
Lowth, aiming to "correct" his 19th-century countrymen's lamentable English, succeeded only in securing for his work a short-lived vogue as a college text. Edward S. Gould, in his *Good English* (1876), railed against the introduction of unnecessary "spurious words" such as *leniency* (*lenity*, he insisted, was the only correct English word). Baron doubts that future reformers will fare better. And, indeed, the reader is left wondering whether sweeping language reform, possibly led by a national academy, would really be preferable to the haphazard way in which English has developed over time.

ISAK DINESEN: The Life of a Storyteller
by Judith Thurman
St. Martin's, 1982
495 pp. \$19.95

Her legal name was Karen Blixen, but the Danish writer is known to the English-speaking world by her pen name, Isak Dinesen. She wrote, among other books, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), a collection of deceptively old-fashioned and stylistically ornate stories, and *Out of Africa* (1937), a memoir in which the author seemed magically to enter the minds of both the humans and animals native to her beloved Kenya. Blixen herself (1885-1962) was, as biographer Thurman shows, a genuine anachronism: In a society (turn-of-the-century Denmark) which valued caution and propriety, she possessed a reckless, heroic view of life. It came from her father, who was himself an author as well as a politician, a traveler, and a swashbuckler. Blixen's love of the wilder parts of Africa duplicated her father's fascination with American Indians, among whom he wandered for a time. She even made living in Kenya a condition of marriage to her cousin, a minor count and a great romancer (who infected her with incurable syphilis). The two immediately moved to the family's Kenyan coffee plantation, where Karen lived and worked from 1914 to 1931 (after her divorce from "Blickie" in 1921, she went it alone). It took a worldwide depression to drive her back home. The cost of Blixen's unconventional life was considerable, to herself and to others: tragic ro-

mantic liaisons, deteriorating physical and emotional health, financial losses to the family corporation from the Kenya venture. Blixen justified it all by saying it was her Destiny. But the stronger justification of her life was the fiction that issued from it.

Science & Technology

PLUTO'S REPUBLIC
by Peter Medawar
Oxford, 1982
351 pp. \$25

"Instead of wringing our hands over the human predicament, we should attend to those parts of it which are wholly remediable." Behind zoologist Medawar's tart pronouncement stands a long English tradition of imperturbable common sense. In 25 essays, Medawar castigates fuzzy thinkers, airy system builders, dogmatists, pseudoscientists, and other denizens of the intellectual underworld—Pluto's Republic. Critical of IQ scientists who insist intelligence is a fixed, measurable trait, he also raps psychoanalysts who assign psychic causes to neurological disorders. In "Ethology and Human Behavior," he pleads for a biology-based psychology to replace the "weird farrago of beliefs" that is psychology today. Medawar challenges the notion of a strict Scientific Method (e.g., the induction of general truths from known cases). A scientist makes up a story, much as a poet does; then he must test it to see if it can be found false. Stressing this modest view of scientific truth, the Nobel Prize winner is still optimistic about progress. In "Science and the Sanctity of Life," he argues that there are no technology-created problems that technology cannot solve. The reader may find much that is debatable here, but little that is not refreshing.
