University of Chitral
JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE
CrossMark
ISSN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER
P 2617-3611
e 2663-1512
Crossref

Journal homepage: https://jll.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/jll

Unsettling the Settler: Disillusionment and Narrative Fragmentation in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*

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Keywords:
colonial disillusionment;
narrative fragmentation;
memory;
empire;
immigrant perspective;
belonging

Abstract

This paper examines Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* through a close reading of Chapter Four, "From an Immigrant's Notebook," to explore how the memoir drifts from a romanticized colonial imagery toward a more fragmented and ambivalent portrayal of empire. While much of the text is steeped in aesthetic nostalgia, this chapter signals a shift—both in form and in tone—toward disillusionment. Blixen's use of digressive reflections in this chapter destabilizes the coherence of the colonial narrative she had previously upheld, drawing attention to the tensions between belonging and estrangement, memory and forgetting, permanence and displacement. By foregrounding these thematic contradictions, the paper argues that Blixen inadvertently unsettles the very imperial ideologies her text seems to admire.

Introduction: Unsettling the Colonial Gaze

Karen Blixen's memoir *Out of Africa*, published under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen, is divided into five chapters, four of which (Chapters One, Two, Three, and Five) trace a loosely connected narrative based on her eighteen-year experience as a settler in British East Africa. Chapter Four, titled *From an Immigrant's Notebook*, stands apart as a striking interlude composed of short allegorical tales. Often overlooked in scholarly readings focused on the memoir's central plot and romanticized portrayal of colonial life, this chapter marks a pivotal shift in Blixen's narrative. While the tales may initially appear disconnected or digressive, a closer examination reveals that they represent a crucial moment of reflection, signaling Blixen's growing disillusionment with colonial authority and her evolving relationship with the land and people she once claimed to master. This paper argues that "From an Immigrant's Notebook" functions as both a thematic and structural turning point in the memoir—where the narrative moves from confident assertions of benevolent rule to a fragmented, self-critical exploration of complicity, loss, and ethical awakening. This ambivalent narrative stance reflects what Homi Bhabha identifies as the "unhomely moment" in colonial discourse, where the settler becomes alienated within the very space she sought to domesticate (Bhabha 13). In this sense, Chapter Four serves less as a narrative detour than as a retrospective epilogue—offering insight into Blixen's emerging critique of the very imperial ideology her earlier chapters seem to uphold.

In the first three chapters of *Out of Africa*, Blixen appears to take pride in her role as a benevolent colonial master, seemingly unaware of the inherent imbalance this position entails. As Petersen insightfully observes, "presupposes asymmetry. It is rarely conceived—or practiced—as a reciprocal relationship but relies on hierarchy and is thus not normally possible between equals, on either a personal or a societal level" (103). Blixen reinforces this asymmetry through her repeated references to the various "services" she provides to the African community—portraying herself as a doctor, a mediator, a teacher, and most prominently, as a baroness who generously grants "her" people land for cultivation. As Petersen notes, she effectively "establishes herself as God in their eyes" (107), a claim substantiated by Blixen's own narrative. She likens herself to God not only when acknowledging her medical limitations but also when she recounts her flying experience, describing her elevated view of the world as if from a divine vantage point (218).

The Narrative Authority of Writing the Colony

Blixen delights in her relationship with the Africans, which, as Rob Nixon observes, positions her as "the center exercising *noblesse oblige* and anticipating a deferential loyalty in return" (219). This dynamic reinforces a self-image rooted in colonial paternalism. Petersen further elaborates that Africa provides Blixen with a setting uniquely suited to the performance of an identity denied to her in Denmark. For her, Africa is:

> …. a dream world in which the apparent Otherness of the Africans could act as a foil to the role she herself wanted to play—the feudal lord, a role denied her in Denmark…. In this mythic setting already imbued with the values of a past and glorious age, Blixen as a medieval lord (or lady) loves the natives. (Peterson 107)

Within this seemingly symbiotic relationship—where Blixen believes she fulfills the natives' need for a benevolent master while satisfying her own desire for recognition—she consistently assumes a position of superiority. This power imbalance grants her the authority to narrate and define the lives of those around her. At times, this manifests in overtly patronizing and dehumanizing language. She frequently compares the African characters to animals, often in ways that reinforce colonial hierarchies. One striking example appears in her description of Kamante, whom she likens to a dog offering a gift when he presents her with a local delicacy:

> Here even his intelligence sometimes failed him, and he came and offered me a Kikuyu delicacy—a roasted sweet potato or a lump of sheep's fat—as even a civilized dog, that has lived for a long time with people, will place a bone on the floor before you, as a present (Blixen 35).

