveless marriage. At the idea of such a marriage she grew cold, as she had descended into a cellar' AA, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Wallace, *The Female Gothic*, p. 30.

¹¹¹ GV, p. 22/ 'a portrait of Mr Armworthy's late wife, and in the light of the flickering flames it appeared to be moving faintly. Lucan met the picture's eyes, which seemed to rest gently and sadly upon her face. They were, perhaps, two against one in this room. And on which side was the dead woman?' AA, p. 13.

¹¹² Wallace, p. 57.

¹¹³ Kastbjerg, p. 314.

eventually be questioned by the double wedding at the end. Zosine and Lucan's interaction with the ghost figures in the form of revenge, can be interpreted as the indignation of a new generation of woman for the sacrifice of the preceding ones.

Zosine seems to feel that revenge is not only a duty, but also the only reaction left. She says to Lucan regarding Rosa the ghost: 'Hun var jo en ung Pige, ligesom vi [...] Nu venter hun af os, at vi skal skaffe hende hendes Ret. Hun venter, at vi skal hævne hende'.¹¹⁴ Rosa is the main ghost character in GV/AA, she was the Scottish girl who lived at Saint-Barbe before Zosine and Lucan and was killed because she made herself 'ubrugelig'¹¹⁵ by burning her face with a candle. The focus on the female body as affirmation of women's subjectivity that had characterized the first part of the novel, is here taken to the opposite extreme, where the female body becomes a commodity. The discovery of the letter that testifies Rosa's death, written in a business style as to stress the feature of women as disposable commodities, functions for Lucan as the realization of the danger she is in, and seems to be taking her dangerously close to ghostification herself: 'i lang Tid var det for hende, som om hun sank ned i et Mørke, hvis Bølger en efter en vedblev at skylle over hende[...] Det forekom hende, at dette Brev og hun selv ikke kunde være i Verden paa same Tid. Det tilintetgjorde hende'¹¹⁶ The salvation from being annihilated is given by the appearance of Zosine 'For Lucan var der redning i Zosines Nærværelse',¹¹⁷ her tangible corporality rescues Lucan from "ghostification", and underlines once again the essentiality of female solidarity.

Apart from their husbands to be, Noel and Thesèe, in the second part of GV/AA men seems to merge into one hostile male entity to be feared and not trusted. The fear of Mr Pennhallow is so engrained in the girls that they question the credibility of any other male coming to offer help, such as Mr Tinchebrai or Father Vadier. As Wallace explains, the fear of the male other in the female gothic is 'intensified because of the material power men have over women in a patriarchal society – the power to 'ghost' women both physically and spiritually'.¹¹⁸ And it will be eventually through a network of women that

¹¹⁴ GV, p. 160/ 'She was a girl like you or me [...] now she is waiting for you and me to see justice done to her. She *expect us* to avenge her' AA, p. 194.

¹¹⁵ GV, p. 152/ 'unfit for use' AA, p. 183.

¹¹⁶ GV, p. 153/ 'for a long time it was to her as if she were sinking, even deeper, into a darkness, the waves of which washed over her head [...] it seems to her that she could not possibly remain in the same world as this letter. It annihilated her' AA, pp. 183-184.

¹¹⁷ GV, p. 154/ 'To Lucan there was salvation in Zosine's presence' AA, p. 185.

¹¹⁸ Wallace, 2004, p .66.

Zosine and Lucan will be saved. Aunt Arabella's letter – and the fundamental message in it to 'bevar den Værdighed, som bestaar deri, at man adlyder sin Skæbne'¹¹⁹ will provide them with an alibi, while Olympia will come and rescue them, guided by her own ghosts. Olympia subverts the nature of ghosts as the absence of essence, but rather raises them to become guides: 'hvem af eder [...] kender til vore Veje? De sorte Mennesker har deres egne Sjæle og deres egne Næser [...] denne gang kom der nogen fra den gamle Tid og hjalp mig. De gamle Folk hjemmefra kom og viste mig Vej'.¹²⁰ It is important to underline that in order to perform this role, the ghosts have to come from a non-Western tradition, displaced from the patriarchal discourse that have been responsible for turning Rosa, and the other women, into ghosts. While the discovery of Rosa annihilates Lucan, Zosine reacts by assimilating Rosa into her own battle, in an indignant attempt to revenge her. 'She was a girl like you and me [...] she expects us to avenge her [...] the three of us will again hold together'.¹²¹ Olympia's subversion of the ghosts' function will be essential, as eventually the ghost of Rosa seems to be dragging the girls down– because of Zosine's assimilation: 'Jeg tænkte mig [...] at naar jeg holdt fast ved Rosa, saa kunde jeg hjælpe hende op af Mørket. Men det bliver dig og mig, der kommer til at følge hende derned. Nu er vi fortabte, Lucan'.¹²² The figure of the ghost women eventually becomes overpowering, as the symbol of a battle too big for the girls to win on their own. The Pennhallows' theft of their clothing ultimately signifies the theft of their identity:

Vi lever ikke mere. Vi er allerede borte. – Det var ikke for at flygte, at de gamle Folk tog vore Klæder paa. Det var for at føre os bort [...] men her er vi i hvert Fald ikke længere. Her er der kun een Plads, som venter os og vil tage imod os, det er den Grav, som de har gravet under Brændestabelen.¹²³

¹¹⁹ GV, p. 192/ 'preserve the dignity which consists in obeying one's destiny' AA, p. 253.

¹²⁰ GV, p. 204/ 'Who of you [...] knows our ways? Black people have got their own souls and their own noses [...] somebody from the old time came and helped me. They came from far away to show me the road' AA, p. 251.

¹²¹ AA, pp. 194-195.

¹²² GV, pp. 195-196/ 'I thought [...] that when I held onto Rosa, I might lift her out of the darkness. But is you and I who will be following her down there. Now we are lost, Lucan' AA, p. 240.

¹²³ GV, p. 196/ 'We are no longer alive. We have already gone; we do not exist any longer. It was not in order to get away that the old people put on our clothes. It was in order to take us away from here [...] the girls who, at this moment, are talking together here are ghosts, phantoms whose bodies have long left the world of the living' AA, p. 240.

As opposed to this annihilation of their body, and thus of their subjectivity, it is Olympia's empowering corporality that rescues them from the abyss 'Olympia stod imellem dem paa Gulvet som en massiv og urokkelig Virkelighed og hendes Skrig genlød endnu fra Vægge'/'Olympia stood on the floor between them like a solid and unshakeable reality' as well as her voice 'her shriek still re-echoed from the walls', as to represent the authenticity of a true, feminine voice, whose legitimacy lies exactly in her displacement from a Western, patriarchal discourse, Olympia: 'talte og teede sig som en vanvittig, og alligevel var det hendes Nærværelse, der tvang Løgnen paa Saint-Barbe tilbage'.¹²⁴

Male perception of femininity in *Gengældelsens Veje/The Angelic Avengers*: on Prince Charming, marriage, interplay between the sexes, and the (failed) rebellion of the angel of the house

The depiction of femininity in GV/AA includes also the perception of it from a male perspective. Whether positive or negative characters, the men in GV/AA are depicted as seeing women in the ways Blixen described in 'Daguerreotypes' – Mr Pennahallow sees them as 'bayaderes', Noel, Ambrose and Thesèe see them as 'guardian angels' – dividing them in stereotypical categories and contributing in the process of de-individualising them. Mr Pennahallow's ideas on women and prostitution are expressed when he falls sick, and asks Lucan to read aloud for him, choosing William Defoe's *Moll Flanders* as a starting point for his discussion: 'forfærdelig er i Virkeligheden den letfærdige kvindes Skæbne'/'awful is the reality of the wanton woman', he comments, and continues:

Og vi handler saaledes [...] i et Ideals, i den rene Kvindeligheds Tjeneste. En gammel, fransk Filosof har sagt: "Hvis Gud ikke er til, da maa vi opfinde ham." Saaledes gælder det ogsaa for os. Hvis den rene Kvindelighed ikke er til, maa vi skabe den. Derfor støder vi den ene Del af Kvinderne i Afgrunden og holder den anden i Uvidenhed derom, for det ikke skal besmittes af Medynk. Det er ikke vor egen Svaghed eller vore egen Fald, som vi herigennem prøver at holde skjult fra Kvinderne. Det er Kvindens.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ GV, p. 210/ 'spoke and behaved like a mad woman, and still it was her presence which drove back the falsehood at Saint-Barbe' AA, p. 258.

¹²⁵ GV, p. 121/ 'And we are acting so [...] in the service of an ideal, of pure and guiltless womanhood. An old French philosopher has said 'If God does not exist, we must invent him'. It is the same thing in the matter of which we speak. If pure guiltless womanhood does not exist, we must create it. To this end we

Pennahllow's plan of creating pure womanhood by eliminating 'unpure' subjects, reflects a deep fear of female sexuality. He goes on by stating that women cannot even visit or feel compassion for other women who fell in disgrace. And this is the point that disturbs Lucan, because it goes against what she holds dearest in the world— her own friendship with Zosine, the concept itself of female solidarity, as well as the idea of love.

