



Karen Blixen. The Devil's Advocate
Reading Blixen in the Light of Kierkegaard

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PhD thesis

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Karen Blixen. The Devil's Advocate

- Reading Blixen in the Light of Kierkegaard

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Thanks	3
Introduction	3
1. RESEARCH SURVEY: THE BLIXEN-KIERKEGAARD SCHOLARSHIP	7
1934-1969	7
1970-1994	13
1995-2013	17
The New Perspectives	20
2. THE EXTRATEXTUAL CONNECTIONS	33
Kierkegaard in Blixen's Library at Rungstedlund	34
Other Works about Kierkegaard Known to Blixen	35
Conclusion: Extratextual Connections to Kierkegaard	39
Humor or Irony?	40
3. CHRISTIANITY: BLIXEN AND KIERKEGAARD	42
Early Critique of Christianity	43
<i>Sandhedens Hævn</i>	46
The Gospel of Nature and Joy	49
The Marionette Motive	51
Nature and the Poet as God	55
Early Nemesis: Truth as the Nemesis of the Lie	57
The Concept of Christi-Anxiety	59
"En Historie om en Perle"	61
Christianity is just a Sign: "Clothes Mangled Here"	68
Intermezzo	69
4. "CARNIVAL"	
Flappers and Macabre Dandies: Karen Blixen's "Carnival" in the light of Søren Kierkegaard (Bunch 2011).	69
"Carnival": Theoretical and Methodical Reflections	107
"Carnival": Additional Observations	108
Annelise and Kierkegaard's "det unge Menneske"	108

The Shadow as Conscience and Guilt	111
5. "EHRENGARD"	115
"Ehrengard," Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note" (Bunch 2013a)	116
"Ehrengard": Theoretical and Methodical Reflections	165
The "Chinese Puzzle" as a Composition Principle	166
Unreliable Observer Narration and Ambiguous Discourse (AD) in "Ehrengard"	169
"Ehrengard": Additional Observations	175
Kierkegaard's Secret Note	175
6. "THE POET" / "DIGTEREN"	178
Karen Blixen's "The Poet" and Søren Kierkegaard's <i>Gjentagelsen</i> (Bunch 2013b)	179
"The Poet": Additional Observations	200
"The Poet": Theoretical and Methodical Reflections	200
Dialectics of Repetition in Blixen	201
"Babettes Gæstebud": Repetition and Nemesis of the Aesthetical	203
Conclusion: Blixen and Repetition	209
7. GENDER: BLIXEN AND KIERKEGAARD	210
"Drømmerne": Don Juan, Pellegrina and Seduction	211
Baron Gyldenstjerne as a Comical Don Juan	212
The Male Characters as Parodies of the three "umiddelbare erotiske Stadier"	214
Don Juan Seduced	216
Pellegrina as the Materialistic, Female Embodiment of Music	217
Pellegrina as a Tragic Female Don Juan	217
"Drømmerne" and Don Juan: Tradition and Repetition	219
Woman: God(dess) of Man	220
Woman: Man's Paradise on Earth	226
Lucifer. Masculinity Internalized: Heksen and Jomfru Maria.	227
8. CONCLUSION	229
Blixen. An Ethical Aesthete	229
Gender and Nemesis	230
Danish Summary	233
Works Cited	234

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Foreword

This thesis falls into the category of an article Ph.D. This means that it consists of three articles and a background section. At the time of writing¹ the first article “Flappers and Macabre Dandies. Karen Blixen’s ‘Carnival’ in the Light of Søren Kierkegaard” has been published in the journal *Scandinavica* (2:2011), the second “‘Ehregard,’ Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note” has been accepted by the journal *Scandinavian Studies* and is scheduled to appear in the winter 2013 issue and the third “Karen Blixen’s ‘The Poet’ and Søren Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen*” has been submitted to the *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* but has not yet been peer reviewed.²

The three articles are framed by a background section that consists of 1) a research survey of the Blixen-Kierkegaard research scholarship, 2) reflections over the theory and method used in each of the three articles and 3) additional analyses of selected tales by Blixen with particular attention to Kierkegaard and the topics of gender and Christianity and finally 4) a concluding chapter that ties the observations from the articles and the background section together. This means that the form of the thesis is more similar to that of a monograph, but as the thesis unfolds it should be clear, why this format has been necessary in order to supplement and develop the observations made in the articles and make a final conclusion about Blixen and Kierkegaard that takes both articles and the additional analyses into account. The downfall is, however, that it has been impossible to avoid the re-use of quotes and ideas presented in the articles in the background section, which is causing some redundancy. I hope it will not disturb the reading too much. All Kierkegaard quotations are from the online version of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*: www.sks.dk. In the background section the references to Kierkegaard’s works will not have any page references (n. pag.) since the works are online and do not have page numbers. All Kierkegaard quotes can, however, easily be checked in the online version by pasting text from the quotes into the search box on the

¹ August 20, 2013.

² All these journals belong to the highest ranked academic category (category 2) according to the latest Danish ranking list: ”Autoritetslisten for serier 2012 og 2013”: <http://fivu.dk/forskning-og-innovation/statistik-og-analyser/den-bibliometriske-forskningsindikator/autoritetslister>

website. With regard to Blixen, I have decided to use the Danish versions of her works in the background section following the observations made by Poul Behrendt about the English and Danish versions with regard to *Vinter-Eventyr* (1942). Behrendt shows that Blixen in her Danish reworkings of the tales developed ideas from the English texts and added or reinforced allusions to Danish writers from the 19th century in order to cater to her Danish audience (Behrendt 2010a, 406). This also pertains to allusions to Søren Kierkegaard, as I show in the third article about “The Poet” from *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) / “Digteren” from *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935), but in the first two articles about “Carnival” and “Ehrengard” I only use the English versions since Blixen never had a chance to translate and rework the tales into Danish herself (it was done posthumously by Clara Selborn in 1963 and 1975). Even though this background section is written in English, none of the Danish quotes from Kierkegaard or Blixen’s works (including the letters) are translated into English,³ since I presuppose that the review committee and other readers on this academic level are able to read and understand Danish, but also in order to not exceed the maximum limit of 100.000 words. If the italics in the quotes are mine, I will note it in the parenthesis after the quote as “author’s italics,” otherwise the italics are original. When I refer to my own articles in the thesis I use the page number of the article as it was submitted to (or printed by) the journal (see page numbers to the left or right), but I have also numbered the articles with a second page number (in the middle of the page), so each page also fits the running text of the thesis in its final form. The articles each follow the specific formatting style of the journal it was submitted to, but in the background section I have chosen to use the Chicago Manual of Style as the reference format. This thesis consists of about 85.000 words (without the works cited list); the three articles account for approximately 36.000 words and the background section for the rest. The English part of thesis is followed by a one-page summary in Danish.

³ In the three articles the Danish quotes are, however, followed by English translations due to the requirements of the journals.

Thanks

Many people have been helpful and supportive throughout the five years it has taken to complete this work. I would like to give a very special thanks to my supervisor and mentor Poul Behrendt for his tireless feedback on the work presented in this thesis and for everything I have learned from him during many profound and deeply inspiring conversations. I would also like to give a special thanks to my family, who have all been a great help and supportive, especially in the final year of writing. Big thanks also goes to Ivan Ž. Sørensen for feedback on earlier drafts of this work and for kindly giving me access to his material about Blixen and Kierkegaard. Thanks also to Marianne Wirenfeldt Asmussen for giving me access to the Karen Blixen Archive at The Royal Library in Copenhagen, to Marianne Juhl for valuable information about the letters concerning Kierkegaard in the new 2013 edition of Blixen's letters (Blixen 2013), to Bruno Svindborg at Håndskriftssamlingen at The Royal Library and to Anne Sophie Tiedemann Dal and Cathrine Lefebvre at Rungstedlund Museet for giving me access to Karen Blixen's library and for their general interest and support for my work. Also big thanks to the "Lektoratsudvalget" that financed this Ph.D. and the chair Nina Møller Andersen for her great effort to make bureaucracy work in my favor when I returned to Denmark from Canada in 2011. Thanks also to John E. Andersen from Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab (INSS) for office space and for supporting overseas conference participation in 2013 where I was able to present the last parts of this work and to Sune Auken and Toke Nordbo at the Ph.D. office for their help and support throughout the process. As a non-native speaker writing in English I would like to dedicate a special thanks to Brin Friesen, Mark Mussari and J. Robertson McIlwain for proofreading the articles and to the latter for also proofreading the background section.

Introduction

It has become more and more clear to me from my work with Blixen's works in relation to Kierkegaard that one of Blixen's ways of becoming a part of world literature was to deliberately deal with it in her works and for the most part in a subversive way. In her tales we find an unusually high, almost excessive, number of allusions to world literature (including the bible and Greek mythology) and in her Danish versions also countless

allusions to Danish literature (primarily to 19th century writers). When reading Blixen it is easy to go astray in all these allusions that often seem to blur the picture more than they clarify. If these allusions, plots and characters are not subjected to meticulous scrutiny that also take in extratextual historical and literary historical knowledge that plays a significant role in Blixen's tales as has been pointed out by Behrendt (Behrendt 2007; Behrendt 2010a), it is for the most part impossible to understand her works.

Previous research has shown that Blixen (examples here from *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942) in "Heloise" reverses the female character and the plot in order to criticize Guy de Maupassant's famous short story "Boule de Suif" ("Ball of Fat") from 1880 (Henriksen 1998, 232; Sørensen 2002, 24-5; Selboe 2008, 25 and Bunch 2013b, 2). We also know from Blixen's own pen (which is extremely rare) that "En Historie om en Perle" was also meant as a critical literary comment to Nobel Prize winner Sigrid Undset's famous work *Kristin Lavransdatter* (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 393) and that the character Alkmene from the tale of the same name can be perceived as Blixen's tragic version of Shakespeare's Perdita from his play *The Winter's Tale*⁴ (Behrendt 2010a, 404).

In Bernhard Glienke's important work from 1986: *Fatale Präzedenz. Karen Blixens Mythologie* we find a section called "Das Referenzinventar" (Glienke 1986, 98-158) where Glienke on *sixty pages* meticulously lists the allusions to previous works from Danish and world literature (including biblical allusion) that he has been able to find in Blixen's works as well as in secondary literature about her. This gives us a good idea of the huge role that world literature plays in Blixen's works. The allusions Glienke lists in Blixen's work with regard to Kierkegaard are, however, only the tip of the iceberg (which I believe will be the case for other writers too, if subjected to further scrutiny), which I will go on to show in this thesis. Glienke is also, for the most part, unable to coherently analyze how Blixen's narratives, through these allusions, invert characters and plot from the works she alludes to, which means that the potential the allusions have as keys to the understanding of Blixen's works in relation to her literary predecessors are not fully developed. This I will also try to make up for in this thesis with regard to Kierkegaard.

⁴ Another Shakespeare allusion is the title of Blixen's tale "Tempest" from *Last Tales* (1957), which is of course alluding to Shakespeare's play "The Tempest". It would be a very interesting task to do an in depth investigation of how Blixen in this tale (and in her oeuvre as such) relate to Shakespeare's work.

Within the Blixen-Kierkegaard scholarship it is commonly accepted, and rightly so, that “Ehregard” is a counter-narrative to Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog” (see the list of articles about the topic in Sørensen 2002, 190-93 and Bunch 2013a, 1). Aage Henriksen seems to have discovered this strategy of Blixen’s and began to send her “modfortællinger” (counter-narratives) as literary comments to her own tales during their intense letter correspondence in the first part of the 1950s.⁵ To Henriksen’s idea of a story as a “modfortælling” Blixen dryly replied:

“En Modhistorie,” sagde hun, “det er en ting, der ikke eksisterer. Der er heller ikke noget der hedder sådan.” (...) ”Nu skal jeg vise Dem, hvordan en historie ser ud,” sagde hun så og tegnede et pentagram. ”Sådan, her er intet at tilføje og intet at trække fra. På samme måde er historien færdig, når den er forbi.” (Henriksen 1965, 98)

Blixen’s answer is both right and wrong since her tales, in my opinion, are *both* counter-narratives *and* at the same time completely original, sublime and fully finished pieces of literature in their own right as Blixen’s pentagram analogy is meant to show us. Thus, it is a matter of both/and instead of either/or (to allude to Kierkegaard). It is also clear that some writers, more than others, were subjected to Blixen’s counter-narratives. In this thesis I will claim that Kierkegaard was one of the primary targets (Goethe maybe taking second place), whereas Blixen was much more in agreement with Shakespeare, Heine and Goldschmidt, who were not subjected to the same ironical counter-narratives as much as other writers of Danish and world literature and Kierkegaard in particular. Blixen was of course inspired by (and loved) many writers of world literature and absorbed and adapted (some of) their ideas and made them her own, but it doesn’t show very much in her tales, which for the most part always have a polemical under-current. That means that it is very difficult to detect the positive influence from the writers of world literature in her works.

⁵ For example “Vejene omkring Thunersøen” that he send her in a letter on December 20th 1953 (reprinted in Henriksen 1985, 128-51). Henriksen also had plans of developing a counter-narrative to “To gamle Herrers Historier” (*Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957) as he mentions in a letter to Blixen from September 25th 1956: “Jeg har også tænkt mig en modhistorie lagt i munden på de to herrers fælles tante, Mædea (...) Jeg begyndte også at skrive på den, men synes så ikke, at det var ulejligheden værd, men hvis de vil høre den engang så skal jeg fortælle den” (Blixen 1996, Vol. II, 327).

This leads us to the main aim of this thesis, which is to uncover the major influence that Søren Kierkegaard and his works have had in Karen Blixen's (Isak Dinesen) oeuvre. Or, rather, how Blixen in her tales interprets, critiques and inverts major ideas, characters and plots from Kierkegaard's esthetic-pseudonymous works (1843-46).⁶ This also means that her tales, instead of just taking over the ideas presented in Kierkegaard's works, offer a whole new interpretation of them, while at the same time being independent works (that also deal with ideas presented by other writers) in their own right. In that regard it is clear that the "light" that Kierkegaard and his works are shedding on Blixen's works, which is what the subtitle of this thesis suggests, is reflected back on Kierkegaard to a degree, so it would be valid to state that the road also runs the other way and we could invert the sentence, so it reads: "Reading Kierkegaard in the Light of Blixen."

Thus, in relation to Kierkegaard, Karen Blixen's oeuvre offers a long line of narratives⁷ that deliberately interpret and subvert characters, plots and major ideas from Kierkegaard's works and instead propagate a pagan, materialistic and feminist perspective on gender and Christianity in direct opposition to Kierkegaard's works that (in Blixen's view) offer a (flawed) Christian, idealistic and masculine perspective on the world. This dichotomy is best described as Lucifer's (the angel of light and truth) revolt (Blixen) against God in the shape of the Christian-Idealistic order (Kierkegaard), which she in her ironical counter-narratives turns upside-down to a degree so it often borders parody. This position is also the argument behind the choice of the title "The Devil's Advocate" (the pun is here to be understood outside the discourse of Christianity) since Blixen from a pagan-materialistic point continuously questions and challenges major ideas from Kierkegaard's works. Her materialistic and atheist way of thinking with regard to Christianity and Kierkegaard is completely in line with that of Georg Brandes' and, as I will go on to show, Blixen got her view on Kierkegaard through Georg Brandes

⁶ Based on Behrendt's convincing articles "An Essay in the Art of Writing Posthumous Papers" (Behrendt 2003) and "Det pseudonyme firma: om juridiske fiktioner - et dobbeltportræt" (Behrendt 2004) that point to the fact that Kierkegaard's entire body of work must be considered pseudonymous, I will use the term "*esthetic*-pseudonymous" about the first part of Kierkegaard's authorship covering the years 1843-46.

⁷ *Sandhedens Hævn* (1926), "Carnival" (1926-27, 1933, published 1975 and 1977) "Drømmerne," (1935) "Digteren" (1935), "En Historie om en Perle" (1942), "Babettes Gæstebud" (1958) and most likely also "Dykkeren" (1958) (Langbaum 1964) and "Peter og Rosa" (1957) (Bøggild 2012).

and shared his critique of him, even though they both recognized Kierkegaard as a great writer, and at times (within certain limits), also a great philosopher.

1. RESEARCH SURVEY: THE BLIXEN-KIERKEGAARD SCHOLARSHIP

In this research survey I will go through the Blixen scholarship with particular attention to the connections that have been established with Kierkegaard from the publication of *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) until present.⁸ The connections made over the years can be divided into two categories. A) Connections between Blixen and Kierkegaard that are substantial and deserve to be taken seriously. Here the Blixen scholars have more in depth knowledge about Kierkegaard too and put in an effort to back up their observations with close readings of Kierkegaard's works with regard to Blixen (even though with varying success). B) Connections to Kierkegaard that for the most part are random and superficial, typically established in Blixen monographs or shorter articles, where it is clear that the author has little knowledge of Kierkegaard and primarily establishes the connections based on intuition or, alternatively, by reproducing ideas from previous scholars without evaluating them. The summary is organized chronologically, but I will mark the most important contributions (that I in most cases will return to later in the thesis) with an A in parentheses. The unmarked contributions automatically belong to category B.

1934-1969

The first connection to Kierkegaard we find in two reviews upon the publication of *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) and *Syv fantastiske fortællinger* (1935). In his review of *Seven Gothic Tales* in the paper *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts Tidning* (July 18, 1934) Swedish reviewer Torgny Segerstedt briefly notes that: "Åtskilliga reminiscenser från nordisk litteratur skymta. Så stöter man på Kierkegaards anekdot om skylten: "Her mangles" och åtskilligt annat" (quoted from Rostbøll 1980, 129). More significant however is Danish writer and reviewer Tom Kristensen's review of *Syv fantastiske*

⁸ For a comprehensive review and examination of the entire Karen Blixen scholarship up until 1999, see Jørgensen 1999, 177-264 and for additional contributions to the scholarship up until 2012 (aside from the survey in this thesis) see Aage Jørgensen's online Karen Blixen Bibliography: http://www.blixen.dk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Blixen_Bibliografi_2012.pdf

fortællinger in Danish newspaper *Politiken* (Sept. 26, 1935) following the publication of Blixen's Danish reworking of the original English text. Here Kristensen concludes his review with an exalted comparison between Blixen and Kierkegaard connecting them with regard to the Gothic elements and their ingenious fantasy:

Og denne Grundtone vil vi fastholde. Sorg og Glæde, Smerte og Vellyst løber sammen i ét (...) Og kan denne Grundtone endnu ikke gøre Læseren fortrolig med Baronessens snørklede, hyperlogiske Fantasi, forekommer den stadig Læseren udansk, saa er det pudsigt at minde den samme uvillige Læser om, at den danske Søren Kierkegaard engang i vor "gothiske" Fortid, i Fyrreerne, skrev et hypergenialt Essay om Mozarts "Don Juan". Der vil man finde den samme danske Fantasi, der med sin logiske Stædighed truer med at sprænge Fornuften, den danske Fantasi, saadan som den er, naar den er genial. (quoted Rostbøll 1980, 221).