This tendency to reduce Africans to voiceless, symbolic figures reaches one of its most disturbing expressions in Blixen's ant-hill metaphor—an image that Yvonne Vera forcefully critiques for its erasure of African subjectivity and speech. Yvonne Vera critiques Blixen's dehumanizing portrayal of Africans through the metaphor of ants, as seen in the line: "When we really did break into the natives' existence, they behaved like ants, when you poke a stick into their ant-hill; they wiped out the damage with unwearied energy, swiftly and silently—as if obliterating an unseemly action" (16). Vera identifies "the construction of primary images of Africans" as "one of the most urgent tasks" in confronting European biases and misrepresentations. She argues that Blixen creates "a myth of Africanness captured in the words 'swiftly and silently,'" rendering Africans "without communication... for like the ants, they are not heard to speak.... The ant hill image removes from the Africans the possibility of language and grants them instead, a telepathic effort." For Vera, Blixen's use of the word "obliterating" is especially troubling, as it precludes both reflection and remembrance—processes she sees as "essential to any recovery" (115). Supporting this critique, Petersen notes that "Vera teases racist implications out of an extended metaphor of precisely the kind that has given Blixen a large and devoted readership in America and Europe" (109).

Beyond the colonization of people under the guise of benevolence, Blixen also enacts a quiet exploitation of the land itself. Framing her actions as part of an adventurous spirit, she ventures into the wild and indiscriminately hunts animals, seemingly unaware of the ecological damage her entitlement causes. Her coffee plantation, established on a highland at the foot of the Ngong Hills, stands as a clear example of this environmental imposition. The land is ill-suited for coffee cultivation, and the eventual failure of the plantation appears not only predictable but symbolic of a broader colonial overreach. Blixen remains largely oblivious to the consequences of her appropriation—of both people and land—until she herself is struck by a series of personal losses. It is only when her idyllic life collapses—when her property slips away, when Denys Finch-Hatton dies, and when she is forced to leave her home—that she experiences, however faintly, the vulnerability of being dispossessed. The chapter titled "From an Immigrant's Notebook" can be read as an allegorical reflection of this moment, suggesting a subtle shift in her self-perception and a possible reckoning with the power she once wielded so effortlessly. The chapter lacks the linear temporality of the other sections and resists the logic of progress and control that underpins colonial writing. Anne McClintock argues that colonial narratives are undergirded by a "panoptic and chronological gaze," through which history is claimed and narrated by imperial agents (McClintock 36). Blixen's disruption of this gaze, through fragmented and reflective entries, destabilizes the narrative authority of the colonial subject.

Reflective Digression and Fragmentation

Africa Reimagined

The first short story in "From an Immigrant's Notebook," titled "The Wild Dame to the Aid of the Wild," centers on a wild ox that the narrator's manager attempts to tame—through physical abuse—for use with a wagon or plough. However, the effort ends in failure when a leopard devours one of the ox's hind legs after it has been tied up by the manager and his servants. Blixen vividly describes the ox's resistance:

> He stormed against the men, he broke their yokes, he foamed and bellowed; when tied up he shovelled up earth in thick black clouds, he turned up the bloodshot white of his eyes, and blood, the men said, was running from his nose. The man, like the beast, towards the end of their struggle, was dead beat, the sweat streaming down his aching body. (Blixen 227)

This episode may be read as an allegorical representation of African resistance to colonial domination. In contrast to the earlier ant-hill metaphor—where Africans are rendered voiceless and passive—this story seems to grant a form of agency through allegory. The ox's rebellion, its refusal to be broken, and its fate reflect the consequences of bondage: once the manager realizes that the ox "would never come to see him in the yoke now," he shoots it. This moment could be interpreted as Blixen critiquing the colonizer's utilitarian view of the colonized: when the oppressed are no longer useful—when they resist, or are damaged by the very systems that enslave them—they are discarded. This metaphor of exploitation and disposability continues in the following story, "Iguana," where Blixen kills an iguana, enchanted by its vibrant colors, believing she might craft "pretty things from his skin" (235). Yet after the act,

she is struck by a sense of futility as the iguana turns lifeless and colorless — "grey and dull like a lump of concrete" (235). The story subtly exposes the destructive logic of colonial desire: that the beauty of the Other is often extinguished through the act of possession.