Noels Stemme i Haven, som bestandig genlød i hendes Sind, kom ogsaa nu tilbage til hende: For den Kvindes Skyld, som han elskede, havde han sagt, vil han tilgive, ja ære enhver Kvinde, selv den dybest faldne. Kærlighedens Magt var da vældigere end selve Ondskabens og Rædslens, den Lys gennemtrængte det sorteste Mørke.¹²⁶

This circularity with Noel's speech is necessary in order to show the two faces of the medallion, and to display two conflicting views. Love, may it be towards a partner or a friend, is in the novel the antidote to Pennahllow's evil. The certainty of its power and the ability to receive it, is what makes the positive characters strong. As opposed to the Pennahllow's view on women, Noel had previously told Lucan: 'hvordan gaar det til [...] at en Mands Øjne en Dag i et eneste Nu aabnes, og han for første Gang fatter en Kvindes, en skøn, uskyldig Piges, Værd og forstaar, at det vilde være hans højeste Lykke at tjene hende hele Livet igennem?'.¹²⁷ Noel's words subverts completely both Mrs and Mr Pennahllow's speeches. The juxtaposition of those speeches provides a dynamic and multifaceted depiction of femininity that aims to mirror the feminine essence itself. Noel's love declaration to Lucan is also necessary in the process of Lucan's re-acquaintance with her body, reversing Pennahllow's terror of the female sexuality in something sacred: 'En ung Mand [...] er en svag, urolig Skabning – hvor svag, hvor urolig ved De i Deres

thrust one group of women into the abyss, and keep the other in ignorance thereof, so that they shall not become defiled by compassion. It is not our own weakness nor our own degradation which we keep from the knowledge of woman. It is the weakness, it is the degradation of her own sex' AA, p. 141.

¹²⁶ GV, p. 122/ 'Noel's voice in the garden, which forever resounded in her heart, again came back to her. For the sake of the one woman he loved, he had declared, he would forgive, aye, he would honor all women, even the deepest fallen. Thus love was mightier indeed than the power of evil; its light penetrated the blackness of horrors' AA, p. 143.

¹²⁷ GV, p. 114/ 'how is it [...] that the eyes of a man are suddenly opened, in a single moment, and that then for the first time he realizes the worth of a woman, of a sweet, innocent girl? How is it that he will only then understand that it would be the highest imaginable happiness to him to serve her all his life?' AA, p. 131.

Uskyldighed slet ikke. Han bliver først virkelig en mand, naar Kvindens himmelske renhed aabenbarer sig for ham'.¹²⁸

On the same note is the other interesting view of womanhood in the first part of the novel given by Zosine's cousin Ambrose. Again, the recipient of this speech, is Lucan, and Ambrose talks to her while he is dressed as Zosine father, MrTabbemor. The theme of masks and disguise in GV/AA both represents and criticizes oppressive and restricting social conventions— in fact Ambrose feels free to express his thoughts on femininity only under disguise— questioning the legitimacy of an identity acquired and constructed according to social norms. As opposed to this process it is significant that the main characters Zosine and Lucan seem to be able to develop their individuality only once they experience a social, and geographical displacement. Ambrose's discourse has to be read as another counterpart to Pennhallow's ideas on femininity, although it shares with the reverend's terrifying philosophy the same fear of the feminine. Ambrose bases his belief on the idea that: 'Kærligheden til det skønne er den Drift, der har ført Menneskene fremad'¹²⁹ and women are the representation of beauty:

Alt [...] hvad Menneskeheden lige fra detn barbariske Oldtid har virket og udrettet, har i Grunden kun stræbt efter at placer Kvinden i saadanne Omgivelser, som passer for hende og er hende værdig Vi har endnu paa ingen Maade naaet dette Maal – først om mange hundrede Aar vil vi kunne give Kvinden, Perlen i vor Tilværelse, den Indfatning, hun har Krav paa.¹³⁰

And he concludes by affirming that 'En ung Pige som Zosine eller som De selv er i Virkeligheden hundrede Aar forud for os andre'.¹³¹ Although rather more flattering than Pennhallow's views on womanhood, Ambrose's ideas about femininity are still problematic. In his understanding and worshipping of womanhood he creates a distance

¹²⁸ GV, p. 114/ 'A boy [...] is a weak and wild creature – how weak and wild, in your own innocence you do not guess. He does not become a man before the heavenly of woman is revealed to him' AA, p. 131.

¹²⁹ GV, p. 47/ 'the love for beautiful things is the instinct that has carried humanity forward from barbarism to civilization' AA, p. 46.