An examination of the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, English and US reviews of *Winter's Tales* (1942) that we find in the Capsule 153 in the Karen Blixen archive at The Royal Library in Copenhagen revealed no mention of Kierkegaard. On the other hand there seems to be agreement among most Danish reviewers to label Blixen's tales as "Eventyr" (fairy-tales) and point out H. C. Andersen (and partly E. T. A. Hoffmann) as the major source of inspiration, which is understandable when taking the Danish title *Vinter-Eventyr* into account. The most common point of critique among the reviewers is, however, that the tales are literary pastiches that do not seem to deal with the psychology of ordinary people, and thus are not particularly interesting aside from their entertaining, fairy-tale-like qualities.⁹ The Swedish reviewers compare Blixen to Selma Lagerlöf, whereas the British and US reviewers are more international in their comparisons and mention Shakespeare, Maupassant, Gogol, Poe and Conrad as the major sources of inspiration. Blixen's first major works came in the 1930s and 1940s where the literary climate in Denmark, within the genre of prose, favored social realism. Thus, it is not surprising that most critics and literary scholars of the day were bewildered when confronted with this odd mix of seemingly archaic storytelling and European Modernism within the frame of 19th-century story worlds. Blixen's international breakthrough and

⁹ Blixen must have been aware that the Danish title *Vinter-Eventyr* (and not "Vinter-Fortællinger," which would be a better translation of the English title) would make her Danish readers and the reviewers think of H. C. Andersen (instead of Shakespeare, which the English title alludes to). Since the tales are everything but "Eventyr" as Behrendt precisely observes: "Et vintereventyr er et antieventyr, hvor ingen lever lykkeligt til deres dages ende" (Behrendt 2010a, 404) the title must be perceived as ironic and as another example of Blixen's astute and ironic way of playing with her readers and turning things upside down as she did with Kierkegaard.

her enigmatic status within Danish literature, however, lead to the first monograph about her body of work (up until *Gengældelsens Veje*, 1944) published in 1949 by Danish scholar Hans Brix¹⁰ (Brix 1949) only fifteen years after her debut, which was very unusual at the time (albeit not today). When taking the common opinion among the reviewers and the comparisons to H.C. Andersen into account, it also seems no coincidence that the monograph was titled *Karen Blixens Eventyr*. Even though Hans Brix was an extremely well read scholar and points out many allusions to 19th century Danish literature in Blixen's tales, he nowhere mentions Kierkegaard as one of Blixen's literary background sources.¹¹

A few years later in 1951 Christian Elling wrote a long chapter¹² about Blixen in the two volume history of Danish Literature *Danske Digtere i det 20. Aarhundrede* (Frandsen and Johansen 1951, 521-55), where he doesn't pay particular attention to Kierkegaard, but one of the editors of the volume, Ernst Frandsen, does when he in the review chapter "Udsigt over et halvt Aarhundrede" makes an interesting observation with regard to Blixen and Kierkegaard when he places Blixen in the Kierkegaardian category of the esthetical compared to her younger contemporaries, Kaj Munk and Nis Petersen, whom he places in the category of the religious (Frandsen and Johansen 1951, 22). It is a rather brief passage and Frandsen does not offer a more in depth explanation, but the observation is, however, interesting (A) and I will return to it in the chapter "Blixen. An Ethical Aesthete."

Aside from this brief, en passant, comparison between Kierkegaard's notion of the esthetic and Karen Blixen, Aage Henriksen seems to be the first scholar (A) to develop a more in-depth connection to Kierkegaard, when he, in his small book *Karen Blixen og marionetterne* published in 1952,¹³ compares the marionette motive in Blixen's marionette comedy *Sandhedens Hævn* (1926) to the notion of Christianity and God and concludes that Blixen and Kierkegaard have gentagelsen (repetition) in common (the essay is reprinted in Henriksen 1965, 32). He also mentions that both writers seem to fear

¹⁰ Hans Brix was a professor of Danish Literature at the University of Copenhagen 1924-41.

¹¹ Which there is certain logic to since Kierkegaard never really caught the interest of Hans Brix, whose major literary research interests instead were writers such as Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), Emil Aarrestrup (1800-1856) and H. C. Andersen (1805-1875).

¹² Not mentioned in Bo Hakon Jørgensen's Karen Blixen research review (Jørgensen 1999).

¹³ First given as two radio talks on National Radio in May 1952 that we know Blixen heard (Blixen 1996, Vol. II, 99).

the demonic aesthete but have different ways of dealing with this archetypal character¹⁴. In the last chapter of Aage Henriksen's doctoral thesis *Kierkegaard's romaner* that came out as a book two years later (1954), Henriksen returned to the marionette/repetition idea and developed it, using the notion Blixen put forward in *Sandhedens Hævn* that we as human beings have to stay true to our nature in order to be a good marionette, thus must remember to: ““holde forfatterens idé klar, ja, at drive den ud i den yderste konsekvens” (Henriksen 1954, 175). I will get back to this important observation and Henriksen's interpretation of the Christian and the marionette in the chapter “Sandhedens Hævn.”

English scholar Eric O. Johannesson (A) was the first to bring attention to the connection between Søren Kierkegaard and Karen Blixen in the book *The World of Isak Dinesen* (1961). There connections between Blixen and Kierkegaard, albeit very short and loose, were established with regard to: The Gothic tradition (Johannesson 1961, 299), the character of the melancholy young man (Ibid. 34), Kierkegaard and Blixen as artists of the mask and masters of irony (Ibid. 52), their affinity for romantic humor (Ibid. 53) and the use of pseudonyms (Ibid. 69). Danish poet and friend of Karen Blixen, Jørgen Gustava Brandt was not impressed with the book when it came out and mentions it in a letter to Blixen from February 16th 1962:

Har baronessen set, at der, i Amerika, er udkommet en bog, “The World of Isak Dinesen”, af E. O. Johannesson. Jeg har netop faaet den tilsendt og har blot gennemlæst den. Den virker ikke meget interessant,—bortset fra emnet, naturligvis,— men den siger dog nok nye unge læsere et og andet om forfatterskabet og dets rang. (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 461-462)¹⁵

A year later Johannesson published a small article: “Isak Dinesen. Soeren [sic] Kierkegaard and the Present Age” in *Books Abroad* 1962 where he develops the idea of Blixen and Kierkegaard as “artists of the mask” and points out similarities with regard to their approach to Bourgeois individualism, which is the subject of criticism in Kierkegaard's *En literair Anmeldelse*¹⁶ (1846). There Kierkegaard suggests that passion, honor and greatness have been substituted with reflection and superficiality in the new

¹⁴ I discuss this quote with regard to repetition and the demonic in the paper about the “The Poet” (Bunch 2013b, 15-6).

¹⁵ Johannesson also sent her a copy of the book with a personal dedication to Blixen. It was in her library, when she died (Bondesson 1982, 412).

¹⁶ With the subtitle: ”To Tidsaldr, Novelle af Forfatteren til »en Hverdagshistorie«, udgiven af J. L. Heiberg.” (...) ”anmeldt af S. Kierkegaard.” (Kierkegaard 1846a, n. pag.)

post-revolutionary Bourgeois society that wrongly believes that the individual is the creator of his own destiny. This is a point of view that on the surface does not seem too far from Blixen's view on Bourgeois individualism, but here we must remember the major differences with regard to Blixen's notion of the individual in connection to Christianity, which separates the two, rather than connects them, as I will go on to show in the chapters "Sandhedens Hævn" and "The Concept of Christi-Anxiety." Georg Brandes (A) also claims that the passionate ideas Kierkegaard propagates in the essay with regard to the notion *the passion and greatness of past times* might very well just be a mirror of his own inner condition:

Jeg sigter til Afhandlingen om Fru Gyllembourg's «To Tidsaldre» og Artiklerne «Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv» der uden at nævne Fru Heibergs Navn strøer Virak for hendes Fødder. Kierkegaard led af en Art ulykkelig Kjærlighed til Heiberg og det Heibergske Hus, og disse to Arbejder ere Ytringsformer af denne. Den Del af dem, som holder sig til Sagen, den egentlig kritiske, er en Strøm af fortræffeligt skrevne og fint udtænkte Complimenter. Det Øvrige deri er Charakteristik af Samtiden i Kierkegaards sædvanlige Stil, altsaa lige det Modsatte af Complimenter. Fru Gyllembourgs «To Tidsaldre», en meget talentfuld Novelle, indeholder en Art Defensionsindlæg for den Tid, da Forfatterinden selv var ung, Revolutionstidsalderen nemlig, som sees i et poetisk Lys, og en yderst ensidig og bitter Anklage mod Datiden. Forsvaret tager Kierkegaard med visse Forbehold til Indtægt, fordi Revolutionstiden besad den Lidenskabelighed, han forguder, (og dog er det lidet tvivlsomt at han, hvis han havde været samtidig med den, vilde have dømt den som Oprør mod alt Ærværdigt og Helligt) Angrebet er fuldstændig Vand paa hans egen Mølle. Han tager deraf Anledning til en sand Tordentale imod «Nutidens» Lidenskabsløshed, Misundelse, Nivelleresyge, Overfladiskhed og Lefleri. (Brandes 1877, 132-3)

In an article about *En litterair Anmeldelse* from 2005, Poul Behrendt (A) also shows that Kierkegaard's review is a hidden polemical comment to P. L. Møller and his review of Kierkegaard's *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (1845) where P. L. Møller accuses Kierkegaard of falling in the same trap as H. C. Andersen:

Det var en renlivet repetition af kritikken fra 1838, hvor Kierkegaard havde ærtet H. C. Andersen for at promenerer sin egen privatperson, så at hvert nyt værk fra Andersens hånd, i stedet for en "Production", snarere var en – "Amputation". "Hver Gang man troer at kunne hengive sig til en reen litterær Nydelse," genlød det nu bidsk fra P.L. Møller, "kommer Forf. En i Veien"¹⁷ med sin egen etiske og religiøse Udvikling,¹⁸ som Ingen egentlig spørger om, som kan privat være meget respektabel, men ikke har løst Tegn til den objective Litteraturs Langelinie." (Behrendt 2005, 224)

¹⁷ Note the astute play on words with regard to the title of Kierkegaard's work that Møller critiques *Stadier paa Livets Vei*.

¹⁸ This is a critique of Kierkegaard that, as I will show in this thesis, Blixen seemed to support.

Behrendt convincingly goes on to show that Kierkegaard's *En literair Anmeldelse* is designed as a response to P. L. Møller in order to show him how a *real and sober* literary review is supposed to be conducted. A review where the focus stays on evaluating the overall view on life that the work wants to communicate and where the reviewer respects the pseudonym of the empirical author, which was the code of conduct within the 19th century literary environment. A code of conduct that was, as Behrendt observes, violated by P. L. Møller, which made Kierkegaard furious and became the main source of their conflict (Behrendt 2005, 224).¹⁹ When also including Brandes and Behrendt's perspectives on Kierkegaard's *En literair Anmeldelse*, I don't believe that the similarities between Kierkegaard and Blixen's overall view on life, that has more or less become a fact within the scholarship (starting with Johannesson's article), hold water. There might be some similarities on the surface, but these similarities are like words that are spelled the same way in two languages but mean something completely different: "false friends." To sum up: When we dig deeper, we understand that Blixen had a very different view on 19th century Christian-Bourgeoisie and was highly critical of Kierkegaard's religious solution to the existential challenges of the day, which I will go on to show in the chapters "Sandhedens Hævn" and "The Concept of Christi-Anxiety."

Following in the Blixen-Kierkegaard trail laid out by Johannesson in 1962, Robert Langbaum's book *The Gayety of Vision* from 1964 (A) suggests multiple connections to Kierkegaard's works and thinking (Langbaum 1964, 300). Here we also find the first analysis of the novella "Ehregard" (that had just come out posthumously in 1963) and the interpretation of it as a literary comment to Kierkegaard's "Forførerens Dagbog"²⁰ together with a shorter analysis of the Don Juan motive in "The Dreamers" that Langbaum correctly suggests is inspired by the character A's essay "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske" from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* (Langbaum 1964, 99-101). He also suggests that "The Diver" is dealing with the notions of "hope"

¹⁹ This conflict also became one of the major topics in Aage Henriksen and Karen Blixen's discussion of Kierkegaard in their correspondence (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 150-1). I will return to the passage from this letter in the chapter "Lucifer. Masculinity Internalized: Heksen and Jomfru Maria."

²⁰ Since Langbaum's analysis of "Ehregard" this Blixen-Kierkegaard connection has been the main focus of attention in the Blixen research tradition. At least twenty articles or separate book chapters, discussing the novella in various ways have been published. See Sørensen 2002, 190-3 and Bunch 2013a, 1.

and “infinite resignation” from Kierkegaard’s *Frygt og Bæven*, which I also think is correct (see footnote 93). Though most of the connections Langbaum establishes to Kierkegaard are not supported by juxtapositions of quotes and more substantial literary historical observations, he is the first scholar to give us an indication of the substantial influence Kierkegaard had on Blixen’s work, even though he is not always able to figure out exactly how this influence unfolded.

The first biography of Blixen titled *Titania. The Biography of Isak Dinesen* came out in 1967. It was written by Parmenia Migel, who *en passant* mentions that Blixen and Henriksen discussed Kierkegaard and that Kierkegaard was one of Blixen’s favorite subjects: “For a while he saw a great deal of Tania, and amongst other things, they both enjoyed discussing Kierkegaard, a favorite subject with Tania and of special interest to Henriksen” (Migel 1968, 150), but Migel does not elaborate further on Blixen’s approach to Kierkegaard.

Another Blixen monograph *Karen Blixen debuterer* written by Aage Kabel came out a year later in Germany (1968). Here the approach is biographical and comparative, but even though Kabel seems to be just as well read and thorough as Hans Brix with regard to literary allusions and historical connections (and sharper when it comes to pointing out allusions to European literature), he only mentions Kierkegaard in a few passages (Kabel 1968, 90, 116, 187) that do not really bring anything new to the scholarship. It might have to do with the fact that Kabel refers a lot to Langbaum’s analysis’ in the footnotes and thus seems to avoid mentioning Kierkegaard if he can’t bring anything new to Langbaum’s observations.

1970-1994

The interest in both Kierkegaard and Blixen dropped significantly in the 1970s, when a shift from the biographical and comparative approach to the study of literature was substituted by Freudo-Marxist and structuralist approaches, which came to dominate academic discourse and gender and politics became the main centers of attention. Aside from Poul Behrendt’s superior analyses of the Blixen tales “Sorg-Agre” and “En Herregaardshistorie” (based on hermeneutic-rhetorical principles) that came out in Danish literary journals *Kritik* and *Blixeniana* (Behrendt 1977; Behrendt 1978), not much

came out in 1970s, but in the 1980s the pendulum started to swing the other way and a couple of substantial contributions to Blixen scholarship saw the light of day: Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen's feminist reading of the Blixen's oeuvre *Dianas Hævn* from 1981, which, curiously enough, nowhere mentions Kierkegaard even though Diana is a reoccurring figure in Kierkegaard's *Enten. Eller. Første Deel*,²¹ and thus with regard to Kierkegaard has nothing to bring to the scholarship. Of much more interest with regard to Kierkegaard was Bernhard Glienke's book *Fatale Präzedenz. Karen Blixens Mythologie* (1986) (A) that came out five years later. Glienke's main aim in his monograph is to spot as many allusions in order to evaluate the influence of Blixen's literary predecessors. At the same time Glienke applies a structuralist method in his analyses of the tales, particularly with regard to "Ehregard", which we understand from the title of his chapter about "Ehregard": "6.3. Aktanten. *Ehregard*" (Glienke 1986, 213). This method of analysis, however, does not contribute with any new, important observations with regard to Blixen's text as such or its relation to Kierkegaard. Aside from the explicit mentions of Kierkegaard in Blixen's work including the character "the young Søren Kierkegaard" in "Carnival", which account for four in total (Glienke 1986, 136, 148, 151, 153), Glienke spots the following allusions to Kierkegaard's works: One to *Sygdommen til Døden* (123), one to *Gjentagelsen* (124), one to *Frygt og Bæven* (146) and eleven allusions to Kierkegaard's *Enten. Eller* — ten of which are to *Enten. Eller. Første Deel*. This accounts for eighteen allusions in total (Glienke 1986, 189). Even though Glienke overlooks many allusions and connections to Kierkegaard and fails to explain what these connections actually bring to our understanding of Blixen's approach to Kierkegaard, the book is indeed a substantial contribution to the scholarship on the formal level of comparison and allusion. In her biography *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* from 1982 Judith Thurman mentions Kierkegaard in nine different passages (Thurman 1982, 549). Comparisons here are, however, loose and bring nothing of significance to the scholarship. In 1983 an analysis of "Carnival" appeared in *Scandinavica*. It was co-written by Arthur R. Ganzberg and Vivian Greene-Ganzberg

²¹ Diana is mentioned in three significant passages in *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.) that inspired Blixen's character Ehregard in "Ehregard" (Bunch 2013a).

with the straightforward title “Karen Blixen’s ‘Carnival’.”²² The analysis, however, offers little insight with regard to Kierkegaard and only delivers a shallow interpretation of the character Annelise:

The masks in “Carnival” are not used to obscure the identity of the wearers entirely; on the contrary, certain comic effects in the tale are attained by contrasting the wearer’s still visible, banal appearance with the highmindedness revealed by the choice of the mask. The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, for example, must co-exist with the shallow figure of Annelise, whose brilliance is defined only by her outward appearance. (Ganzberg and Greene –Ganzberg 1993, 131)

In 1984 Jackie Kleinman followed up on Johannesson’s ideas about Blixen and Kierkegaard’s *En literair Anmeldelse*. The article appeared in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary* (1984) and was titled “Two Ages. A Story of Søren Kierkegaard and Isak Dinesen.” Kleinman starts by outlining that she is in agreement with Johannesson and then goes on to develop Johannesson’s ideas. Again, Kleinman’s main aim is to find and develop similarities between Kierkegaard and Blixen, which leads to a couple of premature conclusions about gender and the “individual and God”:

