

If there is a weakness in Jauss's approach, it lies not with the method itself but with the limits Jauss places on the scope of its application. Taken as a heuristic tool, the logic of question-making has two possible utilities. It can help one understand the horizon of expectations at play in a text that is normative for its contemporary readers. But it can also help us understand the horizon of expectations operating in the minds of subsequent reading communities, including our own. While Jauss has much to say about the reception of canonical works, he has little to say about *why* a given work remains today canonical (or, quite as importantly, uncanonical) for him or for anyone else.

Paradoxically, Jauss's hermeneutic sophistication and unusual erudition enable him to reconstruct convincingly the horizons of expectations of very diverse readerships, but they do not inspire him to deal critically with his own horizons. This inevitably leads one to wonder—perhaps unfairly—if Jauss does not in fact regard his own reception politics as somehow timeless and objective in the way Leopold von Ranke assumed his own historiography to be. Jauss's notion of "dialogic understanding"—a key topic of the summational final essay—can only enjoy internal consistency when it also involves dialogic *self-*understanding, when it engages fully the issue of historicity.

Question and Answer will serve English-language readers as a useful complement to two earlier Jauss essay collections brought out by the University of Minnesota Press, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) and *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982). These three texts demonstrate well the fecundity of Hans Robert Jauss's critical thought. A measure of this richness is clearly the broad and ongoing relevance his work has for late twentieth-century philosophical hermeneutics and particularly for the study of canon-formation, perhaps the preeminent issue in the postmodern period.

Olga Anastasia Pelensky

ISAK DINESEN: THE LIFE AND IMAGINATION OF A SEDUCER

Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991. Pp. 218

Reviewed by Thomas Whissen

At first glance, Olga Pelensky's *Isak Dinesen: The Life and Imagination of a Seducer* has all the earmarks of a very good book, one likely not only to attract new readers but to please old ones as well. In under two hundred pages it promises a capsule biography of Dinesen's extraordinary life, a survey of her artistic output, and a brief overview of the best of Dinesen scholarship. Unfortunately, it is a promise whose fulfillment is undermined by poor writing, injudicious research, and a gross distortion of the very figure it attempts to honor.

To begin with, the book reads like a bad translation: "The personality of Isak Dinesen's father [is] currently available in English" [xxiii]. "He was, in the

Darwinian sense, a survivor: despite his neck snapping twice, the bad heart left by malaria and colonial stresses, and a leg cut by the teeth of a devouring lion" [4]. "The trip to America for Wilhelm was relieved by icebergs, and four or five gulls following the ship and diving for its refuse" [18]. In a particularly embarrassing passage, Pelensky accuses those who said Bror Blixen had affairs with African women of "wanting to *flesh out* his portrait as a rogue," arguing that "entering a tribal enclave of Masai warriors and proceeding to *make merry* would not have been such a simple matter" (92) (emphasis mine).

Throughout the book, one wonders at the editors who could have missed a sentence like this: "He had little patience with petty rules, once hanging up the manager of the Norfolk for announcing that the party had ended—he hung him gallantly in the meat freezer alongside several dead sheep" (4). Or this: "He lost his wife early on, to the tropical disease and loneliness which ruined many settlers; he did not remarry until fourteen years after" (4) Or this: "More is known about the Dinesen men than the daughters they had or the women they married" (9).

The unintentional humor of some sentences mocks Pelensky's serious intent, as in "Mama grew up among Copenhagen's finest, the splendid houses lining up the Bredgade" (23). Or: "Leaving a nest of baby snakes near the stairway, they would gloat over the shrieks of their sisters as they came across them slithering about" (23). And then there are the dangling modifiers: "One of Copenhagen's wealthiest men, his fortune had been made . . ." (24). "Arriving at the breakfast table slightly out of breath, his reverberating shouts. . . ." Not to mention bad grammar such as: "Mama along with her brothers and sisters *were* immersed in . . ." (24). Or: "Lord Delamere, *who* Tanne would later be happy to claim as her friend . . ." (4). Or: "*those kind* of statements . . ." (90) (emphasis mine).

In addition to bad style, this book suffers from an indiscriminate use of resource material. No matter how trivial or pointless an item might be, Pelensky includes it, as if having dug it up, she simply cannot bring herself to throw it out. The result is puzzling non sequiturs such as: "For a while she stayed at the Cosmopolitan Club in New York, irritated by the uniformity of the women. A letter had been misplaced there, sent to her by Tommy telling her that their sister Ellen was dying" (172). The three short paragraphs that follow include references to the possibility of filming *Out of Africa*, to Truman Capote, to Greta Garbo, to Eugene Haynes, and to Harlem.

Perhaps the most disturbing weakness in this book is the distorted portrait of Dinesen that Pelensky ultimately paints. All the tiresome stereotypes are reinforced, so that Dinesen comes across as a poseur and a snob, a crypto-fascist, an eccentric who loved to shock, a meddler who liked to cause trouble, and a literary lightweight who wrote to "escape." ("German soldiers were everywhere and riled the Danish author by camping on her lawn. She reacted by working on a novel, *The Angelic Avengers*" [146].) The picture that emerges mirrors the one on the cover of Pelensky's book: Dinesen masquerading as Pierrot, an act she regretted and an image she loathed. While it is true that Dinesen was constantly reinventing herself, constantly perpetuating the myths that sprang up

around her, serious scholars have always concentrated on the genuine artist behind the facade. This desperately ill, desperately lonely, enormously gifted woman, this artist whose talent ultimately cost her everything, deserves better than to be memorialized as a painted clown, an aging coquette fawned over by "groupies," a willing prisoner of vanity and delusion. If any artist ever kept a clear eye on reality and a steady finger on her own pulse, it was Isak Dinesen. Pelensky must know this, and she probably intends no disrespect. More's the pity.

Richard C. Moreland

FAULKNER AND MODERNISM; REREADING AND REWRITING

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. Pp. 259. \$14.75 & \$37.50

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

In its preoccupation with broad sociohistorical concerns, *Faulkner and Modernism* continues a healthy trend in recent Faulknerian scholarship, one established by the work of, among others, Richard Brodhead and John T. Matthews. Richard Moreland makes effective use here of insights drawn from various poststructuralist theories to investigate power relations in selected major works of Faulkner.

Some critics, Michael Millgate for example, have viewed Faulkner's repetitions of events and themes and characters as simple tautology and hence pointless. Contrariwise, Moreland's thesis is that Faulkner's much-discussed repetitions are in fact repetitions with revision and difference. Further, Moreland holds that after *Absalom, Absalom* Faulkner places increasing emphasis on such marginalized constituencies as blacks, women, and the poor at the expense of those white male founders of Yoknapatawpha who effectively expelled the latter's indigenous peoples and colonized the region.

Moreland identifies "Barn Burning" (1939) as a transitional work between those earlier novels with their patriarchal protagonists—notably the male members of the Sutpen and Compson families—and later works that focus on marginalized groups. The reading of "Barn Burning" that Moreland advances in his introduction is a familiar one. The arson of Abner Snopes is viewed emblematically as the desperate act of a member of an economically oppressed underclass. In telling Ab's story, Moreland maintains Faulkner reveals his sensitivity to class conflict in the Old South.

The interpretation of *Absalom, Absalom* that makes up the first and second chapters is more nuanced. Importantly, Moreland debunks the notion of a gentle, humane "Southern aristocracy," one eschewing the hard materialism of Northern-style capitalism. In repudiating this sort of nostalgic reading of the Old South, Moreland is far more observant of the plentitude of actual social practice than are Cleanth Brooks and other Agrarians and New Critics who have consistently privileged the white male perspective at the expense of other