¹³⁰ GV, pp. 47-48/ 'Everything [...] for which human beings, from the barbaric stone age [...] have labored and toiled, has in reality only striven to place women within such surroundings as fit and agree with her, and as will be worthy of her. We have not yet reached our goal. It will be probably another eighteen hundred years before we can give to woman, the jewel of our existence, the setting to which she is entitled' AA, p. 47.

¹³¹ GV, p. 48/ 'Any young girl like Zosine or yourself is, in reality, five hundred years ahead of the clumsy and savage male' AA, p. 47.

that prevents any attempt of empowering women, precisely because he makes them idols and as such outside reality. Woman is an idol for Ambrose, yet still an object to admire, thus a commodity. The battle that Lucan and Zosine will attempt to fight during the novel will be that of having the freedom to affirm themselves outside of a male perception.

Noel and Thesèe, respectively Lucan and Zosine's Prince Charming, at a first glance could appear as mere accessory characters, supporting the idea of the necessity for the girl of affirming their own subjectivity, and their absence from the process of rescuing the girls is necessary in order to make this message effective. However, their role is also that of mirroring Dinesen's conception of an interplay between sexes. Noel and Thesèe are constructed in order to match with Lucan and Zosine's characteristics. In the case of Noel and Lucan this match works on juxtaposing opposites: Noel, 'hvor han ligner Lord Byron'¹³² is 'en smuk og kraftig Skikkelse og havde brunt Haar, tykke, mørke Øjnebryn og blaa Øjne, over hans Holdning var der noget frisk tog utvungent som hos et Menneske, der har levet meget i fri Luft'¹³³ as opposed to Lucan's features characterized by being light and delicate, and her generally more contemplative nature. Lucan and Noel, by the dynamicity of their contrasting characters, represent the gothic mode applied on the idea of love. Lucan's first elaboration of her feelings towards Noel are still influenced by the oppressive conventions of the society she lives in:

Og saa længe – tænkte hun – som jeg kan faa Lov at dvæle i min Sorg, har jeg et Hjem i den. Men hvis den Tid nogensinde kommer, da det bliver forlangt af Kvinden som af Manden, at hun skal glemme og forlade sin Kærlighed eller sin Kærlighedssorg for at give sig af med den Verdens Opgaver, der omgiver hende, da bliver hun virkelig dreven ud paa den aabne Mark of udsat for Vejr og Vind. Ja værre endnu, hun kommer til at løbe der som en vanvitting med opløst Haar, der spotter sig selv og sin egen Natur.¹³⁴

¹³² GV, p. 110/ 'the very picture of Lord Byron' AA, p. 127.

¹³³ GV, p. 103/ 'a fine, vigorous young man, with thick dark eyebrows and blue eyes; his carriage was free and natural, as in a person who has lived much in the open air' AA, p. 117.

¹³⁴ GV, p. 141/ 'Woman', she thought, 'as long as she is free to dwell in the thought of her love, even in the thought of an unhappy and hopeless love, has a home there. If the time ever comes when it is demanded of woman, as of man, that she must forget her love to take part in the activity of the outer world, be it even in the service of justice, then she will have been driven out into the open, bleak field, without shelter, exposed to the wind and the weather. Worse than that, she will be running there like a mad creature, with disheveled hair, mocking herself and her own nature' AA, p. 168.

It is only while she is dreaming, and thus her subconscious is free, that she will elaborate love as a free individual, rather than as an ideal imposed on her: 'Efter nogen Tids Forløb vendte Drømmen tilbage, men var forandret. Det var Noel, der fangede Sommerfugle og hun var nu selv en Sommerfugl. Hun var lykkelig ved at kunne flagre tæt omkring ham uden at synes udfordrende eller ukvindelig'.¹³⁵ If Lucan and Noel represent the 'gothic love', Zosine and Thesèe embody Blixen's idea of interplay in between sexes, based on mutual inspiration. Thesèe is the means through which Zosine re-discovers her aristocratic background, and its grounding values. She will explain to Lucan:

Han gaar klædet i Bluse som en Skovhugger, han kalder sig selv en Bonde. Men jeg har set mange unge Herrer i London, der havde høje Tanker om sig selv, og i Paris, den Gan jeg rejste med Papa! Og jeg har aldrig set nogen, der førte sig eller talte saa smukt som han. Jeg er sikker paa, at ingen Kavalier ved det franske Hof er mere fribaaren eller fornem. Jeg har aldrig før tænkt over, at Blodet selv i en Mand kan betyde saa meget.¹³⁶