Dinesen and Kierkegaard agreed, in general, about the role of the male/female image in the nature of things, and both used the classical interlocking, interdependent image of that essential relationship as paradigmatic of the essential relationship in all things, and of the relationship between the individual and God. Both agreed that “feminine” submissiveness, of the freely chosen variety, was a superior form of strength (Dinesen called it the “price” and the “pride” of life). (Kleinman 1984, 177, author’s italics)

Kleinman also claims that Kierkegaard, at the time when he wrote his review, believed that Thomasine Gyllembourg, the author of *Hverdagshistorier* and the topic of Kierkegaard’s *En literair Anmeldelse*, was a man: “Kierkegaard judged Thomasine Gyllembourg (whom he thought to be a man) to be an author time-tested and ‘twice-matured’” (Kleinman 1984, 178), which is not only a sloppy, but also a flawed conclusion. Kierkegaard did of course know that it was J. L. Heiberg’s mother, Thomasine Gyllembourg, who had written *Hverdagshistorier* as did the rest of the academic and literary environment in Copenhagen of the day (documented already by Brandes 1877, 131-2). In the same year Birgit Bertung’s article “Har Søren Kierkegaard

²² I was unaware about this article, when I wrote my own article about “Carnival” (Bunch 2011). The article is reprinted in Pelensky 1993.

foregrebet Karen Blixens og Suzanne Brøggers kvindesyn?” came out in the journal *Kierkegaardiana* (Bertung 1984). In the article Bertung discusses Kierkegaard, Blixen and Brøgger’s view on women and marriage. She, however, concludes her essay with the following statement:

Jeg mener således, at Blixen, Brøgger og Kierkegaard er fuldstændig enige i hovedsynspunktet, at ægteskabet, *hvis* det var et idealt forhold (Kierkegaards udtryk), hvis det ikke havde mistet sin ide (Blixens formulering), og hvis det ikke havde været så kummerligt (Brøgger), ville være den bedste (og letteste) form for samliv mellem mand og kvinde. Dette er imidlertid ikke tilfældet: det ideale ægteskab er et ubekræftet rygte, vanen overtager i mange tilfælde styret. I værste fald vil en partner dominere over og destruere den andens personlighed i stedet for at løfte og inspirere, Kierkegaards terminologi: gøre muligheden til en opgave. (Bertung 1984, 83)

The above quote shows that Bertung also falls into the trap of presupposing that Blixen was in agreement with Kierkegaard with regard to women and gender. Here it seems that both Kierkegaard and Blixen are taken hostage in an overall attempt to prove that Brøgger’s 1970s feminist point of view on marriage is correct; that marriage is “kummerligt,” destructive and prevents the individual from growing and become “one-self.”

In 1990 when the literary discourse in the US was dominated by post-structuralism, Susan Hardy Aiken’s *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative* came out. Here Aiken presents us with readings of Blixen’s tales that are heavily inspired by the feminist post-structuralists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. In the book Aiken tries to show that Blixen in “The Roads Round Pisa” and in “The Dreamers” is deconstructing the phallogentric statements about women put forward by the male speakers in Kierkegaard’s “In vino veritas”. Aiken is right that both tales deal with the notions of gender and women in a radical way that also has connections to Kierkegaard, but there are no allusions in the tale that point directly to “In vino veritas” and no evidence to support the conclusion that:

In “Roads,” as in “The Dreamers,” Dinesen both satirizes the rigidly oppositional symbolic order that generates such stereotypical formulations “man” and “woman” and plays brilliantly on the analogies of femininity, figuration, and narrativity as principles of diversion, ex-centricity, and extravagance: literally, that which wanders outside the bounds (...) suggesting that within a phallogentric order woman becomes the supreme fiction/maker insofar as she simultaneously embodies and engenders the figurative of the narratable. (Aiken 1990, 160)

A year after came Olga Pelensky's biography *The Life and Imagination of a Seducer* (1991) where Pelensky mentions Kierkegaard nine times in relation to Blixen (Pelensky 1991, 216), but all of these connections must be considered random and unfounded. Interesting observations are, however, to be found in Irena Makarushka's feminist and post-structuralist article "Reflections on the 'Other' in Dinesen, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche" from 1992 where she observes the contrast between the ethical and the aesthetical in "Babette's Feast" with regard to Kierkegaard and characterize it in this way:

For Kierkegaard, the aesthetic and the ethical are mutually exclusive categories of experience. Under the category of the aesthetic, he includes characteristics and qualities associated with the darker side of Romanticism, including eroticism, sensuality, pleasure, immediacy, diversity, boredom, melancholia and detachment. In contrast to the aesthetic, Kierkegaard describes the ethical as related to duty, universal principles and unconditional choices. The ethical is a continuation of the singled-mindness of the purity of heart to will one thing. It is interesting to note that, although Kierkegaard attempts to retrieve feeling, which he considered lost to the rationality of eighteenth-century philosophy, he divorces feeling from sensuality, desire or pleasure. (Makarushka 1992, 152)

I think Makarushka's observation with regard to Kierkegaard is true in the sense that they are in line with Blixen's perception of Kierkegaard and his categories, even though Makarushka in her analysis of "Babette's Feast" is not able to fully understand the role these stages (together with the religious stage) play in the tale, which I will get back to in my analysis of "Babettes Gæstebud." Two years after her first book, Pelensky gathered a collection of previously published articles (all of them now translated into English) in the book *Isak Dinesen. Critical Views* (1993). With regard to Kierkegaard, we, aside from the already mentioned "Carnival" article, find Pelensky's own article "Isak Dinesen and Kierkegaard: The Aesthetics of Paradox in *Ehrengard*" (originally from 1985) but here she is offering a reading of "Ehrengard" that for the most part confuses our understanding of the tale, rather than enlighten it (Pelensky 1993, 322-32).

1995-2013

When the post-structuralist and post-colonialist waves, that also did not favor classical authors in the Western canon (and Karen Blixen in particular, who as the author of *Out of Africa* was perceived as a colonialist) started to abate, works with other approaches to

Blixen (and Kierkegaard) started to come out. One of them was Mogens Pahuus's *Karen Blixens livsfilosofi. En fortolkning af forfatterskabet* from 1995, which we could put with the paradigm of "Lebensphilosophie" (Philosophy of life)²³ as the title also strongly indicates. In the concluding chapter "Afslutning – Spørgsmålet om en filosofisk fortolkning af forfatterskabet" he suggests that Blixen adapts Kierkegaard's notion of how to become oneself:

Blixens billede af menneskets og dets drivkræfter rummer også et andet element, som træder klart frem, når man sammenligner med Kierkegaards menneskesyn. Kierkegaard definerer mennesket som en syntese af mulighed, uendelighed, evighed på den ene side og nødvendighed, endelighed, timelighed på den anden side. Kierkegaard hævder videre, at man kun kan være et helt eller vellykket menneske, når man har begge sider med i sin livsførelse (...) Blixen tænker nøjagtig på samme måde. (Pahuus 2001, 199)

Pahuus also elaborates on the marionette motive with regard to Kierkegaard inspired by Aage Henriksen:

Blixen er også enig med Kierkegaard i, at mennesket som en syntese af mulighed og nødvendighed forholder sig til sig selv. At leve ud fra sin natur eller selvvirkeliggørelsestrang er ikke noget, som giver sig af sig selv. Det kræver, at man med sin holdning (sin forholden sig til) giver livsudfoldelsen stil og form, at man former sit liv efter idealer (...) Det er disse tre bestemmelser af den vellykkede livsudfoldelse – som jeg i første kapitel benævnte 1) at leve ud fra sin natur, 2) at leve på en involveret måde og 3) at give sin livsudfoldelse form og stil, som udgør indholdet i marionetsymbolet (Pahuus 2001, 200)

Pahuus is right in some ways in his comparisons, especially in the last quote, but seems to neglect the religious solution Kierkegaard offered to the existential challenges of the individual, which Blixen did not subscribe to at all.

The year after, in 1996, Tone Selboe's *Kunst og erfaring. En studie i Karen Blixens forfatterskap* (A) came out. In the opening lines she describes her own method as:

"DENNE AVHANDLINGEN om Karen Blixens forfatterskap kombinerer en hermeneutisk grunnholdning med en tematisk og retorisk lesning" (Selboe 1996, 9).

Selboe dedicates a chapter to an analysis of "Ehregard" and conducts one of the best analyses of the tale so far, more interestingly, and a new observation within the

²³ According to the small article "Lebensphilosophie" by Jason Gaiger from 1998 in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edvard Craig, "Lebensphilosophie" is a philosophical school of thought, which emphasizes the meaning, value and purpose of life as the foremost focus of philosophy. Inspired by the critique of rationalism in the works of Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, it emerged in 19th century Germany as a reaction to the rise of positivism and the theoretical focus prominent in much of post-Kantian philosophy.

scholarship, is however the connection she makes between Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*, *Begrebet Angest*, "In vino veritas" and "Babettes Gæstebud" where she also correctly, albeit briefly, mentions that Blixen is critical of Kierkegaard (Selboe 1996, 108-19), which is rare within the scholarship. I will return to Selboe's observations in my analysis of "Babettes Gæstebud".

Selboe's book was succeeded by Jean Schuler's article "Kierkegaard at 'Babette's Feast'. The Return to the Finite" (Schuler 1997, n. pag.) in *Journal of Religion and Film* that instead of digging deeper into the crack that Selboe opened with regard to Kierkegaard, rather obscures the connections to Kierkegaard, since the article is based on feelings and presuppositions within the discourse of Christianity rather than thorough research. Here Schuler outlines some surprising parallels that, for scholars who know both Kierkegaard and Blixen, clearly do not pass the test, when subjected to further scrutiny:

The parallels between Kierkegaard's life and Blixen's story are striking. Like the General, Kierkegaard had spent a wayward youth, gambling and disappointing his father. Like the General, Kierkegaard traveled to the Jutland to stay with his aunt, and like the General returned to become engaged in the conventional manner of settling down. Only, unlike the General, Kierkegaard broke off the engagement and turned to writing in the peculiar religious and philosophical modes for which he is known. Most importantly, both the General and Kierkegaard discover that the great love which had seemed futile in youth was given back in the end (Schuler 1997, n. pag.).

Schuler completely overlooks the humorous and satirical components in "Babette's Feast" with regard to Christianity and goes on to conclude:

Babette's Feast suggests that evil can be accommodated without much bother; what confounds our ordinary bookkeeping is goodness or love. The villagers were not surprised by harshness, regrets, and crabbed routine. It was the gift freely given that disturbs them. Babette's feast was as unsettling to the villagers as the religious doctrine of forgiveness. This ethical life operates within the economy of scarcity and sacrifice. A greater courage is required to trust that love runs deeper than the losses which are so palpable. At the end of his journey to the Jutland, Kierkegaard writes: "It requires moral courage to grieve; it requires religious courage to rejoice." If eventually such a gift is accepted, it might move stiff and pinched limbs to dance (Schuler 1997, n. pag.).

This is of course incorrect since what moves the Berlevaagians "stiff and pinched limbs to dance" is the alcohol (the champagne and wine), which they don't know they are consuming and had never had before. Instead the Berlevaagians believe that it is the

Kingdom of Heaven that has arrived on earth, when it is in fact just their bodily response to the alcohol and the exquisite food that creates their state of mental bliss. This is a humorous-materialistic critique of Christianity Blixen delivers where the body is the source behind their spiritual bliss and willingness to forgive — not God in heaven. I will return to this in the chapter “‘Babettes Gæstebud’: Repetition and Nemesis of the Esthetical.”

In 1999 came Bo Hakon Jørgensen’s doctoral thesis *Siden hen. Om Karen Blixen*. The focus of the thesis is “Drømmerne” and the vanishing point “siden hen” that we find in “Drømmerne” and other Blixen tales. Kierkegaard is mentioned in six passages (Jørgensen 1999, 307) in connection to a couple of well-known letters between Blixen and Aage Henriksen, but of more interest is Jørgensen’s critique of Langbaum’s reading of Pellegrina as a female Don Juan (Langbaum 1964), which he denies any validity:

Langbaum betragter Pellegrina efter branden som en kvindelig Don Juan [!] – og forklarer det italienske citat på denne måde. Men der er dog intet opsøgende forførerisk i nogen af hendes roller efter branden, så at se hende som en kvindelig Don Juan må være en slags systemtvang hos Langbaum og senere andre fortolkere! (Jørgensen 1999, 97)

What Jørgensen points out as an argument for dismissing Pellegrina as a female Don Juan: “der er dog intet opsøgende forførerisk i nogen af hendes roller efter branden” is, I will argue, exactly one of Blixen’s points with regard to the differences between male and female seduction. This I will return to and explain in further detail in my analysis of “Drømmerne” in the chapter “‘Drømmerne’: Don Juan, Pellegrina and Seduction.”

The decade concluded with Heinrich Anz’s small article “‘Seinerzeit eine Art makabre Modefigur’. Aspekte der Wirkungsgeschichte Søren Kierkegaards in der skandinavischen Literatur” (Anz 1999) (A). Here he carries out the most elaborate analysis of “Carnival” in relation to Kierkegaard so far conducted.²⁴ Even though Anz’s analysis in some ways is inconsistent, which should be clear from my article about “Carnival,” he reaches a conclusion about Blixen’s relation to Kierkegaard that has some truth to it, when he claims:

²⁴ Anz’s article from 1999 is another article about “Carnival” (the first one being Ganzberg and Greene-Ganzberg 1995, first printed in 1984) that I was not aware of when I wrote the article about “Carnival” presented in this thesis (Bunch 2011).

Die literarische Gestaltung des Ästhetikers und des Ethikers in *Enten-Eller* fällt so deutlich zu ungunsten des Ethikers aus, dass eine kritische Weiterdichtung des Ästhetikers sinnvoll ist. Wenn, wie H. Deuser das formuliert hat, “Kierkegaards Zwang zur Ablösung des Ästhetischen im Ethischen [...] widerrufen” werden kann, dann tut sich innerhalb des Ästhetischen ein Spielraum neuer und konsequenterer literarischer Konstruktionen auf. Eine solche Widerrufung und Neukonstruktion ist Karen Blixens Kierkegaardrezeption durchweg (...) Auf einer möglichen basale Korrektur Kierkegaards macht Blixen zentrale literarische Motive seiner “ästhetischen Schriftstellerei” produktiv. Das ergibt ein vertracktes Vexierbild, in das sich eklektisch andere Autoren einbeziehen lassen (Anz 1999, 211)

I will return to this in the chapter “The Shadow as Conscience and Guilt.”

The interest in both Kierkegaard and Blixen increased in the latter part of the 1990s through the present and several new connections between the two writers were established. The first monograph to come out was Dag Heede’s *Det umenneskelige* from 2001, which is a post-structuralist queer reading of Blixen’s tales with Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) as the major inspiration.²⁵ Kierkegaard is only mentioned briefly in connection to “Carnival” and “Ehrengard” (Heede 2001), but I will deal more in detail with Heede’s views on Blixen and gender in my article about “Carnival” and the chapters that follow the article.

On an overall level I think the increased interest in these particular writers (who both deal with how the individual struggles to become itself in conflict with the norms and expectations of society) around the new Millennium had something to do with a renewed interest in existentialism and “the individual” and how it maneuvers within the new globalized, neoliberalistic, competitive society. A society that on one hand offers more freedom to become who “you are” but on the other hand increases stress and anxiety by demanding strict discipline to ensure maximum efficiency and competitiveness in the age of “individualization.”²⁶

Kierkegaard especially had a lot of momentum in the late 1990s and the 2000s with the publication of the new annotated edition of his collected works that started in 1997 and is set to conclude in 2013, in celebration of 200 years since his birth. But a renewed interest in Blixen also led to the publication of DSL’s (Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab) annotated edition of her collected works in Danish, starting with the

²⁵ With this book about Blixen Heede really put Queer Studies on the map of the theoretical landscape in Denmark within the study of literature, even though I for the most part disagree with his readings and his queer interpretation of the characters in Blixen’s tales.

²⁶ See for example Bunch 2009, Pedersen 2011 and Bunch 2013c.

publication of *Den afrikanske Farm* in 2007 (Blixen 2007), *Vinter-Eventyr* in 2010 (Blixen 2010), *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* in 2012 (Blixen 2012) and with *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944) as the next scheduled publication. On an academic institutional level I think the increased interest for connecting the two writers also had to do with a shift within the academic environment of literature studies that now offers a polyphony of new ways to approach literature (cultural studies, comparative literature, world literature, the study of book history, translation and reception) all having contact with the overall current of New Historicism, defined as:

Betegnelsen [Nyhistorismen] henviser således ikke til en bestemt skole, men til mange forskellige læsestrategier, der forholder sig til litterære tekster som historiske dokumenter, der kommer ud af bestemte sociale, kulturelle og politiske kontekster. Der markeres altså en vending væk fra blandt andet nykritikkens og dekonstruktivismens formale, dekontekstualiserede analyser (...) Nyhistorismen har berøringsflader med både cultural studies og kulturel materialisme, men skiller sig ud ved sin insisteren på det historiske udgangspunkt. Kritik af nyhistorismen går ofte på, at tilgangen reducerer det litterære værk til et vidnesbyrd om den specifikke historiske kontekst og dermed overseer litteraturens potentiale som eksistentielt og æstetisk udsagn. (Tanderup 2013, 437-8)

This is also the overall approach that this thesis has as a starting point for the investigation of how Blixen dealt with Kierkegaard, but at the same time without neglecting “litteraturens potentiale som eksistentielt og æstetisk udsagn” and supporting the fact that literature, in the words of Behrendt, conversely, has the power to change our understanding of significant historical developments, meaning that the road of influence also runs the other way, from writer to society:

I alle tilfælde står forståelsen af tekst og samfund i modsætning til en ‘traditionel’ sociologisk eller socialhistorisk forklaringsramme. Det er ikke historie- eller samfundsvidenskab, der forklarer tekst eller forfatter. Det er stik imod forfatteren, der som tekstuel instans ændrer forståelsen af samfund og historie. (Behrendt 2007, 12)

New Historicism together with a renewed momentum within the study of narrative theory (especially Dorrit Cohn, James Phelan and Poul Behrendt) all in all offered a more fact-based, hands-on approach to the study of literature in the 2000s and early 2010s compared to the more lofty, ideological and theoretical approaches that dominated the academic literary discourses in the 1980s and 1990s. This paved the way for various comparative studies within this theoretical framework.

