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Linda Donelson

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#2950056 in Books Coulsong List 1995Format: ImportOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.06 x 1.18 x 6.02l, #File Name: 0964389312411 pages | File size: 35.Mb

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Out of Isak Dinesen in Africa: The Untold Story [Import] [Paperback]

From Publishers WeeklyIn December 1913, after marrying Bror Blixen, Baroness Karen Blixen (aka Isak Dinesen) of Denmark boarded a steamship in Naples bound for East Africa, beginning one of the more intriguing adventures undertaken by a 20th-century woman. Donelson's well-researched biography of Blixen's years in Kenya is an absorbing read that will grab readers whether or not they are familiar with Out of Africa. Donelson's depiction of Blixen is decidedly less romantic than Blixen's own but no less intriguing for that. A medical doctor, Donelson argues that Blixen was cured of the syphilis her husband had given her in their first year of marriage, and that her illness was instead a result of years of taking arsenic as a cure. Unlike many Europeans, Blixen took an active interest in Africa's language, culture and people and reveled in its unique beauty. Donelson, who spent many years living in the Ngong Hills of Kenya, re-creates colonial Africa's physical, political and social milieu in remarkable detail. Intelligently and skillfully organized, the book offers a sympathetic yet candid portrait of Blixen and her complex relationships with her husband and with her lover, Denys Finch Hatton. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library

Journal Donelson, a physician who has lived in the Ngong Hills in Africa where Dinesen farmed from 1913 to 1930, closely chronicles the now-legendary African years of Karen Dinesen, Baroness Blixen, with a new slant. Using Dinesen's written descriptions of her symptoms and the work of other physicians who have written on her lifelong illness, Donelson concludes that the illness that crippled and ultimately killed her was not syphilis but arsenic poisoning, caused by tonics she frequently took. Medically, the theory is ingenious and possibly valid, but aside from the introduction and an appendix on Dinesen's medical history, Donelson makes little use of this insight. Instead, she relies heavily on Dinesen's published stories for insight into the author's feelings. Donelson focuses exclusively on her subject's African years, though Dinesen lived for another 32 years after returning to Europe. For a complete life of Dinesen, readers should still turn to Judith Thrumann's *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* (LJ 10/15/82). Shelley Cox, Southern Illinois Univ., Carbondale Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

Two facts contribute to the spellbinding nature of this updated account of Dinesen's years in Africa. Attributing symptoms Dinesen suffered to arsenic poisoning, Donelson lends her medical expertise to reinterpretations of Dinesen's health problems. At the same time, Donelson's personal experience of life in Kenya--in the very same area where Dinesen herself lived--accounts for especially vivid depictions of the African landscape and of Dinesen's beloved home. Admirers of *Out of Africa* and *Seven Gothic Tales* should delight in Donelson's graceful, beguiling prose, revealing the very essence of Dinesen's stirring experience of African life and of her vital relationships with lovers and family.

Alice Joyce