The idea of aristocracy that Thesèe represents is the one idealized by Blixen of people characterized by their active and genuine attitude towards life, and their proximity to nature – as well as their own nature. Therefore, it is significant that Zosine and Thesèe's first meeting is in the fields, displaced from their social roles and behaving in complete freedom. Zosine is riding Mazeppa, one of the horses that belongs to the Joliet estate, and Lucan thinks that she 'must always have looked good on a horseback' underlining the righteousness of Zosine situation in the wilderness. When Zosine falls from Mazeppa, she sees Thesèe for the first time 'Solen stod hende i Øjnene, hun var lidt fortumlet efter sit Fald og kunde i Øjeblikket ikke ret skelne mellem Manden og Hesten',¹³⁷ merging the image of Thesèe with that of a centaur. The figure of the centaur in traditional mythology

¹³⁵ GV, p. 145/ 'After a while the dream returned, but now it was changed. Now Noel was catching butterflies, and she herself was a butterfly. She was happy to flutter close to him, without appearing unwomanly or coquettish' AA, p. 173.

¹³⁶ GV, p. 142/ 'He is dressed in a blouse, like a woodcutter. But I have seen many young gentlemen in London, and in Paris, when I travelled with Papa, who had pretty high ideas of themselves and their nice ways. And I have never met anyone who carried himself, or who talked, as beautifully as he does. I am sure that no gentleman of the Court of France is more free-born or noble. I have never till now realized that the blood itself, in the veins of a person, means so much' AA, p. 169.

¹³⁷ GV, p. 97/ 'the sun was still in her eyes. She was a little dizzy after her fall, and at that moment could not quite distinguish between the man and the horse' AA, p. 110.

is often an allegory representing ‘the potential savagery of the human being’ but also hybrids ‘capable of civilised behaviour’.¹³⁸ It is a fitting description for Thesèe, who is representing Blixen’s ideal aristocrat – an individual close to their true nature rather than hidden under imposed masks of social conventions. The centaur is also a figure that allegorically represents masculine sexuality, and in his article about Blixen’s reaction to Branner’s *Rytterne*, Mark Mussari notes that the image of the centaur that Blixen uses in GV/AA is ‘a beacon of fulfilled sexuality and power’.¹³⁹

Both Thesèe and Noel function as the re-evaluation of the girls’ sexuality, after its annihilation forced by Pennhallow. Zosine and Thesèe’s initial relationship as equal questions 19th century imposed social conventions on how a relationship should be, and propose, instead, Blixen’s idea of interplay between sexes. Although the idea of love is celebrated throughout the novel, and represents the ultimate, encouraging message is trying to convey, the idea of marriage as a social institution is deeply questioned, as demonstrated by the figures of the ghost women. Because, according to the tradition of his family, Thesèe is bound to remain in Joliet, Zosine tells Lucan that she could never marry him; firstly because he is too good for her – with his strong aristocratic values – but then mostly because ‘Jer virkelig er for god til ham! Jeg har rejst og set mig om i Verden. Jeg har lovet mig selv at besøge alle Jordens Lande. Skulde jeg nu sidde paa et gammel Slot, se min Mand pløje og selv vogte Gæs? Og aldrig komme længere bort end til Lunel?’¹⁴⁰

It is marriage itself that is seen as limiting, rather than a relationship. If, as Anne Williams states, in the female gothic the happy ending and conventional marriage symbolizes the heroines ‘wedding to culture’, this is especially true for Zosine, as GV/AA ends with her homecoming into her social order. Instead of concluding on the note of self-affirmation, the wedding confirms the girls inescapable status of commodities; ‘in order to make you belong to Joliet’,¹⁴¹ says the mistress of Joliet to Zosine. This last character symbolizes the failure of women’s struggle to impose their subjectivity.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Roman, Luke, *Encyclopaedia of Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), p.113.

¹³⁹ Mark Mussari ‘On Branner, On Blixen: The Battle over "Rytteren"’ *Scandinavian Studies* Vol. 75, No. 4 (Winter 2003), pp. 527-538, p.529.

¹⁴⁰ GV, p. 143/ ‘I am really too good for him. I have travelled and have seen the world. I have promised myself to visit every country on the earth. Must I then, till the end of my life, sit in the same old chateau of France, watching my husband plowing the soil, and myself herd the geese? And must I buy all my bonnets in Lunel?’ AA, p. 171.

¹⁴¹ AA, p. 281.

¹⁴² See Chapter 5.