The first book of the 2000s connecting Kierkegaard and Blixen was a comparative-philosophical study: Per Brahdé's thesis *Magt og afmagt – Kierkegaard og Nietzsche spejlet i Karen Blixens forfatterskab* from 2001, inspired by Pahuus' book about Blixen from 1995 (Brahdé 2001, 10). Here the title, however, promises more than the book delivers, since the connections between Blixen and the two philosophers appear loosely founded and imprecise.

Ivan Ž. Sørensen's '*Gid De havde set mig dengang.*' *Et essay om Karen Blixens heltinder og Tizians gudinder* (2002) (A) is on the other hand a very substantial contribution to the scholarship and contains the most thorough analysis of "Ehrengard" so far conducted (Sørensen 2002, 101-85). Sørensen also manages to establish interesting new connections between Blixen and Kierkegaard that are not directly related to "Ehrengard", for example with regard to humor and the religious, which I will return to in the chapter "Humor or Irony?" Even though my interpretation of "Ehrengard" deviates from Sørensen's on a couple of crucial points (Bunch 2013a) his "Ehrengard" study has been a great help as a starting point and so has the material from his unpublished talks to which he has kindly given me access. In his book Sørensen also lists most of the articles and chapters that have been written about "Ehrengard" up until 2002 (Sørensen 2002, 190-3). To Sørensen's list we can add the following articles Timm Knudsen 1992, Gemal 1999, Mieszkowski 2003, Møller 2005, Rosdahl and Sørensen 2011 and Kondrup 2011. I will not elaborate more in detail about each article here but instead refer to my own analysis in the article "'Ehrengard,' Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note" in this thesis.

In the same year Susan Brantly's book *Understanding Isak Dinesen* came out (Brantly 2002), which seems to be *the* major work in English about Blixen of the decade. Brantly mentions Kierkegaard five times as she redevelops some of Johannesson's and Langbaum's ideas with regard to "The Dreamers" (the female romantic hero), "The Diver", "The Old Chevalier" and "Ehrengard", albeit only in brief passages.

In 2004 Lars Nilsson's book *Om Isak Dinesens "Drømmerne"* came as a critical answer to Bo Hakon Jørgensen's interpretation of "Drømmerne" in *Siden hen* (1999), which I have already mentioned. Nilsson (A) refers extensively to Kierkegaard and makes more than twenty-five connections (Nilsson 2004, 309) between Blixen and Kierkegaard. Nilsson picks up the discussion about Pellegrina as a female Don Juan,

started by Langbaum and dismissed by Jørgensen. Even though Nilsson is definitely on the right track, he is only developing the Don Juan motive in connection to Kierkegaard with limited success (I will get back to this in my analysis of “Drømmerne”), but it is still an important and substantial contribution to the scholarship. Nilsson’s attempt to connect the character of the young man from Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* and Pellegrina, however, seems very inconsistent, but I think he is right, when he observes that Blixen uses the idea Kierkegaard develops in his essay “Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv I-IV” (1848, written under the pseudonym “Inter et Inter”) that only a woman in her mid-thirties is truly able to play a young girl. In “Den udødelige Historie” (*Skæbne-Anektdoter*, 1958) Blixen lets the heroine Virginie, who is in her late twenties / early thirties, play a young girl of seventeen to the fullest of success and I think Nilsson is right when he points out that Blixen was inspired to do so by Kierkegaard (Nilsson 2004, 185-6).²⁷

From the same year we find an article by John Vignaux Smyth “Art, Eroticism, and Sadomasochistic Sacrifice in Søren Kierkegaard and Isak Dinesen” in the book *The New Kierkegaard* (2004) edited by Elsebeth Jegstrup. The angle is (post)-post-structuralist and the connections established between *The Concept of Anxiety*, “The Seducer’s Diary” and “Ehrengard” appear inconsistent and far-fetched (Smyth 2004) and will not be addressed further in this thesis.

Another article connecting Kierkegaard and Blixen came a year later: Jacob Bøggild’s “På smertens mark ‘Sorg-Agre’ i et intertekstuel felt” (Bøggild 2005a). Here Bøggild (A) connects the thoughts presented by A in the essay “Om det antike Tragiskes Reflex i det moderne Tragiske” from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.) with the notion of “sorg” and “smerte” in “Sorg-Agre”:

Sorgen er altså antik og klassisk, smerten moderne, den fundamentale følelse eller tilstand i det moderne drama. Det er, anskuet gennem A’s æstetikhistoriske briller, det tragiskes dialektik (...) Og denne dialektik viser det sig, igen frapperende, at “Sorg-Agre” i høj grad er skrevet ud fra. (Bøggild 2005a, 42-3)

²⁷ Blixen could, however, also have gotten the idea indirectly from Brandes’ book where Brandes mentions Kierkegaard’s essay and gives a detailed description of Kierkegaard’s idea of an older actress playing a young girl (Brandes 1877, 133-4).

Bøggild concludes that: “Den gamle synes således at have et ben i hver lejr, et i den klassiske og et i den moderne (..) De to unge, Adam og Eva [hinting at Adam’s young aunt], tilhører til gengæld udelukkende den sidstnævnte” (Bøggild 2005a, 42-3). I am not able to evaluate in detail whether this is correct or not, but I have my doubts, when taking into account, that Blixen rarely just took over the ideas presented in Kierkegaard’s works and made them her own, as I will also argue in the following chapters. In his “Efterskrift” to *Vinter-Eventyr* from 2010 Behrendt convincingly shows that Blixen owes the ideas presented in “Sorg-Agre” about “det Tragiske,” “det Guddommelige” og “det Comiske” to Danish writer Meir Aron Goldschmidt’s work *Hjemløs. En Fortælling* (1853-57). Here he quotes a long passage from Goldschmidt’s work that fits very well with the ideas presented in “Sorg-Agre” (Behrendt 2010a, 388-9). The preliminary conclusion here must be that work still has to be done with regard to Blixen’s “Sorg-Agre” and the notion of “Sorg,” “Smerte,” “Det Guddommelige” og “Det Tragiske” in relation to Kierkegaard (and Goldschmidt). There is an interesting task here for future researchers.

In 2010 Heinrich Anz published another small article with the title “Erbauliche Geschichten. Zum Wirkungsgeschichtlichen Gespräch zwischen Karen Blixen und Søren Kierkegaard.” The article starts by claiming that “Blixens Kierkegaardlektüre ist schwer zu rekonstruieren” (Anz 2010, 421), which, as this thesis will prove, is only partly correct. Anz, however, goes on to establish some new connections between Kierkegaard’s works and three of Blixen’s tales: “Den unge Mand med Nelliken,” “En Historie om en Perle” and “Kardinalens første Historie” (ibid. 423). The connection Anz makes between Kierkegaard’s *Begrebet Angest* and “En Historie om en Perle” seems to have some very interesting perspectives with regard to Blixen’s critique of Christianity and Kierkegaard’s ideas about original sin and anxiety from *Begrebet Angest* (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag), which I will get back to in my analysis of “En Historie om en Perle,” whereas the connections Anz establishes to the two other tales are not backed by any substantial allusions or literary historical connections. In the same year Christian Braad Thomsen’s book *Boganis Gæstebud* (2010) was published. The book is a Freudian analysis of Blixen’s work with particular attention to the relation between Blixen and her father. Braad Thomsen only mentions Kierkegaard once, but here he correctly observes that the plot in “Digteren” is also inspired by the notion put forward by Victor Eremita in

“In vino veritas” that you become a poet as a result of the girl you did not get (Braad Thomsen 2010, 228).²⁸

From 2010 we also find Sune De Souza Schmidt-Madsen’s MA-Thesis *Felix Culpa – Syndefaldet og den sokratiske metode i Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Here Schmidt-Madsen compares Kierkegaard’s notion of the fall in *Begrebet Angest* to the fall that various characters in Karen Blixen’s tales often experience towards the end of the tale. Schmidt-Madsen arrives at the conclusion that Blixen’s tales are examples of “Felix Culpa” – the fortunate (positive or blessed) fall from where the individual emerges and grow: “Det, der til gengæld efter min mening er moderne Blixens måde at behandle syndefaldet på, er, at tolke det som en psykologisk eller eksistentiel myte, der handler om uskyld, der må gå tabt, før livet som menneske kan begynde” (Schmidt-Madsen 2010, 23). I disagree with this interpretation of the positive fall in Blixen’s tales, since, when analyzing these falls with regard to most of the female characters (for example Jensine, Lise and Ehrengard), they appear, on the contrary, to have a very negative and tragic impact on the life of these women. Through the fall, each experiencing it in her own way, they all suddenly become aware of their sad life situation (that they are trapped in a marriage they will never be happy with), but more importantly, that they through the fall have also become aware that they as women living within the frame of 19th century Christian-Bourgeois society and ideology can in no way be able to change it. I do not have time to elaborate further on this here, but will instead refer to my interpretation of Ehrengard’s fall and its tragic implications in my article “‘Ehrengard,’ Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note” and my analysis of “En Historie om en Perle” in the background section.

In 2010-2011 as a new decade began, Danish Blixen and Kierkegaard scholar Poul Behrendt (A) made some very interesting observations regarding Blixen and Kierkegaard and their elusive narrative strategies and pseudonymity:

sin kierkegaardske skelnen mellem pseudonymet Isak Dinesen, der er forfatter til fiktioner (som i *Seven Gothic Tales* eller *Winter’s Tales*), og den reelt eksisterende forfatter, Karen Blixen, der meddeler en faktisk stedfunden virkelighed (i *Out of Africa*). (Behrendt 2010a, 462)

²⁸ See Bunch 2013b for a thorough analysis.

Behrendt also compares Blixen's narrative strategy to that of Kierkegaard and points out a certain common elusive feature in their narratives, which he calls "den hemmelige note" [the secret note]:

Denne 'hemmelige note' tydeliggør under alle omstændigheder et dialektisk særtræk ved Karen Blixens vintereventyr, som de deler med Søren Kierkegaards værker fra hans æstetisk-pseudonyme forfatterskab 1843-1846: at hendes historiers mere eller mindre skjulte citater og allusioner ikke bare er referencer til et isoleret tekststed fra et andet værk, men at der fra den citerede sammenhæng, dvs. konteksten i 'fremmedteksten', falder et fortolkende lys tilbage på momenter eller på helheden i det vintereventyr, hvor referencen indgår. Sande noter til en fortælling af Karen Blixen er ikke bare fodnoter, de er øjenåbnere – af den art, som forandrer, men ikke forklarer alt." (Behrendt 2010a, 459)

Behrendt coined the idea of "den hemmelige note" as a hidden narrative "super-byggeklods" [super-brig] (Behrendt 2007, 14) in the groundbreaking work of the same name *Den hemmelige note* from 2007 and employed his observations with great success in his superior analysis of Blixen's "Sorg-Agre" and in a later article about unreliable 3rd person narratives and ambiguous discourse in Blixen's narratives (Behrendt and Hansen 2011). In my article "'Ehregard,' Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note," I, as the title strongly indicates, demonstrate how this type of secret note also becomes the key to the understanding of "Ehregard" (Bunch 2013a). In "Ehregard" this secret note is precisely to be found in "konteksten i 'fremmedteksten'" (the sexuality of the historical and biographical J. W. Goethe and behind him; Kierkegaard) that Behrendt mentions, which is a secret note that took scholars half a century to discover. In the chapter that follows the article about "Ehregard" called "Ehregard": Theoretical and Methodical Reflections," I will also use Behrendt and Hansen's narrative model from 2011 to disclose the various levels of unreliability and "Ambiguous Discourse" in "Ehregard."

In another influential article about "Skibsdrengens Fortælling" from *Vinter-Eventyr* Behrendt points to another narrative strategy of Blixen that seems inspired by Kierkegaard; the employment of "gensynet" [second meeting] and "gentagelsen" [repetition] as sort of narrative super-hubs that create a frame in the tale from where understanding and interpretation emerge for both the characters and the readers (Behrendt 2011, 170). I will use Behrendt's idea as the starting point for the discussion of the role that repetition plays in Blixen's works using "Babettes Gæstebud" as an example in the chapter: "Dialectics of Repetition in Blixen." Here I will also show how Blixen is using

Kierkegaardian narrative strategies of repetition as a means to be ironic and polemical against major ideas and characters from Kierkegaard's own works.

In 2011 a monograph about Karen Blixen also came out titled *Texts at Play. The Ludic Aspect of Karen Blixen's Writings* by Ieva Steponavičiūtė.²⁹ In her reading of "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen" from *Last Tales* (1957) Steponavičiūtė makes a couple of loose connections to Kierkegaard's *Stadier paa Livets Vei* and "Forførerens Dagbog" with regard to gender (Steponavičiūtė 2011, 56-7) that is not supported further, neither with regard to quotations from Kierkegaard or by the rest of the analysis of this Blixen-tale. There are however some useful passages in the tale about gender that do relate to Kierkegaard, which I will return to in the chapter "Woman: God(dess) of Man."

The last and final contribution to the Blixen-Kierkegaard scholarship that I will mention in this research survey is Jacob Bøggild's paper "'det Under, at en Pige kunde være saa Herlig.' Om anerkendelse, angst og det imaginære i Karen Blixens "Peter og Rosa" (A) that he delivered at a Blixen conference at the University of Copenhagen in Fall of 2012.³⁰ Here he used Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* to understand and explain the concept of anxiety and the notion of "Øieblikket" in the tale "Peter og Rosa" from *Vinter-Eventyr*. He concludes:

"Peter and Rosa" vidner således om, at Blixen ikke bare er indlæst i i hvert fald dele af Søren Kierkegaards forfatterskab og i *Begrebet Angest* i særdeleshed, samt at hun tydeligvis har opfattet og benyttet sig af det imaginæres centrale betydning for forståelsen af angsten i dette værk. (Bøggild 2012, unpublished)

I agree with Bøggild in his conclusion that Blixen had read Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* closely and used some of the ideas about "Angest" from this work in her tales (as I will go on to show in thesis), but I am not sure she used them in the way that Bøggild suggests in "Peter and Rosa" when he claims that:

Det er fordi alt, for dem begge, lige indtil deres øjeblikkelige *Liebestod*, er således ren og ubestemt mulighed, og selvfølgelig også fordi forløbet er så koncentreret, at "Peter og Rosa", som angstfortælling, er langt mere intens end den anden, jeg har omtalt, "Ib og Adelaide." (Bøggild 2012, unpublished)

²⁹ Which I also did a review of in *Danske Studier* 2012.

³⁰ Jacob Bøggild has kindly given me permission to use his manuscript from where these quotes originate.

Contrary to Virgilius Hafniensis' idea that "Dette er Uskyldighedens dybe Hemmelighed, at den paa samme Tid er Angest" (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.) the two *innocent* teenagers in Blixen's tale do not seem to show any fear, when they are about to die in the ice cold waters of Øresund:

Den Angest, der er sat i Uskyldigheden, er da for det første ingen Skyld, for det andet er den ingen besværende Byrde, ingen Lidelse, der ikke lod sig bringe i Samklang med Uskyldighedens Salighed. Naar man vil iagttage Børn, vil man finde denne Angest bestemtere antydet som en Søgen efter det Eventyrlige, det Uhyre, det Gaadefulde. At der gives Børn, hos hvilke den ikke findes, beviser Intet; thi Dyret har den heller ikke, og jo mindre Aand jo mindre Angest. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

Their death even culminates in an erotic embrace³¹ and for Peter a strong sense of immortality is sparked by an intense feeling of "now" that he experiences just before he is about to drown in the arms of his beloved:

Han havde aldrig været bange for at dø, men nu kunde han slet ikke give Plads for Tanken om Døden. For han havde aldrig før følt Livet saa mægtigt i sig. Paa samme tid var det, som om her paa Flagen, hvor Drøm og Virkelighed var blevet eet, ogsaa Forskellen mellem Liv og Død var Ophævet. Han forstod, at dette i Virkeligheden maatte være hvad der mentes med Udødelighed. Man saa, i Udødeligheden, hverken frem eller tilbage, Nuet fik uendelig udstrækning. (Bøggild 2012, unpublished)

This means that the story might very well be, contrary to what Bøggild suggests, a story about *the absence* of "Angest": "Dertil kommer, at Angest altid i sig indeholder en Reflexion paa Tid, thi jeg kan ikke ængstes over det Nærværende, men kun for det Forbigangne eller Tilkommende" (Kierkegaard 1843a, "Det antike Tragiskes," n. pag.) and not a story where Blixen tries to stage and prove the points from *Begrebet Angest*. It would take a more in depth analysis of "Peter og Rosa" with regard to Kierkegaard to justify these initial observations, but it should be clear from the other examples that I present in the following that this way of turning the ideas presented in Kierkegaard's works upside-down fits much better with the way that Blixen generally dealt with Kierkegaard and his works.

The New Perspectives

³¹ Where spirit is not a third part, which Bøggild also mentions could be an ironic reversal of one of Hafniensis claims in *Begrebet Angest* (Bøggild 2012, unpublished).