A similar moment of reflection appears in another short story, where Blixen recounts her fascination with a bracelet worn by a young native girl. Enchanted by its beauty, she has it purchased, only to find that it loses all vitality once she wears it herself. She realizes, "It had been the play of colours, the duet between the turquoise and the 'nègre'… that had created the life of the bracelet" (236). This loss leads her to express regret—not only over the bracelet, but also over the killing of the iguana—feeling, as she puts it, "as if an injustice had been done to a noble thing, as if truth had been suppressed" (236). The allegorical resonance of this moment becomes unmistakable when she draws a direct comparison to a line from a childhood book: "I have conquered them all, but I am standing amongst graves" (236). This reflection suggests a dawning awareness of the violence and cultural devastation underlying colonial conquest. Blixen ends the story with a poignant admonition to future settlers: "For the sake of your own eyes and heart, shoot not the Iguana" (236). This closing line signals what may be the beginning of her moral and political awakening—a recognition, however tentative, of the irreversible losses wrought by the presence of the British Empire in East Africa.

Alterity, Silence, and Ambivalence

Blixen becomes more direct in her critique of colonial cruelty in her narration of "Kitosch's Story," which recounts the true account of a native boy who is brutally punished by a white settler for riding the settler's mare without permission. Kitosch is placed in an impossible situation: his master repeatedly demands to know, "who had given him permission to ride the brown mare" (257), while simultaneously acknowledging that no such permission could ever have been granted. Cornered, Kitosch insists he is not a thief. For this perceived insolence, the settler flogs him, binds him with a rein, and locks him in a store. Unable to endure the pain, Kitosch dies that same night. Yet, the settler is not charged with murder, but merely found "guilty of grievous hurt," reflecting a European legal logic in which "the degree of an offence rests upon the intentions of the persons concerned and not upon the results" (256). The settler's defense is further bolstered by a disturbing racialized claim from one of the doctors: that the "will to die" among Natives, rather than physical abuse, may have caused Kitosch's death (259). Blixen's inclusion of this account has drawn both praise and criticism. Mikkonen, for instance, commends her decision to publish the story despite opposition from her English publisher, noting that "Blixen also made a conscious decision to depict violence committed by the settlers against the Africans and, thus, to point out the disgrace of the colonial system that tried to conceal such incidents" (278).

On the other hand, Petersen critiques Blixen's interpretation of the event as "an instance of natives' transcendence" (108), particularly her suggestion that Africans possess the power to will themselves out of the world when they feel the need to escape. This reading risks romanticizing or mystifying the very real suffering and structural violence inflicted upon the colonized. While both perspectives carry weight—Mikkonen emphasizing Blixen's moral courage in exposing colonial brutality, and Petersen questioning the implications of her metaphysical framing—it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that Blixen does, at moments, articulate a strong ethical stance. Her condemnation is unambiguous when she writes, "that the Europeans should not, in Africa, have power to throw the African out of existence" (260). This line reveals a rare moment of clarity and indignation, suggesting her growing awareness of the irreparable harm wrought by colonial power.

In the narrative "Farah and the Merchant of Venice," Blixen once again appears to grant the Natives a measure of agency by allowing Farah to express his own interpretation of a canonical European text. Farah sympathizes with Shylock and insists that he should have taken his revenge, a response that seems to mirror the suppressed anger and resentment of the colonized toward their oppressors. He criticizes Shylock for accepting money instead of exacting his pound of flesh and even imagines various gruesome ways of cutting exactly a pound from Antonio's body without shedding a single drop of blood. This imaginative violence reflects the deeply buried feelings of humiliation, injustice, and frustration among the colonized — feelings that often find no direct outlet under the weight of colonial power. That Blixen includes and gives space to such a narrative in her memoir may suggest a growing awareness of the psychological and emotional toll of empire, as well as an effort — however limited — to provide her African characters with a narrative voice and symbolic form of resistance.

