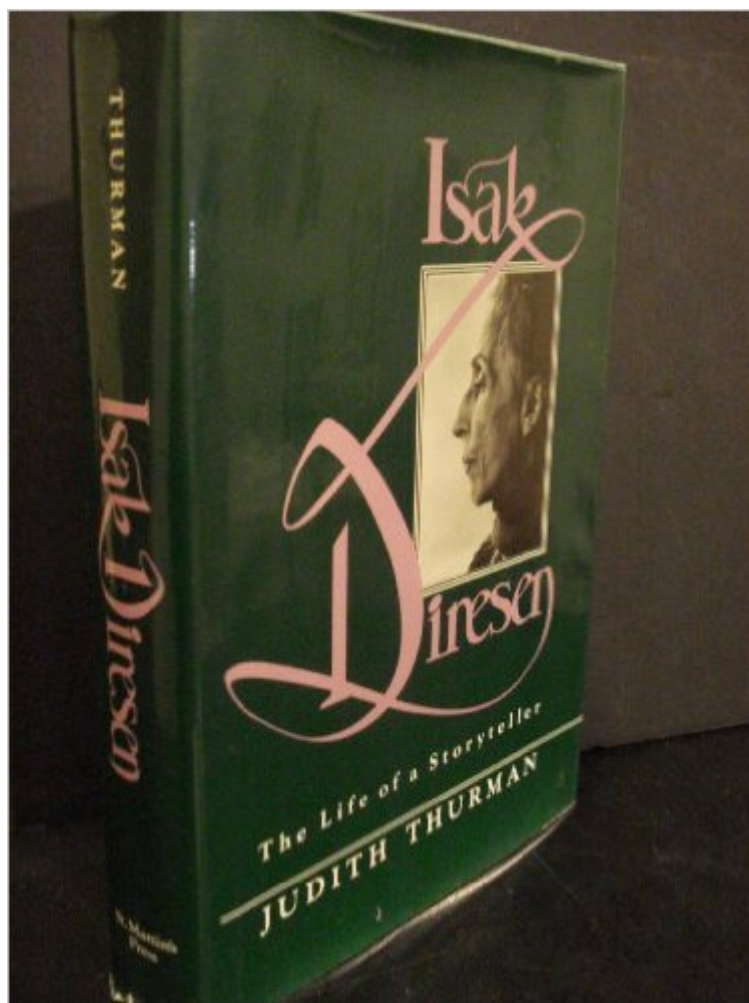


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Isak Dinesen: The Life Of A Storyteller



Synopsis

Winner of the National Book Award A brilliant literary portrait, Isak Dinesen remains the only comprehensive biography of one of the greatest storytellers of our time. Her magnificent memoir, *Out of Africa*, established Isak Dinesen as a major twentieth-century author, who was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize. With exceptional grace, Judith Thurman's classic work explores Dinesen's life. Until the appearance of this book, the life and art of Isak Dinesen have been--as Dinesen herself wrote of two lovers in a tale-- "a pair of locked caskets, each containing the key to the other." Judith Thurman has provided the master key to them both. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ah, so I finally finished this biography last night. I had fallen in love with *Out of Africa* and *Seven Gothic Tales*, and in reading her biography, I had hoped to fall in love with Isak Dinesen, the *Pellegrina*. Sadly, I fell out of it. The fault is not in the biography. It's a fascinating life, and it was good to have the blanks filled in as far as her childhood, and what happened in Africa, the continent to which she spoke and which spoke back to her. The popularity of her work, the American reaction to it, I found this all good reading. But you know, eventually, she turned into quite the old megalomaniac. Thurman shows us where it all came from. (spoilers ahead) Dinesen had always believed that she was special, and was infuriated by her family's insistence on equality, fairness and calm. She felt restrained by it, stifled, dismissed. She felt that the loss of her father was uniquely hers, that it mattered less in the lives of her siblings that their father killed himself. She wanted to

somehow own or claim that. And sadly, the circumstances of her erotic life seem to have warped her terribly. She had syphilis, and had to live carefully and chastely even while madly in love (though there is a question regarding this as far as her relationship with Finch-Hatten). I can see how this would do a woman in, I really can. She spoke of syphilis as both the price and the source of her gift, a horrible bargain with the devil that made her a genius at telling tales. But the cost was high, and the damage was deep. The warping took various ugly shapes as she aged. She tried to usurp her sisters and brothers in the eyes of their children, found her nieces and nephews disappointing in their love of their parents.

I saw "Out of Africa" in Copenhagen in 1986 when I was 21 and bought the biography in Danish, but I couldn't get into it at the time, and eventually sold it to a used book store. Then two years ago I came across it (in English) in a used book store here in Southern California, read it and adored it. It's one of the few books I have read more than once. I love the movie as well, bought it on video about a year ago and have watched it many times. Yes, Redford is not a Dennis F. Hatton type but he's perfect. (In '86 I thought he was utterly miscast, despite being already then a huge Redford fan!) Thurman took seven years to write this bio, and even learned Danish in the process. She truly cares about her subject and thankfully takes her time. Dinesen comes fully alive in this book, a rare accomplishment for biographers. If you go to Copenhagen, take the train north along the coast (20 min. from the Central Station), get off at the beautiful, small, old Rungsted Station and walk down to Rungstedlund (about a mile). It was there that Karen Dinesen, later Blixen, was born and raised. She returned in 1931 from her farm in Africa, and began writing her first collection of tales, Seven Gothic Tales, published in 1934 in English and in Danish (in her own translation) a year later. She "only" wrote seven books for the next thirty years, but oh, what books. It is indeed quality, not quantity that counts with art. In 1991 Blixen's house was opened as lovely museum with a small tasteful book store with books by and about Blixen (she is always referred to as Karen Blixen in Denmark), and a very nice and quiet small cafe. Upstairs is a wonderful exhibit about her life, including separate rooms with many books from her private collection.

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