Aside from the numerous articles about “Ehrengard” that state the obvious; that the novella is a counter narrative to “Forførerens Dagbog,” we can conclude from the above summary, that scholarly attempts to tackle Blixen’s approach to Kierkegaard’s works have so far been focusing on establishing similarities rather than to point out differences (except from Selboe, Anz, Makarushka, Sørensen and Behrendt). What most of the above observations have in common is that they try to show how Blixen adapted Kierkegaard’s various ways of thinking and his narrative strategies. Very little energy has been invested so far in reflecting upon how the opposite may be the case: that Blixen used Kierkegaard in her tales only insofar as she subjects him to critique by ironically inverting significant ideas and/or characters from his works to an extent that often borders parody. In my opinion the blind spot within the scholarship has been that most scholars have expected that Blixen would of course just adapt her fellow countryman and predecessor’s ideas and points of view, since she in her letters, essays and tales often, on the surface, shows great affinity for him: 1) “Læs forresten ogsaa Søren Kierkegaard (...) Vi har i hvert Fald ”Enten-Eller” hjemme. Jeg tror ikke, at noget Menneske kan læse ham med Eftertanke uden at gribes af ham. Han var et ærligt Menneske og led under det” (Blixen in a letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen in 1924, Blixen 1979a, 280) 2) ”For all students of Søren [sic] Kierkegaard will know his deep and graceful work *The Seducer’s Diary*. In it the hero Johannes brings to play all his ingeniousness and his great powers of mind, to obtain one single night of love with the heroine, and then leaves her forever” (quote from ”Carnival”, written 1926-27, Dinesen 1979, 82) and finally, almost thirty-five years after these statements in *Shadows on the Grass* (1960) 3) “It is a fine and fascinating art, in the spirit of that masterpiece of my countryman Sören [sic] Kierkegaard, *The Seducer’s Diary*” (Dinesen 1984, 45). It is, understandably, easy to be led astray by these statements, but Blixen was, just as Kierkegaard, a master of subtext and irony. As I am arguing in the three articles presented in this thesis, and will also argue here in this background section, Blixen is far more audacious, even frivolous, in her critique of Kierkegaard that scholars have so far given her credit for. In a letter to Aage Henriksen from the summer of 1953 where they were discussing Kierkegaard eagerly, she writes: “men jeg *er* da fræk af Naturen, og behersker eller skjuler min Frækhed kun fordi jeg nu engang er bien-elevée!” (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 147) and in a letter from Africa, from the

crucial year 1926 when she was working on "Carnival" and the relationship to Denys became increasingly problematic she explains what would later become her *modus vivendi* and artistic strategy:

Jeg kommer til at tænke paa, at jeg vist burde nærmere forklare, hvad jeg mener med det symbolske Udtryk: Lucifer, for at det ikke skal forstaas som om jeg længtes efter noget vildt dæmonisk, eller misforstaas paa anden Maade. Jeg opfatter det som om det betyder: Sandhed, eller Søgen efter Sandhed, Stræben mod Lys, Kritik,—ja, vel det man kalder *Aand* (...) Og sammen hermed (...) en sense of humour, som ikke er bange for *noget*, men *efter sin Overbevisning* tør gøre Nar ad alt, og Liv, og nyt Lys, Vekslen. (Blixen 1976b, 31)

This was the artistic strategy that Kierkegaard was also subjected to (among most of Blixen's literary predecessors). This artistic principle of total freedom that Blixen outlined in the above quote indeed became the one that Blixen dedicated herself to upholding for the rest of her life with Lucifer as her ally. To that we can add that Blixen was also highly critical of Kierkegaard's break-up with Regine and how he subsequently dedicated himself to the idea of trying to become a true Christian, which is also paving the way for her critique of Kierkegaard's approach to women and the bodily pleasures of this world, which permeates Blixen's critique of him all the way from "Carnival" to "Ehrengard". When putting all the seemingly conflicting pieces together (the passages where she shows her affinity for Kierkegaard, and the tales where she under the surface is highly critical of him), it seems reasonable to conclude that Blixen, just as her Kierkegaard-mentor Georg Brandes, had a love/hate relationship to Kierkegaard. As Brandes, she respected Kierkegaard's profound wit and courage and how he discovered the subject and the self, but was, on the other hand, highly critical of his approach to Christianity and women. In his book about Kierkegaard, Brandes uses an excellent example to illustrate and explain the core of his critique of Kierkegaard:

Da Kierkegaard forlod den gamle naive Landvei til Troen, fandt han da paa hint Skib, han selv havde bygget, Refiexionens ubanede Vei dertil? Nei, i det Øieblik han raabte Land, var det i Virkeligheden ikke Traditionens Indien, hvortil han var naaet, men Personlighedens, den store Lidenskabs, den store Selvstændigheds Amerika. Hans umiskjendelige Storhed er, at han opdagede dette Amerika, hans uheldbredelige Galskab var, at han haardnakket vedblev at kalde det Indien (...) Men det var en underlig Blindhed, en Sygdom, næsten en Sindssyge af ham at troe, at hint den store Selvstændigheds Amerika var Traditionens gamle Vidunderland, at den Enkelte var eet med den Christne, at hin Inderlighed var en rent specific som en speciel positiv Religion havde forpagtet, eller, for at vende tilbage til vort Udgangspunkt, at hans egen

ethiske Collision havde nogen Lighed med Patriarchen Abrahams i det gamle Testamente. (Brandes 1877, 106-7, 109)

But Brandes also recognized Kierkegaard as a big thinker and already back in 1877, predicted the huge impact he would come to have on intellectual life:

Det skal ikke glemmes, at Faa her i Danmark have bidraget saa meget til dens [den intellectuelle Culturs] Fremme og Væxt som han, om hvem vi tale. Han er, som jeg engang har sagt det, vor Filosofis Tycho Brahe; han feilede i sin Opfattelse af Verdenssystemets Midtpunkt; han var paa mange Punkter hildet i sin Samtids Overtro, men han har beriget vort Aandsliv med en Rigdom af selvstændige lagttagelser og Ideer. (Brandes 1877, 117)³²

As the following chapters will show, Blixen was well-versed in Kierkegaard's esthetic-pseudonymous authorship (1843-46) long before her debut in 1934 with *Seven Gothic Tales*. Focus, with regard to her interest in Kierkegaard, has so far been put almost exclusively on the first part of the 1950s, which is obvious because of the "Ehrengard" (written 1952-62) and the extensive letter correspondence with Aage Henriksen, where they eagerly discuss Kierkegaard. But, as I shall argue in the following, Blixen's critical approach to Kierkegaard was already in place in the mid-1920s and can be detected in the early works *Sandhedens Hævn* (written 1904-1925, published 1926) and "Carnival" (written 1926-27, rewritten 1933, published posthumously in 1975 and 1977). That said, it is of course also obvious that Blixen integrated parts of Kierkegaard's thinking in her own view on life and in her artistic oeuvre, without necessarily displaying it in the tales. This accounts for Kierkegaard's dialectical way of thinking, the idea that the individual must undertake a special effort to become "oneself" and Kierkegaard's narrative strategies and pseudonymity,³³ but when she alludes indirectly to him it is always to present another point of view and/or to poke fun. When this general position in Blixen's approach to Kierkegaard is first discovered, things suddenly fall into place, and we discover that a hidden polemic to Kierkegaard and his works runs as a significant secret undercurrent all the way through her oeuvre.

³² Despite his critique of Kierkegaard, Brandes did a tour of Scandinavia in the Fall of 1876 where he gave public lectures about Kierkegaard. His Kierkegaard biography that came a year later was also soon translated into Swedish and German (Anz 1999, 206).

³³ Within the scholarship, Poul Behrendt is right when he mentions that Blixen learned from Kierkegaard with regard to her narrative elusiveness, use of secret notes and pseudonyms (Behrendt 2007, 2010a and 2011).

2. THE EXTRATEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Here, I will start by outlining connections to Kierkegaard on the extratextual level. This level I define as the connections to Kierkegaard we find *outside* Blixen's artistic production, her tales (the intratextual level). Most of this extratextual information come from Blixen's letters where she (or others) mentions Kierkegaard, but also from other historical information; for example interviews and the inventory of her library. In this section, I will list the works by Kierkegaard that we know were in her library when she died, and also mention other works about Kierkegaard that we know from letters that she read or, at least, was familiar with. I will also show that two people were particularly influential (in each their own way) with regard to Blixen's interest in, and perception of, Kierkegaard: Danish literary critic Georg Brandes and Blixen's sister Ellen Dahl. In his article from 2010, Anz mentions that:

Blixens Kierkegaardlektüre ist schwer zu rekonstruieren. Es lässt sich nicht eindeutig ausmachen, welche Werke Kierkegaards Blixen selbst gelesen hat und wie viel bei ihr sekundär über allgemein verbreitete Vorstellungen bürgerlicher Bildung vermittelt ist (...) Explizite Bezüge innerhalb einzelner Erzählungen, wie die nachgelassenen Erzählungen *Karneval* und *Ehrengard*, verweisen auf eine Lektüre von *Diapsalmata* vielleicht von *Skyggerids* und mit Sicherheit von *Forførerens Dagbog* und damit wohl insgesamt auf die Papiere des Ästhetikers im ersten Band von *Enten. Eller*. Die Hiobreferenzen im Kontext der Dichterexistenz verweisen möglicherweise auf *Gjentagelsen*, alles andere bleibt so unspezifisch wie geflügelte Worte. Und auch die in ihren Texten selbst explizit etablierten Bibliotheken und die rekonstruierten Bibliotheken in ihren afrikanischen Farmhaus und in Rungstedlund bringen lediglich den Aufschluss, dass Kierkegaard in Blixens Bibliothek nicht vorkommt. (Anz 2010, 421-2).

Anz is partly correct in his first claim that “Blixens Kierkegaardlektüre ist schwer zu rekonstruieren” and also that it at times can be difficult to figure out how much she got from secondary (“sekundär”) literature, but after mentioning the works that Blixen had read, or might have read (which I agree with), he concludes “alles andere bleibt so unspezifisch wie geflügelte Worte.” This, I will argue, is a premature conclusion. It is also curious that Anz does not mention Bondesson's registrant (Bondesson 1982) from which we know that the following books by — or about — Kierkegaard were in Blixen's library, when she died.

Kierkegaard in Blixen's Library at Rungstedlund

From the books in Blixen's library, listed here below in chronological order according to publication date, we get the following information about Blixen's "Kierkegaardlektüre."

Comments, if any, are under each title:

Kierkegaard, Søren: *Enten – eller: et Livs-Fragment* – 3. Udg. København: C. A. Reitzels forlag, 1865.

Ejersignatur med blyant i bind I: Wilhelm Dinesen [signature of owner in pencil inside the cover in volume one: Wilhelm Dinesen]. According to Clara Selborn this copy of *Enten-Eller*, which had belonged to Karen Blixen's father, was given to Blixen by her sister Ellen Dahl (Bondesson 1982, 179). In the first volume there are no pencil markings whereas in volume two we find eight substantial passages underlined, all mentioned in their full length by Bondesson (Bondesson 1982, 179-80).

Kierkegaard, Søren: *Synspunkt for min Forfatter-Virksomhed: en ligefrem Meddelelse, Rapport til Historien. Ved A.B. Drachmann.* – 2. Udg. Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendal, 1906.

Kierkegaard, Søren: *Lillien på Marken og Fuglen under Himlen. Tre Gudelige Taler af Søren Kierkegaard.* København: D. Daase og Søns Boghandel 1922.

Dedication: "Ellen Westenholz af H. Molbech."

Bruun Andersen, K.: *Søren Kierkegaard og kritikeren P. L. Møller.* København: Munksgaard, 1950.

From a letter to Karen Blixen we know that Aage Henriksen gave her this small book about the feud between Kierkegaard and P.L. Møller in August 1955 (no specific date), while she was hospitalized at "Militærhospitalet" in Copenhagen (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 298-9).

Hansen, P. Emanuel: *Dagbogsoptegnelser: omkring Søren Kierkegaard*. Indledning og noter ved Julius Clausen. Sønderborg: 1950.

Kierkegaard, Søren: *Søren Kierkegaards dagbøger*. I udvalg ved P. Rohde. Udgivet af Dansk Lærerforening. København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1953.

Peter P. Rohde visited Rungstedlund from time to time in the early fifties until (at least) 1960 (Selborn 2006, 166). Blixen herself mentions in a letter that Peter Rohde and Tage Skou-Hansen were visiting on Sep. 11, 1953 to talk her into contributing to the new literary magazine “Vindrosen” published by Gyldendal (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 156). Rohde might have given her a copy of his book with the selected Kierkegaard diary entries, even though we find no dedication in it. We do know at least that Blixen knew Peter P. Rohde at the time when the book was published and that she might very well have come to know of its existence through her acquaintance with him.

Henriksen: Aage. *Søren Kierkegaards romaner*. København: Gyldendal 1954.

Given to Karen Blixen by Aage Henriksen in 1954 upon publication (Bondesson 1982, 343). Karen Blixen had a copy of the manuscript at Rungstedlund before it went to press for most of the summer of 1953 (at least from June 13th to July 29th 1953) (Henriksen 1985, 106, 111). The thesis was published on October 5th (Blixen 1996, Vol. II, 236) and then defended by Aage Henriksen three weeks later, on October 26th 1954.

Other Works about Kierkegaard Known to Blixen

From the letters we also know that Blixen was familiar with works by — and about — Kierkegaard other than the ones we find in her library. In a letter from Africa dated July 8, 1923 Blixen mentions that she has read Harald Høffding’s article about Pascal and Kierkegaard that was published in *Tilskueren* 1923 (første halvbind): “Der stod for en

Gangs Skyld en udmærket Artikel i Tilskueren, af Høffding, om Pascal og Kierkegaard, som Du, – og Thomas – maa læse.” (Blixen 2013 Vol. II, 623). Much later in life, in the summer of 1953, while she was reading the manuscript of Aage Henriksen’s doctoral thesis, she also mentions that she has borrowed Frithiof Brandt’s Kierkegaard biography *Den unge Søren Kierkegaard* from 1929 (Blixen 1996 Vol. I, 147). I shall also argue that Blixen also read Georg Brandes’ book about Kierkegaard *Søren Kierkegaard. En kritisk fremstilling i Grundrids* from 1877 very thoroughly, since she is very much in line with Brandes’ critique of Kierkegaard with regard to Christianity. Heinrich Anz mentions Brandes’ Kierkegaard book as *the work* about Kierkegaard that has had the most influence on the reception of Kierkegaard among Scandinavian writers:

Brandes’ Kierkegaard-Monographie ist eine der wichtigsten und wirkungsvollsten Biographien innerhalb des literarischen Genres ‘Biographie’ und seiner skandinavischen Gattungsgeschichte: Eine Werkbiographie, die Kierkegaard als die große Dichterpersönlichkeit herausstellt und die zugleich die von Kierkegaard postulierte innere Notwendigkeit in der reflexiven Bewegung der Stadien aufhebt, ihn also für Richtigstellungen und Weiterführungen freigibt. Die in Brandes’ Werkbiographie erreichte große Nähe zu Kierkegaard und zugleich kritische Distanzierung von Kierkegaard prägt die Korrekturen der literarischen Rezeptionsgeschichte. (Anz 1999, 207-8)

Anz paradoxically then goes on to *only* mention Blixen and Ibsen as having been particularly influenced by Brandes’ book, but we do know that other writers from the time around the Modern Breakthrough also got to know Kierkegaard through Brandes and it does seem plausible that the huge impact Anz claims that Brandes’ book had among Scandinavian writers is true if we modify the claim to account only for the period from the turn of the century and up until World War II. After World War II, I will argue, Brandes’ materialistic-critical approach to Kierkegaard was substituted by existentialist-religious approaches e.g. by the Heretica-group and other writers of the day like Jakob Knudsen and Kaj Munk and since then many different approaches to Kierkegaard have emerged where Brandes’ view on Kierkegaard seems to have drowned.

On September 13th 1928, five years after the letter to her mother about Høffding’s Kierkegaard article, Karen Blixen mentions Kierkegaard again when writing from Africa to her sister Ellen Dahl. Here she writes that she is eager to read more Kierkegaard³⁴:

³⁴ From two previous letters from Africa we know that Blixen at that time had read: 1) *Enten. Eller* which she mentions in a letter to Thomas Dinesen from Aug. 3, 1924 (Blixen 1978a, 280) and in a letter to her

[Tilføjet]: Undskyld, at der er saa mange Fejl i Skriften, dette Brev er skrevet ved Lyset af en meget daarlig Lampe. Hvilken (sic) af Søren Kierkegaards Bøger er det, Du har læst og særlig blevet grebet af? Jeg vilde grulig gerne have dem.³⁵ (Blixen 2013 Vol. III, 1470)

We don't know what books by Kierkegaard Blixen is referring to, but Blixen was back in Denmark for a longer period of time just half a year after she wrote the above letter:

“Ingeborg Dinesen bliver alvorligt syg i Danmark. Karen Blixen rejser skyndsomst hjem og bor på Rungstedlund 18. maj — 25. december [1929], kun afbrudt af en rejse til England, hvor hun bl.a. besøger Finch Hattons familie,”³⁶ which means that it would not take long before Blixen was able to discuss Kierkegaard with Ellen Dahl in person and (maybe) borrow her books or borrow them from a library. From the letter we also understand that Ellen Dahl was much occupied with Kierkegaard in the last part of the 1920s and in 1932 she published an essay-collection *Introductioner* under the pseudonym Paracelsus at the time when Blixen had moved back to Denmark and was now working on *Seven Gothic Tales*. The book consists of three different essays about Goethe, Kierkegaard and Ewald, shaped as didactic prose narratives. The middle essay about Kierkegaard is titled “Melancholia.” There we find the female protagonist to be stopping in at an inn while traveling in Northern Zealand. In the evening she is alone in the room reading Kierkegaard's “In vino veritas” from *Stadier på Livets Vei*. The female protagonist is full of praise and calls Kierkegaard a great eroticist:

Husker De, Læser, Stadierne og da især den Del deraf, som hedder *In vino veritas*? Hvis ikke, saa find Bogen frem fra Deres Hylde og sæt Dem til at læse. Hvor jeg misunder Dem den Nydelse, der forestaar Dem,—som man misunder den, der tiltræder den samme herlige Rejse, man nylig selv har tilendebragt. Hvilken Rigdom for Aanden! (...) overvældet, aandeløs lægger man tilsidst Bogen fra sig—mere overvældet end noget Pigebarn ved Læsningen af en Skillingsroman—og saa? Mon De saa, som jeg, vil sige til Dem selv: Men du milde Gud, Kierkegaard er jo sletikke Filosoffen, Teologen eller Moralisten—han er selve Erotikeren af Guds Naade. (Dahl 1932, 38-9)

mother Ingeborg Dinesen from January 22, 1928 just eight months prior to this letter to Ellen Dahl, Blixen alludes to Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* in a way that strongly indicates that she has read, or— at least— is familiar with the major ideas presented in this work (Blixen 1978b, 133).

³⁵ An examination of the original letter in the Blixen archive at The Royal Library in Copenhagen in the stack of letters labeled: “45. Håndskr. Afd. Utilg. 727. Ellen og Knud Dahl. D. II. 1-3” showed that there is a mistake in the transcript of the hand-written passage. The correct word is “hvilke” so there is agreement with the last pronoun “dem.”