Blixen exposes the racist attitudes of European settlers toward the African population in the episode "The Élite of Bournemouth," where she recounts the response of a neighboring doctor whom she calls upon to assist a native woman in a life-threatening childbirth. Although the doctor ultimately saves the woman's life, he later writes to Blixen requesting that she not summon him again for such cases, as he "practiced to the elite of Bournemouth" (239). While Blixen does not openly condemn the doctor's behavior, her choice to include the incident in her narrative suggests a clear sense of disgust and moral unease. In another story, "Of Pride," Blixen writes, "The barbarian loves his own pride, and hates, or disbelieves in, the pride of others" (239). The context strongly implies that the term "barbarian" is

used not for the colonized, but for the colonizer, as she closes this reflection with the admonition: "Love the pride of the conquered nations and leave them to honor their father and their mother" (240). This sentiment resonates with her evident disapproval of a later incident involving the funeral of Chief Kinanjui. Blixen describes how Christian priests took control of the ceremony, erasing indigenous traditions and imposing Christian rituals. She is particularly appalled by the sight of Kinanjui's large body being crammed into a coffin that is far too small—a powerful image of both physical and symbolic containment (313–14). Together, these narratives reveal Blixen's growing discomfort with the cultural and spiritual violence inflicted by European colonialism, even as she remains a participant within its structures.

In "*The Oxen*," Blixen reflects on the brutal exploitation of oxen by their masters, portraying their suffering as both physical and unconscious. The oxen endure extreme exertion as they are made to support heavily loaded wagons, particularly while descending hills, where the weight shifts onto their bodies. Their struggle could be alleviated if the drivers applied the wagon brakes, but the drivers never do. Blixen notes, "the oxen did not know and went on, day after day, in their heroic and desperate struggle, with the conditions of life." This passage may be read as an allegorical illustration of the colonized subject's lack of awareness of their own exploitation. Just as the oxen remain unaware that their suffering could be prevented, the Natives, deprived of education and rights under colonial rule, remain unaware of the structures that oppress them. Blixen's narrative seems to acknowledge how this lack of knowledge is strategically maintained by the colonizers, who benefit from the silent endurance of the oppressed.

This theme of imposed ignorance and manipulated understanding finds a more satirical yet equally unsettling expression in "The Swaheli Numeral System," where Blixen highlights how colonial authority extends even into language and knowledge systems, reshaping them at will. Though couched in humor, the story carries serious allegorical undertones related to the nature of colonial authority. Blixen recounts learning the Swahili numbers from a shy young Swedish man who, finding the number nine phonetically dubious in Swedish, simply omits it from the system. For a long time, the narrator accepts this altered system as truth, only to later discover its inaccuracy when she shares it with others. While the anecdote appears lighthearted on the surface, it offers a sharp critique of the colonial tendency to arbitrarily alter, erase, or reinvent indigenous knowledge systems for convenience or cultural bias. The episode allegorically reflects how colonizers assume the right to manipulate local customs, languages, and rituals to suit their own worldview. This imposition is further emphasized in the banning of the *Ngoma* dance—an important cultural and spiritual ritual among the Natives. When a government official abruptly halts a *Ngoma* performance, Blixen expresses her deep frustration, stating, "During all my life in Africa I have not lived through another moment of such bitterness" (352). Her response suggests a rare moment of alignment with the colonized, revealing the violence embedded in the colonial suppression of indigenous cultural expression.

Continuing the thread of Blixen's evolving awareness of colonial power and her shifting identification with Africa, the short narrative *Earthquake* captures a symbolic moment of rupture and insight. Blixen recounts her experience of an earthquake during her stay in Africa. Initially caught off guard, she quickly becomes ecstatic as she grasps, in her words, the "consciousness that something which you have reckoned to be immovable, has got it in it to move on its own" (272). The next morning, her houseboy Juma attributes the earthquake to the death of the King of England—who is, in fact, still alive—an interpretation that, while mistaken, carries symbolic weight. It suggests the possibility that even the seemingly unshakable power of colonial Europe is not immune to collapse. Blixen's exhilaration at the earth's movement—what she describes as one of the "strongest sensations of joy and hope in the world" (272) — hints at a deepening empathy for the Natives and a growing recognition of the instability of imperial power structures.

This emerging identification is more explicitly expressed in the following short narrative, *George*. While aboard a cargo boat returning to Africa, Blixen is invited by a young boy named George to a birthday party on behalf of his mother, who is hosting English passengers. Blixen responds by saying that she is not English but a Hottentot. This ironic self-description suggests a moment of solidarity with Africans, which was absent in the condescending benevolence that characterized her earlier posture. It marks a subtle but significant shift in her self-perception—from colonial baroness to someone who, at least momentarily, stands alongside the colonized rather than above them.