Because of her attempt to affirm her individuality and expand her knowledge, the lady of Joliet was threatened by her own husband with the worst menace to a mother- the loss of her child. Her husband eventually dies as a consequence of her actions, and she reacts by not only going straight back into the tradition she had tried to fight, but also by making it even tougher for her own descendants: ‘ingen af min Slægt [...] skal nogen Sinde forlade vor Provins for at fordærves af Verden uden for den. Vi vil grave vore Hjerter ned i Joliets Jord, og være det tro til Døden’.¹⁴³

Also for the male characters marriage seems like the consequence of a social imposition they cannot escape, and they thus feel the need to behave accordingly. Gender relationships in GV/AA are characterized by this discrepancy between individuals’ feelings, and the behavior that is expected of them. This struggle is not only felt by the female characters, but by the male ones as well. After their final arrival at Joliet, Thesèe scolds Zosine: ‘Hvem tilkom det da her paa Joliet at staa en ung Pige bi og at udøve Retfærdighed – hvis det ikke var mig? Hvis det ikke var mig – som elsker dig!’.¹⁴⁴ Again GV/AA employs the use of a discourse borrowed from a sentimental tradition, underlining the often noted correlation between sentimental novel and female gothic.

As Elizabeth McAndrew notes ‘[Gothic] forms a variant of the Sentimental genre, with related structures, forms and devices. Sentimental novels reflect and ideal that, coming from God is possibly realizable; the Gothic represents the distortion of that ideal’.¹⁴⁵ Zosine, who had refused to marry Thesèe, eventually gives up, after having talked to the horse Mazeppa ‘jo, jeg ved godt hvordan vi skal leve nu [...] han siger at jeg skal vogte Gæs paa Joliet og se paa min Mand pløje’. And these words are pronounced, significantly, in a whisper ‘mens noget I hendes Strube, Graad eller Latter, halvt kvalte hendes Stemme’.¹⁴⁶ Employing the horse in the decision to marry moves the scene into a surreal realm, as to underline the unnatural injustice of the situation – and what is stuck in Zosine’s throat, is the individual voice she had tried until now to shape. To seal her awareness of being treated as a commodity, Zosine gives her childish ring, which

¹⁴³ GV, p. 228/ ‘none of my descendants [...] from this time shall never leave our province, to be corrupted by the outside world. We will dig down our hearts in the soil of Joliet until death’ AA, p. 284.

¹⁴⁴ GV, p. 114/ ‘Who has the right to protect an innocent girl, and to punish her persecutor, if it is not I? If it is not I, who love you?’ AA, p. 131.

¹⁴⁵ In Fleenor, Juliann, *Female Gothic* (Montréal: Eden Press, 1983), p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ GV, p. 114/ ‘yes, I know how we are to live now [...] he tells me that I am to tend the geese here at Joliet and to watch my husband plow?’/ ‘while something within her throat, a sob or a laughter, half choked her voice’ AA, p. 131.

symbolized her friendship with Lucan, to her husband: ‘nu giver jeg den til dig [...] den betyder noget, den skal tale de værgeløse, de forurettedes og mishandlede Sag. Det passer hos dig’.¹⁴⁷ Zosine puts in her husband the hope of creating a better wedding, an interactive partnership. Although unsatisfactory, the final double wedding can also be read as an attempt to provide the girl with a plausible solution according to the historical context the novel was set in. Because Noel and Thesèe represent quite positive characters, and their relationship to Lucan and Zosine is characterized by love, this ending compromises the idea of love to the need to provide a reproduction of the cultural ideas of the time ‘Nu er det ikke Billeder af Fortidens Mennekser, som jeg holder op for Dem,— det er Gengivelser af deres Ideer eller Forestillinger, og af deres Syn paa Livet’¹⁴⁸ writes fittingly Blixen in ‘Daguerreotypes’.

Concluding remarks

If gothic creates spaces for critical thinking by clashing oppositions, GV/AA creates spaces to rethink femininity by clashing different feminine depictions. According to Luce Irigaray’s reading of the feminine in traditional western discourse, women have always been understood as outside representation: ‘the feminine has consequently had to be deciphered as forbidden, in between signs, between the realized meanings, between the lines’.¹⁴⁹ In view of that, to use the gothic – a mode in between genres, ambiguous and displaced in the literary mainstream – as a mean to discuss femininity, that in traditional western discourse has always been ‘in between signs’, makes it the appropriate way of representation. Gothic is a genre in between, a misfit, and a discourse ruled by ambiguity that while mirroring female’s multifaceted essence, also manages to create a space for critical thinking. As many feminist gothic critics have noted, gothic’s horror discourse and ambiguity in representation derives from the fact that the gothic heroine has to look upon a symbol, an ideal of femininity that has been imposed upon her – and that derives from a male point of view. This seems to reflect Irigaray’s theory of specularization, according

¹⁴⁷ GV, p. 241/ ‘now I give it to you [...] it signifies something. It pleads the cause of the defenseless, the oppressed and the wronged. It is right and fit that it should be with you now’ AA, p. 301.