³⁶ <http://blixen.dk/liv-forfatterskab/karen-blixens-liv/en-kronologi/>

While reading, the protagonist is suddenly approached by a young ghost-like figure in the shape of a young girl, who calls herself Melancholia. The young maiden then goes on to talk about the role she has played in Kierkegaard's life (his "tungsind"/ "melancholia") as his "hemmelighed," *the secret note* that explains his solitaire life, religious quest and prolific production. The last part of the essay contains an imagined dialog between Kierkegaard, who is lying on his deathbed, and "Mortensen, Gaardskarlen fra Gammeltorv" (Dahl 1932, 63) and the essay concludes with three students discussing "tungsind" after Kierkegaard has finally taken his last breath. All in all the essay is full of compassion, admiration and praise. Ellen Dahl also brought up another work by Kierkegaard in her letter correspondence with Karen Blixen in the fall of 1933, when she was giving Karen Blixen feedback on *Seven Gothic Tales*. Here she compared the special feeling she got from reading "The Poet" with Kierkegaard's review of Thomasine Gyllembourg's (Fru Heiberg's) *To Tidsaldre* (1845)³⁷ in *En literair Anmeldelse* (1846):

Jeg maa lykønske dig til "Digteren", som er langt den bedste af dine Historier (...) Jeg har tit en Følelse af, at Forfattere ikke selv ved, naar de er at their best. Der kommer pludselig i deres Bøger ligesom en stærkere Strøm, en Varme eller Kulde, som gennemrisler en,—det er det, jeg kalder Inspiration, det eneste, jeg virkelig troer paa i Kunst. Gang paa Gang gribes man paa den Maade i "The Poet" (...) Det er det, der giver Kunst Perspektiv. Kierkegaard giver det rammende Udtryk for det i sin Anmeldelse af Fru Heiberg (jeg har desværre ikke bogen her, den er på Mols), idet han siger at man føler sig *tryk*, man ved, der er mere bagved, end det man ser.³⁸ (Blixen 1996 Vol. I, 116-7)

Here Ellen Dahl is more right than she thinks with regard to "Digteren" when sensing that something is hiding under the surface, since it is, ironically, exactly Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen* and some of the ideas from Dahl's own essays about Goethe, Kierkegaard and Ewald from *Introductioner* we find subjected to her own sister's irony. From the

³⁷ Thomasine Gyllembourg published twentyfive novels and longer short stories called *Hverdagshistorier* (1827-1845) under the pseudonym "Af Forfatteren til en Hverdags-Historie."

³⁸ The word "tryk" does *not* occur directly in Kierkegaard's *En literair Anmeldelse* but must be Ellen Dahl's interpretation of Kierkegaard's review, probably based on this passage: "Men hvilken er da denne Forfatters Magt, hvormed han udretter Dette, naar der ikke er Spørgsmaal om det Enkelte i den enkelte Novelle, ikke om hans Fortrinlighed som Novellist, men om ham som Repræsentant for en bestemt Livs-Anskuelse, og dette er netop det *Mere*, han væsentligen har fremfor Novellister i Almindelighed, og et andet Fortrin end det, han indenfor Bestemmelsen Novellist comparativt maa hævdes." (Kierkegaard 1846a, n. pag., author's italics)

same period (fall 1933) Ellen Dahl also mentions Kierkegaard in connection to one of the other *Seven Gothic Tales*, “The Monkey”:

Forfatteren lader os imidlertid ikke i Ro. Først skal vi se for os, ikke blot den vide Udsigt, de store Skove, som Priorinden har talt om, og det smukke Efteraarslandskab, men også en Flok Enhjøringer. Lad gaa! Det kan vi nok. Men samtidig skal vi,—og er det ikke formeget forlangt?—drøfte med os selv, hvordan Vorherre indretter ikke alene Jordelivet, men selve Paradiset! Hvad nu Ideen med dette Paradis angaar, er Tanken interessant, yderst subtil, og kunde være en Kierkegaard værdig. Men ikke netop nu og paa dette Sted, den unge Mand har saamænd nok at tænke paa. (Blixen 1996 Vol. I, 120-1)

Blixen actually very rarely integrated any of Ellen Dahl’s critiques in the revised drafts, but she must have felt it a compliment when her sister here compared the level of her thinking to the quality of Kierkegaard. In April 1933, Blixen revised “Carnival” (Bunch 2011) around the time, when Ellen Dahl was giving her feedback on the drafts of *Seven Gothic Tales*. Here we find a less flattering, to put it mildly, allusion to her sister: “And if it came to that, he might run the *Ellen Dahl* aground some morning, as the sun was coming up – *she was a moldering old barge*” (Dinesen 1979, 90, author’s italics), which points to Blixen’s many reservations towards her sister. But Ellen Dahl was probably a big influence with regard to Blixen’s reading of Kierkegaard in the sense that she called attention to Kierkegaard’s work and strongly encouraged Blixen to read it, even though their views on him would turn out to be very different.

Conclusion: Extratextual Connections to Kierkegaard

The combination of these early letter passages and the many additional allusions we find on the intratextual level, which I will go on to show in the following background section as a supplement to the articles (Bunch 2011, Bunch 2013a, Bunch 2013b), we can deduct that Blixen was well versed in the major works from Kierkegaard’s esthetic-pseudonymous authorship (1843-46) before she finished *Seven Gothic Tales* in 1934. She must have read, or at least been familiar with the major ideas presented in the following works: *Enten-Eller* (both *Første Deel* and *Anden Deel*) (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.), *Gjentagelsen*³⁹ (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag.), *Frygt og Bæven* (Kierkegaard 1843c, n.

³⁹ Nilsson believes that Blixen must have read *Gjentagelsen* before she read Aage Henriksen’s doctoral thesis where Henriksen’s elaborately deals with this work by Kierkegaard (Henriksen 1954, 87-131), but Nilsson also states that he is unable to document it (Nilsson 2004, 224). This thesis will prove Nilsson’s suspicion correct.

pag.), *Begrebet Angest* (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.) (also supported by Selboe 1996 and Bøggild 2005a), *Stadier på Livets Vei* and “In vino veritas” in particular (Kierkegaard 1845, n. pag.) and *En literair Anmeldelse* (Kierkegaard 1846a, n. pag.). As the previous chapters have also shown Blixen was not only well-versed in Kierkegaard’s works, but she had also conducted studies of the most influential non-theological secondary literature about him that was published in her lifetime. In the 1920s it was the works by Georg Brandes and Harald Høffding and in the 1950s it was the works by Fritjof Brandt, K. Bruun Andersen and Aage Henriksen. The range of this substantial influence from Kierkegaard’s works and the secondary literature about Kierkegaard has, up until the findings presented in this thesis, not been fully understood and documented.

Humor or Irony?

Even though it can’t be proven that Blixen read Kierkegaard’s *Om Begrebet Ironie* (1841), she might have gotten an outline of how Kierkegaard perceived irony and humor from Harald Høffding’s work *Den store Humor* from 1916. In the chapter “Ironi og Humor” we find the following passages about “de store Ironi” in opposition to Kierkegaard that seems to fit very well with the artistic strategy of irony we find in Blixen’s works (also in relation to Kierkegaard):

Til Satirens Midler kan den ironiske Form høre. Den optræder da med tilsyneladende Anerkendelse og Alvor, skønt dens egentlige Stræben er at angribe og tilintetgøre. En indirekte Angrebsform afløser da den direkte. Ironien er her kun Middel, betegner ikke en særlig Livstype. Det er, hvad man kunde kalde den lille Ironi, medens den store Ironi ikke blot er Form og Middel, men et Livsstade. Forskellen vil bl.a. bestaa i, at medens det ved Ironi som Form eller Talefigur maa tilstræbes, at de Andre forstaa, at det er Ironi, at Alvoren ikke er alvorligt ment, forholder det sig anderledes ved den store Ironi (...) Medens Satiren støder Genstanden bort, eller kun fastholder den for atter og atter at støde den bort, kan Ironien være en Vej, ad hvilken det bliver muligt at trænge ind i Genstanden og oprette et Fællesskab med den. Selv hvor Ironien tjener Selvhævdelsen, er den ikke en Frastøden, men en Unddragen, en Vej til at holde Sindets Helligdom fri for Omverdenens Indtrængen (...) Kierkegaard konstruerede i sit geniale Ungdomsskrift (*Om Begrebet Ironi [sic]*, med særligt Hensyn til Sokrates. 1841) en absolut Ironi, hvorved han mente en Ironi af rent negativ Art. Det var den lille Ironi, han gjorde absolut, istedetfor at gøre den stor. Han betragtede Ironien blot som opløsende, som blottet for ethvert positivt Indhold. Han fraskriver den baade indre Fylde og det sympatiske Element. (Høffding 1916, 61, 63 and 64)

The notion of “kunstnerisk ironi” that Høffding then goes on to present in the quote below, with Blixen’s favorite writer Shakespeare as the prime example, also fits very

well as a description of Blixen's preferred artistic method with regard to how she makes the abstract ideas we find presented in Kierkegaard's works concrete in her counter-narratives:

Ogsaa Shakespeare har man villet gøre til Ironiker [in the negative Kierkegaardian sense of the word] (...) Herimod indvender en af de ypperste nyere Shakespeareforskere [footnote in the text: "Dowden: *Shakespeare. His Mind and Art.* (1880) p. 345"] med Rette, at Shakespeare's Upartiskhed overfor Personer og Skæbner ikke betyder Ligegyldighed og Fjernhed, men netop udspringer af hans Interesse for Emnerne, af den faste Villie til at lade enhver af deres Sider komme til sin Ret; hans Begejstring svækkes ikke ved de Skranker, menneskelige Handlinger og Skæbner ere underlagte. *Der gives en kunstnerisk Ironi, som hænger nøje sammen med Kunstens store Opgave, den at give konkrete og individuelle Billeder af Karakterer og Skæbner, ikke Abstraktioner og Utopier.* (Høffding 1916, 67, author's italics)

Høffding then goes on to point out the following differences between "Ironi" and "Humor":

Forskellen mellem Ironi og Humor er ofte udtrykt saaledes, *at i Ironi er der Spøg bag Alvor, i Humor Alvor bag Spøg* (...) I ironien gaas der tilsyneladende ind paa Værdier og Bestræbelser, men Ironikeren foretager kun denne Bevægelse for at bevare sit Indre frit, eller – i den pædagogisk [*sic*] Ironi – for at udløse psykisk Energi hos den, der vedkender sig visse Værdier og Formaål. At der er Spøg bag Alvoren, behøver blot at betyde, at Ironikeren har sin Alvor i andre Retninger end hans Omgivelser. (Høffding 1916, 68-9, author's italics)

Høffding proceeds to state that "den store Ironi" equals "Humor" using formal logic as a method to prove it:

Derfor kan Ironien være en ydre Form for Humor, saa at vi faa følgende Skema (hvor Tegnet < betyder "Middel" eller "Udtryk for"):

$(Alvor < Spøg) = Ironi < Humor = (Spøg < Alvor)$

eller simplere $Alvor < Spøg < Alvor$

Den Spøg, i hvilken Humoristen skjuler sin Alvor, bestaar da netop i Anvendelse af Ironi. Eller Simplere: *bag den Spøg, der i Ironien er skjult i Alvor, ligger igen Alvor Skjult.* Paa denne Maade gaar den store Ironi, som Form for Selvhævdelse eller for Opdragende Omsorg, over til Humor. (Høffding 1916, 69, author's italics)

Høffding finally concludes his essay with regard to Kierkegaard and his notion of irony, humor and the religious:

I det nævnte Skrift [*Om Begrebet Ironie*] (og i Optegnelser, der ere samtidige med det) opfattede Kierkegaard Forholdet mellem Ironi og Humor som Modsætninger. Ironien skal være egoistisk, og den skal være stedt i stadig Kamp mod Verden. Humoren derimod skal være befriet fra Verden; den staar som Udtryk for en religiøs Livsalvor og for Bevidstheden om at høre ind under en stor Helhed. Ironien skal være aristokratisk og polemisk, men Humoren er forsonet med Verden og hviler i en Tro, som fastholdes trods alle Absurditeter. (Skrifter XIII p. 35–119.) Senere derimod, efter det definitive Brud md [*sic*] den spekulative Teologi, betragter Kierkegaard ikke mere Humor som et religiøst Stade. Den staar for ham nu som det sidste humane Stade før det religiøse Stade, – som Udtryk for det højeste rent Menneskeliges Grænse. (Høffding 1916, 74)

It is behind these ideas by Høffding that lie Sørensen's claim about Blixen, Kierkegaard and humor that I support in the last part of the article about "Ehrengard:" "En mere afgørende anstødssten for Kierkegaard ville dog være, at for Blixen er humoren "det højeste", hvor den for Kierkegaard befinder sig på et stadium "før" det religiøse, før troen, før kristendommen." (Bunch 2013a, 45) and that:

As Sørensen correctly observes with regard to Blixen and her view on humor: *Den store Humor* hedder Høffdings berømte værk fra 1916, hvori han – inspireret af, men også i polemik med Kierkegaard – hævder humorens førsteplads i en verdslig, anstændig og ansvarsbevidst livsanskuelse. Og der er ingen tvivl om at Blixen står ved hans side når han fastslår: "Den store Humor vil være forbunden med en stadig Søgen og staar i Modsætning til al dogmatisk Visdom, hvad enten den optræder i den sunde Menneskeforstands, Videnskabens eller Religionens Navn." (Sørensen 2002, 155) (Bunch 2013a, 45-6)

I think that the description "bag den Spøg, der i Ironien er skjult i Alvor ligger igen en Alvor Skjult" (Høffding 1916, 69) that Høffding calls "Humor" (deriving from his own definitions of the terms "Ironi" and "Humor" and his new category of "den store Ironi") could fit with a description of Blixen's narrative strategy on an overall level (but only within Høffding's definition), but in Blixen's particular approach to Kierkegaard, I would say that her subversive Kierkegaard-narratives belong to the category of irony. An irony that is also related to Høffding's category "kunstnerisk Ironi:" "Der gives en kunstnerisk Ironi, som hænger nøje sammen med Kunstens store Opgave, den at give konkrete og individuelle Billeder af Karakterer og Skæbner, ikke Abstraktioner og Utopier" (Ibid.). Thus, I will use the term "irony" in this thesis to describe *Blixen's position in relation to Kierkegaard* and the ideas presented in his works.

3. CHRISTIANITY: BLIXEN AND KIERKEGAARD

That Kierkegaard was a Christian and did everything he could to fit in his new philosophy of the individual under the umbrella of Christianity is one of Blixen's major points of critique, which she also subjects to irony and parody. This critique of Kierkegaard's Christianity is not to be found in my analyses of "Carnival," "The Poet" and "Ehrengard" simply because Blixen in these tales primarily chose to focus on inverting the notions of gender and seduction in relation to Kierkegaard. In the following chapters I will try to fill in this gap, so we get a more complete picture of how Blixen read, understood and responded to the ideas regarding Christianity presented in Kierkegaard's works. In this section, I will also suggest that Georg Brandes played a much bigger role in Blixen's reception of Kierkegaard than most of the scholarship has so far been aware of (following the path laid out by Anz 1999).

Early Critique of Christianity

As we understand from the previous chapters, Karen Blixen read and studied Kierkegaard's esthetic-pseudonymous authorship (1843-46) during the 1920s. The first account of Blixen's affinity for Kierkegaard we find in a letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen from Africa, August 3rd 1924, she writes:

Læs forresten ogsaa Søren Kierkegaard, selv om Du maaske vil synes han er lidt indviklet (maaske ogsaa lidt gammeldags for Dig!) Vi har i hvert Fald "Enten-Eller" hjemme. Jeg tror ikke, at noget Menneske kan læse ham med Eftertanke uden at gribes af ham. Han var et ærligt Menneske og led under det; maaske vil Du i hans Opfattelse af "Den Enkelte" finde noget af Dig selv. (Blixen 1978a, 280)

We notice Blixen's admiration for Kierkegaard here in this earliest account where she is using phrases such as "Gribes af ham," "han var et ærligt menneske og led under det" and "maaske vil Du i hans 'Opfattelse' af 'Den Enkelte' finde noget af dig selv." She seems to have had the same exhilarated feeling as the young Georg Brandes when he read *Enten. Eller* for the first time and through this work discovered Kierkegaard:

Ville vi levende forestille os det mægtige Indtryk, Bogen maatte gjøre paa de Samtidige, da kunne vi kun gjenkalde os den Virkning, den ved den første Gjennemlæsning gjorde paa os selv. Jeg for min Del fik den for første Gang ihænde 18 Aar gammel og jeg husker endnu nøie det overvældende Indtryk. Aldrig før var jeg i dansk Literatur stødt paa en saadan Aandsoverlegenhed, en saadan Tankestyrke og (saaledes forekom det mig da) en saadan Verdenserfaring. (Brandes 1877, 120)

But already a year before Blixen's positive letter about Kierkegaard, criticism already seemed to have started to pervade her view on him with regard to Christianity. On July 8th 1923 she writes a letter to her mother Ingeborg Dinesen from the farm in Africa where she mentions Kierkegaard in connection to a critical article about Kierkegaard and Pascal written by Harald Høffding:

Der stod for en Gangs Skyld en udmærket Artikel i Tilskueren, af Høffding, om Pascal og Kierkegaard, som Du, – og Thomas – maa læse. Du vil vist le af mig, men jeg tror, at Du ved at læse om Kierkegaard vilde komme til en vis Forstaaelse af Viggo. Jeg tror, at Viggo føler noget af Kierkegaards Blanding af Rædsel over og Tiltrækning ved andre Menneskers Overfladiskhed, – ogsaa vor Families – maaske ikke, som hos Kierkegaard, udelukkende i disses Holdning overfor de *evige* Værdier. Forresten er det i det hele taget meget interessant, synes jeg, ogsaa i den Maade Høffding taler om Kristendommen, hvor jeg er enig med ham, og det var en af de Ting, som Thomas og jeg plejede at diskutere. (Blixen 2013, Vol. II, 623)

In the first part of the letter Blixen compares Viggo⁴⁰ and Kierkegaard and continues to show her admiration for Kierkegaard with regard to his general quest to not be superficial and follow public opinion, but instead be honest and follow his own ways and beliefs. In the last part of the quote she, however, finds an ally in Høffding when he, with Pascal and Kierkegaard as examples, is questioning Christianity and the role it plays in a modern society:

Med to Aarhundreders Mellemrum mødtes to Tænkere, som begge med hele deres Sjæls Inderlighed klamrede sig til Kristendommen, i den Maade, paa hvilken de gjorde op med deres Religion, saaledes som denne havde udviklet sig gennem Tiderne. (Høffding 1923, 412)

Høffding then goes on to ask:

Kan den oprindelige Kristendoms Livsopfattelse og Livsførelse fastholdes sammen med Tilegnelse af og Arbejde for den aandelige og materielle Kultur, som Kristendommen ikke har frembragt, men som – før og efter Kristendommens Opstaaen – har udviklet sig efter sine egne love? (Høffding 1923, 424-5)

Høffding perceived any religion as a cultural and anthropological phenomenon. Religion is a product of the psychology of certain people living in certain parts of the world under certain conditions, which means that religion ultimately derives from human beings and is a sort of anthropological fantasy, representing the ideals of a people:

⁴⁰ Viggo must be Viggo de Neergaard (1881-1965) the husband of Karen Blixen's oldest sister Inger Benedicte (Ea), who had already died in 1922.