This gradual identification with the colonized other deepens further in the narrative *Kejiku*, where Blixen begins to see the world through the eyes of the Natives. She recounts the story of a mule she named Molly, which Kamau, the mule-boy, affectionately called *Kejiku* — meaning "the spoon"—because, in his view, the animal resembled a spoon. To Blixen, the name seemed absurd, as from no angle did the mule resemble a spoon. However, one day, from the elevated vantage point of the cart's driver seat, she sees the mule from above and realizes that Kamau was, in fact, correct. In a moment of revelation, she reflects that "God and the angels would have seen her as Kamau saw her" (274). This insight marks a profound shift in perspective. What once seemed incomprehensible now becomes legible when viewed from another's positionality. Such openness to indigenous ways of seeing is a sensibility

absent from the first three chapters of the memoir, revealing the slow evolution of Blixen's empathetic engagement with the African people.

This growing empathy also informs "The Giraffes Go to Hamburg," a deeply allegorical narrative that reflects Blixen's meditations on the colonization of Africa and its people. She describes the plight of two giraffes, confined in a tall wooden crate aboard a cargo steamer bound for Hamburg. Their helplessness elicits a powerful metaphor: "The world had suddenly shrunk, changed and closed round them" (278). This enclosure mirrors the fate of the colonized African subjects, whose lives and landscapes were irrevocably altered by the intrusion of the white race. Blixen empathizes with the giraffes' suffering and even wishes they would die before reaching Hamburg, imagining the alienation, spectacle, and captivity that await them. Beyond its allegorical weight, the story also comments on the colonization of African wildlife, which—like its people—was commodified and displaced for European consumption. Blixen ends this narrative on a note of bitter irony: "As to us, we shall have to find someone badly transgressing against us, before we can in decency ask the Giraffes to forgive us our transgressions against them" (277). The line signals both guilt and complicity, acknowledging the moral failure of colonial violence while leaving its reparation unresolved.

Blixen continues to reflect on the moral and philosophical implications of colonialism in "The Menagerie," a narrative that—like "The Giraffes Go to Hamburg" — appears on the surface to critique the exploitation of African wildlife, but beneath it carries deeper allegorical meanings. The story recounts a conversation between Count Schimmelmann, a visitor at the menagerie, and a showman. As the Count observes a hyena, the showman poses a provocative question: would it be more difficult for a hermaphroditic creature like the hyena to endure captivity, or does the hyena's union of "complementary qualities of creation" make it more self-contained and harmonious? (278). The hyena here may be read as an allegorical figure representing the West, particularly the British Empire, which prided itself on having integrated diverse powers and achievements—believing itself to be the apex of civilization. The question posed by the showman — "In other words, since we are all prisoners in life, are we happier, or more miserable, the more talents we possess?" (278)—serves to destabilize this imperial self-assurance. It points to the psychological and moral isolation that may accompany imperial grandeur, raising the question of whether the very progress and conquests that define the Empire might also be the source of its alienation and disquiet.

Blixen also uses this narrative to critique the epistemological arrogance of colonialism—its assumption that only through Western discovery and classification can the non-Western world truly exist. Through the voice of Count Schimmelmann, she exposes this logic: "The wild animals which run in a wild landscape, do not really exist. This one, now, exists, we have got a name for it, we know what it is like. The others might as well not have been..." (278). The Count goes further, claiming that the animals themselves cannot affirm each other's existence due to their cognitive limitations, as they cannot read the patterns on each other's skins. This moment evokes a colonial epistemology that denies the legitimacy of indigenous presence, experience, and knowledge unless mediated through European perception. As Blackwell notes, this logic aligns with the tradition of British empiricism—particularly Bishop Berkeley's notion that to exist is to be perceived or to perceive (53). Within this framework, the colonized only "exist" when they are named, studied, or interpreted by the colonizer. Through this narrative, Blixen lays bare the philosophical justification often used to support colonial violence: the idea that colonialism confers existence, civilization, and meaning upon peoples and places that were otherwise invisible or unknowable. By giving voice to such rationalizations through the character of the Count, she subtly critiques the self-serving narratives of empire, which disguise domination as discovery and erasure as enlightenment.