¹⁴⁸ *Essays*, p. 23//‘It is not a picture of people from an earlier epoch that I shall hold up for your inspection; it is rather a reproduction of their ideas and concepts of their view of life’ *Daguerreotypes*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁴⁹ Irigaray, Luce, translated by Gillian C. Gill *Speculum of the other woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 20.

to which the representation of the female body and sexuality is distorted since it occurs within a patriarchal system of reference, in which the imaginary is fundamentally phallogocentric. Irigaray encourages women to see themselves from their own perspective, aiming for the ejection of a patriarchal discourse based on binary opposition in which one is always 'less' than the other. Egalitarianism is understood by Irigaray as the creation of a feminine discourse that has the same importance as the male one, and that is based on women's characterizing essence – her body.

Karen Blixen's own views are fascinatingly similar to Irigaray's, despite the temporal gap in between them. In GV/AA Blixen puts into narrative the ideas she will later on develop in 'En baaltale med 14 aars forskinkelse'/'Oration at bonfire', her essay on feminism. Here she discusses the necessity of the binary oppositions between sexes as essential for society's development. The relationship between sexes is characterized for her by interaction, fellowship, interplay and inspiration. Men and women are differentiated according to their essence: 'Mandens Tyngdepunkt, hans Væsens Gehalt, ligger i, hvad han i Livet udfører og udretter, Kvindend i, hvad hun er'.¹⁵⁰ Femininity, characterized by *being* can be an inspiration in 'vor eget Samfund, -i hvilket Menneskene er naaet saa vidt i hvad de kan udrette og i de konkrete Resultater de kan vise,- det trænger til Mennesker, som er. Ja, selve vor Tid kunde siges at behøve at omlægge sin ambition fra at udrette mere, til at være'.¹⁵¹ And she concludes by saying 'thi jeg vil lögge Tidens Kvinder lige saa vel som dens Mænd dette paa Hjerte: ikke blot at tænke paa, hvad de vil udrette, men dybeste at vide, hvad de er'.¹⁵² And as Stecher has pointed out: 'It becomes evident that Blixen's ideological views on feminism and on women's roles are determined ultimately by an existentialist perspective that holds as pre-eminent the fulfilment of individual identity regardless of gender'.¹⁵³ Becoming oneself, in Blixen's view, is not something that can be achieved by external impositions – such as religion, social conventions, or political beliefs. In GV/AA in fact, the villain is the Reverend Pennhallow – the very representative of a Christian ethic. The use of a gothic discourse gives Blixen

¹⁵⁰ *Essays*, p. 80/ 'A man's center of gravity, the substance of his being, consists in what he has executed and performed in life; the woman's in what she is' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 72.

¹⁵¹ *Essays*, p. 92/ 'our small society- in which human beings have achieved so much in what they are able to do and in the concrete results they can show- needs people who are. Indeed, our own time can be said to need a revision of its ambition from doing to being' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 85.

¹⁵² *Essays*, p. 93/ 'I wish to insinuate into the minds of the women of our time as well as those of men, that they should meditate not only upon what they may accomplish but must profoundly upon what they are' *Daguerreotypes*, p. 86.

¹⁵³ Stecher, p. 30.

the necessary tools for subversion, allowing her to develop an important criticism of Christian patriarchal society, which nowhere else in her writing is as evident as it is in *GV/AA*.

Conclusion

The main intent of this thesis has been to re-evaluate a work that has been unfairly marginalised, and to introduce new research possibilities in the range of the scholarship on Karen Blixen. As this thesis has shown, *GV/AA* provides fertile ground for exploration. The time and space constraint of a doctoral thesis have naturally limited the scope of this research. While this work provides a re-assessment of *GV/AA* within Blixen's oeuvre and historical context, *GV/AA* still leaves plenty of opportunities for further enquiries, such as the analysis of this text within the Danish literary canon. For example, the comparison of this text with other texts from the war and post war context in Denmark would allow to further understand its relevance. Further grounds to be explored are also offered by many of the characters in *GV/AA*, such as Mrs Pennhallow, Baptistine Labarre and Clon, whose analysis would be especially fruitful within the field of gender studies. This thesis also opens new avenues of enquiry for the understanding of Blixen's position within postcolonialism, which could be pursued by juxtaposing the character of Olympia to *OOA* and Blixen's other texts on Africa.

Although traditionally seen as the least critically acclaimed of her books, in this thesis *GV/AA* has been shown to be the text that more than any of Karen Blixen's other work, engages with the key social, historical and cultural issues of her century – totalitarianism, colonialism and gender. Thus, the reassessment of *GV/AA* also challenges the traditional assumption of Karen Blixen as a disengaged author, a myth enhanced by her performance of Isak Dinesen as the a-historical storyteller. The comparison of *GV/AA* to Blixen's other work also allows to appreciate them from an unusual, and innovative, perspective. To this extent, the understanding of Blixen's use of the gothic as a subversive tool and a mode able to express a dualistic discourse, remains one of the most important contribution of this thesis to the scholarship on Blixen.