De store Verdensreligioner har nu engang, ligesom Kulturen, deres Udspring i menneskelig Natur og menneskelige Livsforhold, og hvad der af Ædelt, Stort og Skønt har udviklet sig indenfor Religionerne, tilhører derfor tilsidst Menneskeslægten som Helhed, ikke en enkelt Sekt, selv om denne har nok saa stor en Udbredelse.” (Høffding 1923, 432-3)

Blixen had met Høffding in person when she was a student at “Kunstakademiet” in the early 1900s and held him in high regard:

I sin pure ungdom gik Karen Blixen på kunstakademiet i København, hun blev valgt ind i ‘Kunstnernes Elevforbund’, og hun omtaler en episode hvor hun var en slags værtinde i foreningen og fik “Professor Høffding til Bords, da denne store, gamle Mand venligt kom og holdt Foredrag for os. [...]”⁴¹ jeg tror, at Høffdings blide, vise Elskværdighed lige straks har faaet mig til at føle mig hjemme ved hans Side.” (“Til fire Kultegninger” from 1951 quoted in Sørensen 2002, 155)

Both Brandes and Høffding admired and learned from Kierkegaard but as men in a time when the natural sciences, with Darwin as the new star on the firmament starting to gain ground among the younger generation of intellectuals of the day, they were both highly critical of Kierkegaard. In his book *Søren Kierkegaard. En kritisk Studie* from 1877 Brandes is very critical in the way Kierkegaard engaged Christianity, as the title also strongly indicates. Instead of dismissing Christianity as an illusion based on all the paradoxes he discovered, Kierkegaard directed his critique towards the leaders of the institution. This was, according to Brandes, a severe blind spot and a big mistake:

Da Kierkegaard nu var naaet saa vidt i Udvikling, at den Opposition mod Undervisningen, der var at forudsee, kom til Udbrud, kom han følgelig ved denne Revolte ind i en rent tilfældig og hurtigt forældet Polemik, der desværre strækker sig gennem hele hans Forfatterliv (...) Ikke mod en Strauss, ikke mod en Feuerbach rettede han sine Slag, men mod en Marheineke, en Martensen og deres Disciple! Han agtede ikke paa, at medens han stod paa Volden og forsvarede Fæstningen mod uskadelige Speculanter, trængte Fritænkerne ind bag hans Ryg og erobrede Pladsen. (Brandes 1877, 24-5)

Not without a significant element of disappointment Brandes concludes: “Og ikke blot at Kierkegaard blev Theolog, men han levede hele sit Liv igjennem i en fuldstændig theologisk og theologiseret Dunstkreds” (Brandes 1877, 23). Blixen supported Høffding and Brandes as an ardent critic of Christianity and in a letter from Africa she mentioned the importance that Brandes’ books had played in her life and how they opened the realm of world literature for her when she was younger: “jeg havde længe levet i Brandes’

⁴¹ For whatever reason, Sørensen left out this positive bit of the quote that he marks with [...]: ”Jeg kan ikke huske, at jeg den Aften følte mig det aller mindste trykket af min prominente Stilling,” (Blixen 1969, 22).

Bøger, og kan sige at det er ham, som har aabenbaret Literaturen for mig. Min Første *personlige* Begejstring for Bøger, – for Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine – fik jeg gennem ham” (Blixen 1978a, 260). Much later in life in a letter to Johannes Rosendahl on January 15th, 1952, during the period (1950-1955) her interest in Kierkegaard had peaked for a second time (the first peak being the 1920s), Blixen explains very clearly to Rosendahl, how she sees Christianity as an illusion and explains why she has to be critical of it. Her explanation is completely in line with the anthropological and sociological approaches to religion and Christianity propagated by Brandes and Høffding, which, as I shall argue in the next chapter, Blixen had already adopted in the early 1920s, before she finished her first significant work *Sandhedens Hævn*:

Det var ifølge min Opfattelse galt, at Ordet *Tro* Aftenen igennem kom til at stå for *kristen Tro*, som om disse Begreber givetvis faldt sammen. Mennesker har i Tusinder af Aar *troet* uden at være Kristne; Millioner af Mennesker har i Dag en *Tro*, som ikke er Kristendom. Hvorfor vælger nu Mennesker, - altsaa nærmere bestemt Mennesker i Danmark og i Aaret 1951,—at bestemme deres Tro som Kristendom? (...) Kristendom er Troen paa, at i et historisk bestemt Aar en af de tre Personer i en treenig Guddom blev Menneske (...) Nu spurgte jeg altsaa, fra min Stilling udenfor Kristendommen, de Kristne: Hvorfor tror I dette? Jeg har jo før spurgt og har da ofte faaet Svaret: “Fordi det staar i Bibelen.” Her har jeg da igen maattet spørge: “Hvorfor vælger I i ganske særlig Grad at sætte eders Lid til et lille østerlandsk, og selv fjernstaaende, Folks Samling af mytologiske Forestillinger og Fortællinger? Der er i Verden, og i Tiden, nedskrevet mangfoldige saadanne, uden at I i mindste Maade tillægger dem Betydning som Oplysning om den hele Universet gældende Sandhed (...) til dette maa jeg føje, at jeg ikke kan grunde et Livssyn paa en historisk Begivenhed, og at jeg ikke tror, at noget Menneske er i Stand dertil, eller egentlig vil give sig ud for at være i Stand dertil. En Mangfoldighed af anerkendte historiske Begivenheder,—Folkevandringen, det romerske Riges Undergang, den franske Revolution, ja, og i denne Sammenhæng ogsaa den kristne Kirkes Historie,—har bidraget til at danne mit Syn paa Menneskelivets Sammenhæng, uden derfor at have givet mig en absolut Forklaring paa selve Livets og Universets Væsen. (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 75-7)

Sandhedens Hævn

Sandhedens Hævn is the first substantial example of Blixen’s critique of Christianity, which later came to run as a significant current in her entire oeuvre, most poignantly in the long and famous tales “The Deluge at Norderney” (1934) and “Babette’s Feast” (1950) that can be regarded as out right parodies of the flood narrative of Noah from The Old Testament (Genesis, chapter 6-9) and the narrative about the last supper from The New Testament (the four canonical gospels). These tales also contain a couple of important allusions to Kierkegaard that I will get back to later. On March 5th 1925 Karen

Blixen left Mombasa for Denmark. She arrived in Denmark early May, after having stopped over in Paris, and stayed in Denmark until December 25th where she left for Antwerp with her brother Thomas Dinesen. She was back at the farm in Ngong on February 1st 1926. In the nearly eight months she stayed in Denmark she took painting lessons, cooking classes and tried to promote her writing within the Danish literary establishment. In 1925 Blixen finally managed to meet Georg Brandes in person on two occasions in October, where they had plenty of time for one on one conversation (Bunch 2011, 76-7). Blixen probably asked Brandes to put in a good word for her to the editors of *Tilskueren*, Ludwig Holstein and Poul Levin, in order to pave the way for the publication of *Sandhedens Hævn*. She had worked on the play for more than twenty years and most likely made the final revisions during her stay in Denmark in 1925:

Den første kladde til Sandhedens hævn er fra 1904. Den blev omarbejdet i 1915 og igen i 1926,⁴² hvor den blev trykt i tidsskriftet *Tilskueren*, maj 1926. På samme tid skrev Karen Blixen på to andre marionetkomedier – den aldrig trykte *Elmis Hjerte*, samt *Carneval*. Den sidste blev omarbejdet til fortællingen “*Karneval*”, trykt 1. gang i *Efterladte fortællinger*. (blixen.dk)⁴³

It is no coincidence that one of characters in *Sandhedens Hævn* is a murderous innkeeper by the name of Abraham. Blixen of course knew the story of Abraham and Isaac from The Bible, but from the following quotes we also understand that she had read Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven* and found it utterly problematic. *Sandhedens Hævn* is a critical counter-narrative to this work by Kierkegaard, most likely fueled by Brandes' Kierkegaard-study

⁴² It seems very unlikely that Blixen reworked *Sandhedens Hævn* in 1926, since she left Denmark on December 25th 1925, arrived in Kenya on February 1st 1926 and on February 24th 1926 writes to Thomas Dinesen: “Jeg ser, at ”Tilskueren” endnu ikke har indeholdt ”Sandhedens Hævn”. Mon de skulde have betænkt sig og sletikke vil tage den? Kan du ikke faa det at vide af dem, og ligeledes fravriste Holstein ”Jaques”,—hvorom han dog gerne kunde have givet Livstegn? Hvis imidlertid ”S. H.” kommer ud i Enden, vil Du saa ikke sende den tilligemed indlagte Brev til gamle Georg? – jeg ville dog gerne at han skulde se den, og muligt have et Ord fra ham derom. Selv om den skulde været kommet i Martshæftet, vil jeg bede Dig sende ham Brevet; Du kunde da maaske føje nogle Ord til det, om at jeg havde sendt Dig det, men det var blevet uventet forsinket. Jeg føler mig desværre langt fra i Vigør til at tage fat paa ”Elmis Hjerte” eller noget andet; jeg har sjældent i mit Liv følt mig saa langt nede i Arbejdskraft og Livskraft som nu, jeg ved ikke rigtig, hvad det kommer af.” (Blixen 1978b, 19). Thus, the final reworking must have taken place in 1925 before she left for Africa. The passage also indicates that Brandes had either not read the play, or at least not read the final manuscript, but that Blixen for some reason is very interested that he does.

⁴³ This is the official website for Karen Blixen Museet at Rungstedlund. Accessed August 20, 2013.

where he is extremely critical of Johannes de Silentio⁴⁴ and his idolized depiction of Abraham (Brandes 1877, 109-12). The essence of this critique is:

Det er godt nok at beundre Abraham. Men der er intet redeligt Menneske, som af Vane eller Magelighed vil kalde det stort hos Abraham, som han vilde stemple ganske anderledes, ifald det skete i vore Dage, ifald det f. Ex. udførtes af en stakkels udannet Haandværkssvend. (Brandes 1877, 110)

Brandes continues with an anthropological reading of the story and concludes by accusing Kierkegaard of exploiting this biblical story (among others) as a means to explore his own inner condition:

Historien om Abraham er en af de flere gamle skjønne Legender, i hvilke Menneskeslægten paa sin Vandring gennem Historien har nedlagt sin Erindring om de ældste Tiders Menneske-ofringers Overgang til Dyreofre, men er det redeligt, er det sundt, er det ethisk, at prise Abraham som det store ethiske Mønster for Slægten og som Troens Fader, naar man dog blot vil bruge ham til at udskamme en lidenskabsløs Samtid og til at stille sine egne indre Erfaringer i et elektrisk Lys? (Brandes 1877, 112)

In *Sandhedens Hævn* Blixen depicts the great founder of faiths Abraham as not only a villain, but also a coward, who from time to time asks his henchman Mopsus⁴⁵ to kill the guests at the inn for him, so he can take their money. He is in no way a noble and admirable person as Johannes de Silentio depicts him in Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven*. Blixen's Abraham is the materialistic-comical inversion of this biblical character that supports Brandes' view that Abraham should be judged as a common murderer. Blixen is doing here what Johannes de Silentio suggests would be the result if we looked at Abraham without counting in the notion of faith and the religious perspective:

Kan Troen ikke gjøre det til en hellig Handling at ville myrde sin Søn, saa lad den samme Dom gaae over Abraham som over enhver Anden. Mangler man maaskee Mod til at gennemføre sin Tanke, at sige, at Abraham var en Morder, da er det vel bedre at erhverve dette Mod, end at spille Tiden paa ufortjente Lovtaler. (Kierkegaard 1843c, n. pag.)

⁴⁴ Brandes more or less perceives Johannes de Silentio as synonymous with the empirical author Søren Kierkegaard.

⁴⁵ Mopsus was a celebrated seer and diviner in Greek mythology. He also plays a part in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "Mopsus the sage, who future things foretold" (<http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.mb.txt>). Accessed August 20, 2013. In *Sandhedens Hævn* the name is used for comical purposes just like Abraham, since none of them have supernatural powers. *Instead, the only seer of the play is the Pagan witch Amiane.*

This is exactly what Blixen does in *Sandhedens Hævn*. She shows everyone that she has the “Mod” to take this position and even tops it by ridiculing Abraham as a comical villain in a marionette comedy. The following passage in *Frygt og Bæven* also seems to have inspired both the plot and the title, since “Sandhedens Dom” over Abraham is exactly that he is a “Morder,” who in Blixen’s play, has “sovet sig til Navnkundighed” (in this case to his wealth and power) since Mopsus is running around in the night killing the guests for him:

Hvis jeg havde erkjendt det for Sandhedens Dom, at Abraham var en Morder, da veed jeg ikke, om jeg havde kunnet bringe min Pietet for ham til Taushed. Havde jeg imidlertid tænkt det, saa havde jeg formodentlig tiet dermed; thi i slige Tanker skal man ikke indvie Andre. Men Abraham er intet Blendværk, han har ikke sovet sig til sin Navnkundighed, han skylder den ikke en Lune af Skjebnen. (Kierkegaard 1843c, n. pag.)

Abraham even falls victim of “en Lune af Skjebnen” when the witch Amiane casts the spell that every lie told that night, will come true, which in the end becomes the source of Abraham’s demise. In the Biblical story God rewards Abraham with numerous descendants and abundant prosperity for following his command to kill his own son. In *Sandhedens Hævn* Blixen subjects Abraham to the opposite fate, when all of his money disappears as a cloud of bats into the sky and his only daughter runs away with the gossip journalist and alcoholic Jan Bravida.

The Gospel of Nature and Joy

In one of the first paragraphs “Lovtale til Abraham” in *Frygt og Bæven* we find a passage where Johannes de Silentio is praising consciousness and spirit over nature:

Dersom der ingen evig Bevidsthed var i et Menneske, dersom der til Grund for Alt kun laae en vildt gjærende Magt, der vridende sig i dunkle Lidenskaber frembragte Alt, hvad der var stort og hvad der var ubetydeligt, dersom en bundløs Tomhed, aldrig mættet, skjulte sig under Alt, hvad var da Livet Andet end Fortvivlelse? Dersom det forholdt sig saaledes, dersom der intet helligt Baand var, der sammenknyttede Menneskeheden, dersom den ene Slægt stod op efter den anden som Løvet i Skoven, dersom den ene Slægt afløste den anden som Fuglesangen i Skoven, dersom Slægten gik gennem Verden, som Skibet gaaer gennem Havet, som Veiret gennem Ørkenen, en tankeløs og ufrugtbar Gjærning, dersom en evig Glemsel altid hungrig lurede paa sit Bytte, og der var ingen Magt stærk nok til at frarive den det – hvor var da Livet tomt og trøstesløst! (Kierkegaard 1843c, n. pag.)

In the closing lines of the song that concludes *Sandhedens Hævn* Fortunio propagates the exact opposite view on nature compared to that of Johannes de Silentio. Fortunio does not subscribe to the idea that without spirit and God life is just “bundløs Tomhed” and “Fortvivelse.” He, on the contrary, puts forward materialistic metaphysics, where nature, and the sea in particular, are the superior and eternal elements (“I Evighed er jeg bestandig ens”). This point of view is also articulated as a tribute to the bodily pleasures of life, to joy and lust:

Hejs Sejl. O Haab sid Du tilrors
Farvel grønne Kyster
vi har indenbords
alt hvad Menneskers Sjæle lyster
Elskov, Fare
Musik og Alkohol

(...)

Jeg er det fri Hav
andre Guder skal I ikke have.
I Evighed er jeg bestandig ens.
Mer end Jordens Lyst min Lyst
og mer end Jordens Smerte er min Smerte
en og udelt er jeg.
Kom o frie Hjerter til mit Hjerte.

(...)

Ekko efterlod
vi bag Mil og Maane
lad Din Sjæl, Dit Blod
min sit Ekko laane.
Farvel o Kyst.
Evig er Havets Lyst
Evig o evig
Lyst.

(Blixen 1998, 38-9, author's italics)

The song praises the sea as the only religion: “Jeg er det fri Hav / andre Guder skal I ikke have” and “Lyst” [joy/desire/lust]: “Evig er Havets Lyst. Evig o evig Lyst” as the highest principle, which is a Pagan point of view that subverts the Christian notion of nature, the human body, lust and desire as something, spiritless and dark that has to be rejected, cultivated and controlled. Here Blixen is drawing on some of the ideas about nature she

already put forward in “Pløjeren” that came in *Tilskueren* as early as 1907, where only nature and time creates (not God) and the soil is the only remedy that can heal the haunted protagonist (Blixen 2008, 56-7). The notion of eternity here is the opposite of the Christian notion of a timeless and eternal paradise in heaven. Instead, Fortunio connects eternity to the earthly element of the sea as the only eternal, infinite, time- and borderless element, which is a materialistic subversion of the lofty Christian idea of a Paradise in Heaven (that we also find in “Dykkeren,” see the chapter: “Woman: God(dess) of Man”). With her usual affinity for gender reversals of Kierkegaard’s characters, it is no coincidence that the omnipotent character in Blixen’s marionette comedy is a (Pagan) witch, Amiane, and not the usual authority: the male Christian God. This is the first, yet prominent and very clear, example of Blixen’s subversive strategy with regard to gender and Christianity in relation to Kierkegaard that became a consistent method throughout her entire oeuvre.