But Blixen also seems to become aware of the collaborative and interdependent nature of the colonial encounter, particularly in her reflections on perception and existence in the section "Of the Two Races." Here, she draws a parallel between the relationship of the White and Black races and that of the two sexes—each affirming the other's existence through mutual recognition. In this analogy, Blixen gestures toward a more egalitarian view, acknowledging that the identity and existence of the white race are, in part, constituted through its relationship with the Black race. This marks a subtle but significant shift from the hierarchical dynamic of benevolent mastery seen earlier in the text toward a more relational and reciprocal understanding of difference.

Blixen's evolving ethical stance is also evident in her changing attitude toward the African landscape and wildlife. Although she had previously participated in and romanticized the hunt, she eventually came to see such practices as morally troubling. As Mikkonen notes, "Blixen's relationship to hunting changed in the last ten years of her stay in Africa to the extent that she started to see all hunting, as she explains in *Shadows on the Grass*, as unreasonable, ugly, and vulgar" (1985, 306). This transformation is mirrored in The Naturalist and the Monkeys, where Blixen narrates the visit of a Swedish Professor of Natural History who seeks her help in obtaining a permit to shoot Colobus monkeys on Mount Elgon. His objective is grotesquely clinical: to find out "what phase of the embryo state the foot of the monkeys, that has got a thumb to it, begins to diverge from the human foot" (281). The professor

intends to kill an alarming number —1,500 monkeys—for the sake of scientific data. When he is granted permission to shoot only six, he becomes infuriated and storms out of Blixen's home.

Blixen's disapproval of the professor is couched in irony and sarcasm. When he once remarks that standing atop Mount Elgon allowed him to momentarily believe in the existence of God, Blixen later muses: "There is another interesting question which is, — Has it been possible to God, at Mount Elgon, to believe for a moment in the existence of Professor Landgreen?" Her biting wit underscores her growing impatience with the arrogance and moral blindness of European intellectuals, whose scientific or political authority is often used to justify violent interventions into colonized spaces. But more than just a critique of Professor Landgreen, the passage invites a retrospective critique of Blixen's own complicity. Her reflection suggests that the personal losses and disillusionments she suffered—particularly toward the end of her African sojourn—forced her to reexamine her earlier assumptions. From a position of power in which she imagined herself central to the lives of others, Blixen comes to recognize her own smallness within the vast moral and cosmic order. The narrative subtly enacts her movement from self-importance to humility, from colonial agency to existential doubt.

Unbelonging and the Limits of Colonial Narrative

Yet, even in this growing awareness, Blixen is not untouched by nostalgia and loneliness, sentiments that emerge powerfully in "The Parrot." The Chinese woman's parrot recites lines in ancient Greek, which, when translated, poignantly encapsulate Blixen's emotional state:

The moon has sunk and the Pleiads,
And midnight is gone,
And the hours are passing, passing,
And I lie alone. (292)

The verse evokes a deep sense of solitude, temporal displacement, and longing, echoing the memoir's elegiac tone. It functions not just as a reflection on her personal isolation but as an epitaph to a world—colonial, romanticized, and mythic—that is fading away. The parrot's recitation, displaced both linguistically and culturally, mirrors Blixen's own sense of exile and her final awareness that she, too, is a fragment of a bygone order, haunted by both remorse and affection for the land she could not possess.

With the coffee farm lost, her friends dead, and her possessions sold off one by one, Blixen reaches a moment of profound desolation. "Wherever I walked, the ground fell away under me, and the stars fell from the sky," she writes (339). Overwhelmed and disoriented by the upheavals in her life, she begins to search for signs—symbols that might lend meaning to her suffering and offer her clarity. One morning, outside her house, she witnesses Fathima's large white cock attacking a chameleon and plucking out its tongue. The narrator intervenes, chasing off the cock and ultimately killing the wounded chameleon, acknowledging that it could not survive without its tongue. Although Blixen refrains from interpreting the event explicitly, she expresses a strange satisfaction at having received what she calls an "answer."

The symbolism of this episode is striking. The cock, as an emblem of European dominance, violently silences the chameleon—an allegorical stand-in for the colonized subject whose voice and agency are stripped away. The act of tongue-plucking becomes a powerful metaphor for the loss of cultural expression, political autonomy, and self-preservation. In witnessing and responding to this symbolic violence, Blixen may be seen as recognizing her complicity and perhaps seeking atonement. The episode reflects not only the brutal legacy of colonialism but also the psychological rupture that prompts her growing humility and search for meaning.