The study of *GV/AA* within the historical context of its publication also allows an insight into significant aspects of the Western publishing market during and in the aftermath of the war. The focus on the historical context of its creation has demonstrated that *GV/AA* was very much a product of its time, and definitely a war book. The historical circumstances influenced the reason for which it was written, as well as the way

it was written. It provided the inspiration for the story itself, and determined the success of its immediate reception. As Dorothy Canfield noted upon receiving the first draft of AA from Haas – ‘the theme of the book is profound, universal and timely now!’.¹ The historical dimension of it also explains its decline in the following years. Although it was not marketed as an allegory of war times, the leading themes of the novel – of revenge, entrapment and courage – were appropriate in the cultural climate of the occupation and the immediate aftermath of the war.

The comparative analysis of Karen Blixen’s report of her journey in Nazi Germany in 1940 has confirmed the inextricability of the historical context to the creation of GV/AA. The novel puts in narrative form the experience of the annihilation of individual diversity as experienced in a totalitarian society. Her own historical background, as a white woman and colonizer in Kenya just before World War 1, allowed her to develop a parallel with a similar situation of submission and individual erasure as witnessed in colonized Kenya. If, as demonstrated by recent postcolonial criticism,² the criticism of colonial practices underlines some aspect of DAF/OOA, in GV/AA this condemnation is openly expressed with the character of Olympia, and the freedom to write about this topic so openly is guaranteed by the protection of the new authorial mask of Pierre Andrézel. As has already been suggested by Agger’s study of GV/AA, this text also challenges the traditional assumption of Karen Blixen as an aristocratic author disengaged with the economy of publishing, or with mass-cultural literary trends. Instead, the involvement in the publication of the text – from its actual conception to its marketing – demonstrates Blixen’s awareness of the publishing market, and its differences within a variety of cultural contexts, an awareness that was rewarded with the success of the immediate reception of the text.

The exploration of the genesis of GV/AA has also provided the opportunity to revisit Karen Blixen’s idea on writing and storytelling. As discussed in Chapter 4, with the figure of Isak Dinesen, Karen Blixen *performed* storytelling – especially with her public apparitions. It was with the mask of the novelist Pierre Andrézel, however, that she actually fulfilled the criteria of the ideal storyteller as theorized by Walter Benjamin. The study of Karen Blixen as a novelist is probably the most significant and unique

¹ Canfield to Haas, 25/3/1946, kps 51, KBA.

² See for example Lasse Horne Kjældgaard ‘En af de farligste bøger, der nogen sinde er skrevet om Afrika? Karen Blixen og kolonialismen’ in *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* vol.30 (2009), nr.2.

contribution of this work to the scholarship on Karen Blixen, since *GV/AA* has never before been analysed so thoroughly, and her writing has never been assessed from a novelistic perspective. The original image of Karen Blixen/Pierre Andrézel that has emerged from this thesis has demonstrated that the form of the novel was understood by her as a form with a great potential for subversion – hence, as the best form to express criticism on social concerns. This criticism was directed, in an allegorical form, against the Nazi annihilation of individual diversity. The unique fusion of the potential for dissent of the novel form, together with the techniques of storytelling, allowed Karen Blixen to create a text that engaged with its audience by entertaining and encouraging.

While Blixen's other works are characterized by a constellation of references to previous world literature, with *GV/AA* in her unprecedented role as a novelist, she engaged for the first time with a definite literary tradition – namely that of female gothic writers. If gothic had characterized all of Blixen's previous short stories writing, in *GV/AA* she becomes fully aware of its use as a subversive theoretical tool. As demonstrated by the most recent criticism of her prose writing,³ what characterizes Blixen's aesthetic and world view, is a creative dynamic of opposites, and as shown in Chapter 6, this dialectic dynamic is mirrored in use of the gothic mode in *GV/AA*. The use of a gothic discourse allows Blixen to stage a pivotal, and original criticism of the pillars of Christian patriarchal society, that nowhere else in her work is as evident as in *GV/AA*. Blixen as Andrézel not only consciously engages with the previous tradition of female gothic writings, but also establishes a dialogue with her own work. *GV/AA* uses and subverts some of her own stories, as well as conveying some of her most familiar topics that she will also develop in her future essayistic writing. Reassessing *GV/AA* within Blixen's wider authorship also allows to understand it as a fundamental, and grounding, part in the body of her work.

³ See Stecher and Bunch.

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