This shift is deepened in the section titled "The Roads of Life," where Blixen turns to faith and fate, relinquishing her former sense of control in favor of surrender to a greater design. She wonders aloud, "The tight place, the dark pit in which I am now lying, of what bird is it the talon?" (231). This poetic question reveals her desire to interpret suffering not as punishment but as part of a larger, unknowable purpose. The transformation in her worldview becomes more apparent as she imagines herself woven into the cosmic order: "When the design of my life is complete, shall I, shall other people see a stork?" (231). No longer projecting herself as a god-like figure directing the fates of others—as she once did in the early chapters—Blixen instead longs to be a meaningful but modest part of a divine pattern.

This spiritual humility marks a stark contrast to the persona she crafts at the beginning of *Out of Africa*, where she assumes the role of the benevolent baroness, dispensing care, land, and justice to those beneath her. The omnipotent narrator of the early chapters gives way to a chastened and contemplative voice—one that has come to terms with the limits of control, the cost of domination, and the ultimate fragility of human agency. In place of grandeur and mastery, Blixen embraces uncertainty, loss, and the possibility of redemption through surrender. Her journey, in the end, is not just a geographical departure from Africa, but an existential reckoning with the myths she once authored and lived by.

The African world that Blixen once presumed to dominate gradually asserts its autonomy, reversing the colonial power dynamic she had long taken for granted. In one of the memoir's most revealing reflections, she concedes: "It was not I who was going away, I did not have it in my power to leave Africa, but it was the country that was slowly and gravely withdrawing from me, like the sea in ebb-tide" (351). In this moment of poetic resignation, Blixen recognizes that the agency she once exercised as a colonizer—through land, authority, and narrative—has been reclaimed by the land itself. Africa, no longer passive and possessed, becomes an active force, expelling her and nullifying her presumed control.

This transformation in perspective deepens as Blixen grapples with the fate of the Kikuyu squatters who had lived and worked on her land. Following the closure of her farm, the Native inhabitants are forced to leave. Blixen laments the violence of this displacement: "It is more than their land that you take away from the people, whose Native land you take. It is their past as well, their roots and their identity" (346). Here, she no longer speaks as a landowner or settler, but as a witness to dispossession, articulating a critique of colonialism's erasure of history and selfhood. Her final act—petitioning the government to allocate new land to the squatters in the Dagoretti Forest Reserve and succeeding—may be read as an attempt at redress. It reflects her belated acknowledgment of complicity and a desire, however limited, to protect the community from further fragmentation.

While one might argue that Blixen's shift in consciousness is shaped by personal loss—her failed plantation, the deaths of loved ones, and her forced departure from Africa—the literary structure of *Out of Africa* suggests a deeper reckoning. That she chooses to embed in her memoir a series of allegorical narratives (*From an Immigrant's Notebook*) which subtly or overtly critique the earlier, more confident and colonial parts of the text is itself significant. In doing so, she creates a complex self-portrait, not of a hero or martyr, but of a woman learning to confront the myths she once authored: of benevolent mastery, civilizing mission, and romantic dominion. Her memoir thus becomes not only a nostalgic tribute to a vanished world but also a site of self-examination—where loss catalyzes moral insight, and memory becomes a means of critique.

Conclusion: From Romance to Ruin

In its full arc, *Out of Africa* is not merely a memoir of colonial nostalgia; it is also a layered and conflicted narrative of moral awakening. Through the juxtaposition of romanticized early chapters and the allegorical reflections in "From an Immigrant's Notebook," Blixen charts her own evolution from a figure of colonial authority to one of reflective humility. The very structure of her memoir performs this shift, critiquing from within the very ideologies it once seemed to affirm. Her growing empathy with the African people, her acknowledgment of the violence embedded in benevolent rule, and her final recognition of Africa's own agency suggest a deep reckoning with the legacy of imperialism. Blixen's memoir thus participates in a rare and complex literary gesture: it interrogates its own assumptions and reveals the author's internal negotiation with loss, guilt, and complicity. In doing so, it contributes to a body of colonial literature that, while deeply problematic, also offers insight into how narratives of domination can fracture into reflections of conscience and the desire for ethical reparation.

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