The Marionette Motive

In his essay *Karen Blixen og marionetterne* from 1952 Aage Henriksen made the following connection between Karen Blixen’s marionette motive in *Sandhedens Hævn* and Kierkegaard and Christianity. The essay was first given as two radio talks in May 1952 and published by Wivels Forlag the same summer:

I begyndelsen af dette essay omtaltes Heinrich von Kleists dialog om marionetterne. Den endte med den vittigt-dybsindige påstand, at absolut ynde har kun marionetten og Gud, d.v.s. de væsner som er ubetinget natur eller ren ånd. På dansk kunne vi sige, at gentagelsen oplever kun marionetten og den kristne, og med det sidste ord føre tanken hen på Søren Kierkegaard, som skrev en bog, der hedder *Gjentagelsen*. I dette begreb kan Søren Kierkegaard og Karen Blixen mødes og i frygten for den dæmoniske æstetiker, men de mødes kun ved, fra denne skikkelse, at gå i modsatte retninger og følge to meget forskellige arter af fromhed. (quoted from Henriksen 1965, 32)⁴⁶

In the last chapter of his doctoral thesis from 1954 *Kierkegaards romaner* Henriksen develops the ideas presented in the above quote, while quoting a central passage from Blixen’s *Sandhedens Hævn*, but without mentioning the source:

⁴⁶ In the article about “The Poet” (Bunch 2013b) I also use part of this quote to explain Blixen and Kierkegaard’s different notions of the demonic and expound their different ways to piousness.

Og det, at have et forhold til idé i sit liv, er ikke ensbetydende med at leve efter en bestemt overbevisning. Ideen kan så at sige være før og efter lidenskaben, kan være ubevidst eller bevidst. Den idé, som bliver anskuelig i det umiddelbare menneskes skæbne, er ”nedlagt” i det og kan kaldes dets bestemmelse; den idé, som et menneske begejstres for og lidenskabeligt hengiver sig til, er dets personlige ejendom, som det har taget i besiddelse i frihed. Disse to så forskelligartede forhold til ideen skulle ikke i princippet behøve at udelukke hinanden; tværtimod skulle man kunne tænke sig en højere enhed, at et menneske kunne identificere den idé, som var nedlagt i dets væsen, og så bevidst stræbe efter ”at holde forfatterens idé klar, ja, at drive den ud i den yderste konsekvens.” (Henriksen 1954, 175)

What Aage Henriksen does not see is that Amiane in *Sandhedens Hævn* identifies this idea of “Lyst” as the most important one of “Naturens Tanker” that human beings must remember to follow in order to become our self, in order to become an individual:

Nogle Mennesker gør andet end de har Lyst til og glemmer, hvad de selv er. De forvirrer Naturens Tanker, de plumrer Naturens Kilder op, ja tag jer endelig iagt for dem. Hele Natten i Mørke voxer Træerne i Skoven, ja, hvis det blæser, bevæger deres Kroner sig i Blæsten. Sådanne Mennesker, som jeg taler om, vaagner om Natten, bliver urolige og beskæmmes, naar de tænker derpaa. (Blixen 1998, 9, author’s italics)

Mopsus’ problem in the comedy is precisely that he does not do what he wants to, but instead do what Abraham and other people tell him to do, thus forgetting who he is. He blames Christian ”Moral” and his ”Samvittighed” for this discrepancy in his individuality that prevents him from following his own ”Lyst,” his own nature and become himself: ”min Moder var meget streng. Hun plagede mig med sin Moral” (...) ”Da jeg voxede op, blev min Samvittighed min største Prøvelse” and ”Hør nu. O, jeg kan ikke forstaa, hvorfor jeg altid skal have saa forfærdelige Samvittighedskvaler, naar andre Mennesker aldrig har det” (Blixen 1998, 26, 31-2). Mopsus also has his doubts with regard to God, since: ”Det er det svære ved at gøre Guds Vilje, at jeg aldrig rigtig kan blive klar over hans Karakter” (Ibid. 28), which sounds reasonably, when thinking about the Abraham-Isaac story and other gruesome, paradoxical stories from The Bible. It is true that when one evaluates the character of God outside the discourse of religion (as a concrete character), the main characteristics of his personality are less flattering and could be described with keywords such as narcissism, capriciousness and inconsistency. He is in fact also a liar, since his command to Abraham to kill his son is in fact just a test to see if Abraham has faith and is willing to follow his commands blindly. Had Abraham not trusted God, one could easily imagine that the outcome would have been the exact opposite — that God would have taken Isaac from Abraham to punish him. Since God is

normally evaluated within the discourse of religion, he typically evades these types of anthropomorphic evaluations, but not in Blixen's world. This is Blixen's understanding of God's character from The Old Testament even though she did not believe in him in a Christian sense.

The idea of staying true to one's nature that Blixen develops in *Sandhedens Hævn* might derive from Kierkegaard's mentor P. M. Møller and his ideas about "Affektation" and "Naturen":

Affektation kommer oftest af, at man ej har Kraft til at lægge sig ud med Verden for at vise sin Personlighed sand. Derfor er det godt, at somme komme til at staa i trodsig Opposition til Lavet. I Naturstanden levede hver adskilt og udviklede sig trodsig en Personlighed, da han ej forstyrredes af mange. Nu danner man sig ved Abstraktion en almenyldig Person, et Selskabsideal uden Kanter, et Ideal uden Individualitet. (Naturen gør da sin Ret gældende i Bøger som Baggens Genganger.) Enhver har af Naturen sit dybe Præg, men lader det udslettes for at tækkes andre. Disse andre have i at forkaste de fremstikkende et meget rigtigt Princip; kuns skulde de gøre Forskel imellem de selvraadige og dem, der ere fremstikkende af Pedanteri og Hjælpeleshed. Folk ere ikke det, Naturen bestemte dem til, da det stramt organiserede Borgersamfund udsletter Individualiteten. (P. M. Møller 1930, Bd. 2, 291, author's italics)⁴⁷

Poul Møller's collected works with numerous passages underlined (Bondesson 1982, 185) were in Blixen's library when she died but Blixen could also have gotten the ideas from Høffding's book about Søren Kierkegaard: *Søren Kierkegaard som Filosof* (1892, reprinted in 1919) where he describes the essence of P. M. Møller's thinking in this way:

Affektation er efter Poul Møller en forbindelse af falskhed og selvbedrag. Den opstår ved, at man vil være, hvad man efter sin natur ikke kan være, og derfor indbilder sig selv og andre, at man er anderledes end man i virkeligheden er (...) Fast bliver affektationen, når man konsekvent gennemfører det fremmede princip, uagtet det ikke kan få rod i ens personlighed.⁴⁸ Både moralsk følelse, selvfølelse og immoralitet kan på denne måde være skaller, man skjuler sig i over for sig selv og andre, idet man finder behag ved dem uden dog virkelig at udfylde dem (...) Poul Møller går endog så vidt i sin hævden af vigtigheden af overensstemmelse

⁴⁷ Retrieved from the online edition at ADL's website:

http://adl.dk/adl_pub/pg/cv/ShowPgText.xsql?nnoc=adl_pub&p_udg_id=49&p_sidenr=291. Accessed August 20, 2013.

⁴⁸ This type of life-principle, where "affektationen bliver fast" is exactly what August von Schimmelmann is living by: "He had collected flowers, studied music, and had many friends. He had tried a life of pleasure and had been made happy many times. *But the road leading from it all into the heart of things he had not found.* As time went on a dreadful thing had happened to him: one thing had become to him as good as another. *Now, later in life, he had accepted the happiness of life in a different way, not as he really believed it to be, but, as in a reflection within a mirror, such as others saw it (...)* Slowly he took to living, so to say, upon the envy of the outside world, and to accept his happiness according to the quotation of the day." (Blixen 2012, 357, author's italics)

mellem det indre og det ydre, at han erklærer, at “ingen Livsytring har Sandhed, uden deri ligger skabende Selvvirksomhed.” (Høffding 1989, 32-3)

To return to Henriksen’s idea that “et menneske skulle kunne identificere den idé, som var nedlagt i dets væsen, og så bevidst stræbe efter at ”holde forfatterens idé klar, ja, at drive den ud i den yderste konsekvens” in relation to Kierkegaard and the Christian, we understand that Kierkegaard identified this ”idea” in *Om Begrebet Ironie* as Christianity and the obligation of the true Christian individual to develop these seeds in accordance with God’s idea:

men netop skal udvikle de Spirer, Gud selv har nedlagt i Mennesket, da den Christne veed sig som den, der har Realitet for Gud. Her kommer den Christne ogsaa Gud tilhjelp, bliver ligesom hans Medarbejder i at fuldføre den gode Gjerning, Gud selv har begyndt. (Kierkegaard 1841, “Ironien efter Fichte,” n. pag.)

In *Sandhedens Hævn*, Blixen seems to propagate the opposite (even though Blixen might not have read Kierkegaard’s *Om Begrebet Ironie*): that it is the seeds of nature in the shape of joy, happiness, lust and inspiration that human beings must stay true to and develop in order to “vise sin Personlighed sand,” follow “Naturens Tanker” and become a true individual. In the play she also blames Christian-Bourgeois societal norms for rejecting and corrupting these seeds since: “Begrebet Skyld og Synd kommer ikke frem i dybeste forstand i Hedenskabet” (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.). Blixen here puts forward another notion than Kierkegaard that the art of becoming oneself is to break free from the pangs of anxiety and the sense of guilt that Christian ethics and the religious have subjected mankind to and instead follow these uncorrupted seeds of human nature that are expressions of our natural “sensuousness (“Sandselighed”), playfulness and creativity. This is very similar to how the character A describes the Pagan Greeks in *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* and their relation to “Sandseligheden” and the individual:

I Græciteten var Sandseligheden behersket i den skønne Individualitet, eller rettere sagt, den var ikke behersket; thi den var jo ikke en Fjende, der skulde undertvinges, ikke en farlig Oprører, der skulde holde i Ave, den var frigjort til Liv og Glæde⁴⁹ i den skønne Individualitet. (Kierkegaard 1843a, “De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier,” n. pag.)⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Blixen seems to use the last part of this phrase in *Sandhedens Hævn*: ”De gode Gerninger er ligesom de smaa Børn. Tænker I jer længe om, bliver de aldrig til noget, men naar I ingen Hensigt har, men er fulde af *Liv og Glæde*, gør I dem uden at tænke derpaa.” (Blixen 1998, 10, author’s italics).

⁵⁰ It is also worth noting that Kierkegaard dedicated *Begrebet Angest* to P. M. Møller. In the dedication he calls him ”Græcitetens lykkelige Elsker” (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.).

This is a notion that Blixen clearly supported.

Nature and the Poet as God

Late in life Kierkegaard made a very interesting comparison between God and the poet in one of his diary entries called “Et Synspunkt for Msk-Slægtens Historie.”:

Mine Tanker er: Gud er som en Digter. Deraf forklares det saa ogsaa at han finde sig i baade det Onde og alt Vrøvlet og Ubetydelighedens Jammerlighed og Middelmaadighed o: s: v: . Saaledes forholder jo en Digter sig ogsaa til sin Digter-Frembringelse (der ogsaa kaldes hans Skabning) han lader det komme frem. Men som man jo i høi Grad feiler, naar man troer, at hvad den enkelte Person i Digtet siger eller gjør, er Digterens personlige Mening: saaledes feiler man jo ogsaa ved at antage, at hvad der skeer, derved at det skeer, er af Gud samtykket. O, nei, han har sin Mening for sig. Men digterisk tillader han alt Muligt at komme frem, selv er han overalt tilstede, seer til, digter videre, i een Forstand, digterisk (upersonlig), ligeligt opmærksom paa Alt, i en anden Forstand, personligt, sættende den frygteligste Forskjel som den mellem Godt og Ondt, mellem det at ville som han vil og ikke at ville som han vil. o: s: v: o: s: v: Det Hegelske Sludder om, at det Virkelige er det Sande, er derfor aldeles ligesom den Forvexling, at paanøde en Digter, at hans dramatiske Personers Ord og Handlinger ere hans personlige Ord og Handlinger. Kun det maa fastholdes, at hvad der, om jeg saa tør sige, bestemmer Gud til at ville saaledes digte, ikke er, som Hedenskabet meente, for Tidsfordriv, nei, nei, just deri ligger Alvoren, at det at elske og at ville elskes er Guds Lidenskab, ja fast – uendelige Kjerlighed! – som var han selv bunden i denne Lidenskab. (Kierkegaard 1854, “Journalen,” n. pag.)

In Blixen’s world there is no Christian God behind it all, which also means that God can’t be the author of our destinies. But who’s the author then? With her affinity for materialistic inversions and “konkrete og individuelle Billeder af Karakterer og Skæbner” (Høffding 1916, 67), Blixen substitutes God and the divine creation with The Poet and Nature as the logical materialistic answers to the omnipotent Christian God.⁵¹ Only

⁵¹ In “Kardinalens første Historie” (*Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957) Cardinal Salviati talks about God in a way that is very similar to how Kierkegaard describes him in the passage above from 1854: “Du ved,” siger da Herren, “at jeg er almægtig. Og du ser her for dine Øjne den Verden, som jeg har skabt. Sig mig nu din ærlige Mening om den. Mener du, efter at have taget den i Øjesyn, at det har været min Hensigt at skabe en idyllisk Verden?” “Nej Herre,” svarer den Tjenestesøgende. “Eller at det har været min Hensigt,” spørger Herren “at skabe en idyllisk Verden?” “Nej Herre,” svarer den Tjenestesøgende. “Eller at det har været min Hensigt,” spørger Herren, “at skabe en logisk ordnet og beregnelig Verden?” “Nej visselig ikke,” svarer Kandidaten. “Eller en Verden hvori det er let at leve?” spørger Herren. “Oh du gode Gud nej!” udraaber Kandidaten igen. “Eller tror og mener du,” spørger Herren for sidste Gang, “at det har været min Beslutning at skabe en sublim Verden med Mulighed for det herligste og frygteligste?” “Ja det skulde jeg tro,” svarer den unge Mand. “Nuvel,” siger Herren, “da kan du aflægge din Embedsed.” Salviati concludes that the only representative on earth, which is conducting the same principle of sublime creation, is the priest and the poet. He also concludes that none of them can be sure if they are in fact serving God or The

nature and poets create with the omnipotence of a God, which means that God is not like a poet, but, conversely, the poet is like a God (as I also show in my article about “The Poet,” Bunch 2013b). We human beings are in the hands of nature, as the characters in a tale are in the hands of the omnipotent poet:

Sandheden er, at vi alle spiller med i en Marionetkomedie (...) Hvad det, mine Børn gælder om i en Marionetkomedie er at holde Forfatterens Idé klar. Det er en Hemmelighed, som jeg dog vil fortælle Dig, at dette er den sande Lykke, som Folk leder om paa andre Steder (...) o I mine Medspillende, hold Forfatterens Idé klar, ja driv den ud i dens yderste Konsekvens.” (Blixen 1998, 10)

We can only become ourselves, if we follow our ”nature,”⁵² which means to follow our ”Lyst” and do what we want, instead of what others want from us or what we believe they (or God) expect from us. This is the idea that we must follow in order to be good marionettes in the hands of nature, and only then will we be able to embrace our destiny unconditionally and experience ”den sande lykke.” Just like the characters in a story must ”holde Forfatterens Idé klar” and follow the idea of the poet and the aesthetic laws of his character to the fullest in order to be a good marionette:

SABINE: Jovist, Fortunio, vær ikke bedrøvet, vi har gjort vort bedste, og mere forlanger vi ikke at gøre. Da vi først begyndte, da vidste ingen, hvordan vore Roller var, ja, vi vidste det ikke selv, thi hvem kan vide, hvordan en Karakter tager sig ud på Scenen? Men nu har vi sagt de Repliker, som var i os, ikke en eneste har vi holdt tilbage, og naar Tæppet falder, kan ingen tvivle om, hvad vi egentlig var. O maatte enhver af Tilskuerne engang kunne sige det samme. (Blixen 1998, 36)

In *Frygt og Bæven* Johannes de Silentio has the following to say about destiny: “Om Skjebnen kan man derfor sige, hvad Paulus siger om en Afgud: der er ingen Afgud i Verden; men dog er Afguden Gjenstand for Hedningens Religieusitet” (Kierkegaard, 1843c, n. pag.). Contrary to Johannes de Silentio, Blixen here supports this point of view, which implies that it is the Christian God, who is not there. Instead, she reinstates

Devil: “Kan De være sikker paa,” spurgte hun, at den Herre som De tjener, nidkært og ubestikkeligt, at det er Gud?” Kardinalen saa op, mødte hendes Blik og smiled. “Dette,” svarede han, “dette, Madame, er en Risiko som Kunstnere og Præster i denne Verden altid maa løbe.” (Blixen 1957, 25, 29)

⁵²In Poul Møller’s version this movement of following one’s own nature, however, also contains an element of ”skabende Selvvirksomhed” (Høffding 1989, 33) equivalent to Kierkegaard’s idea of the good Christian as a ”Medarbejder.” In order to become oneself one has to create and express oneself and not just follow the rules and norms of society that past generations have set-up (otherwise we become “dusin-Mennesker”). One way to break free and become one-self is through poetic or intellectual creativity in accordance with ones “nature.”

“Skjebnen” as the only higher principle in life there is, which she then, as we know, made “Gjenstand for Hedningens [her own] Religieusitet” in line with Fortunio who at the conclusion of his song on behalf of nature and the sea commands that “andre Guder skal I ikke have.”

Early Nemesis: Truth as the Nemesis of the Lie

When recalling Johannes de Silentio’s idea of “Sandhedens Dom” over Abraham in the above quote, it also seems no coincidence that the title of Blixen’s play is *Sandhedens Hævn*. Here “Dom” is substituted with “Hævn” so the play is not just “Sandhedens Dom” with regard to the individual Abraham (that he is a common murderer) but also becomes a broader way of looking at truth and lies in connection to the human condition. In *Sandhedens Hævn*, “Sandhed” becomes the nemesis of the lie, since that which is told as a lie to cover up the truth actually becomes true in the play. Since “the lie” is the enemy of “the truth,” the revenge of the truth is precisely that the lie becomes true. Abraham lies about himself being a wealthy man and his hidden treasures and in the end loses all his money and becomes poor. Sabine lies about loving Jan and ends up falling irresistibly in love with him, and Mopsus, by denying all his sins towards the end of the play, ends up finally confessing them. The profound insight of the play is that if we don’t follow “Naturens Tanker” (which is to do what we want and follow our own ideas and desires), we lie, since we do what others want us to do, or what we believe they (or God) want us to do. The danger is that we can eventually get caught up in these lies to a degree, so they become the foundation of lives, which means that the lies in the end have become true — have become the truth of our lives (which is actually how most people live). So what Blixen stages in *Sandhedens Hævn* as a comedic reversal (Amiane’s spell that all the lies told that night will become true) is in fact, on the level of human existence, a profound observation of a dynamic in life that applies to all of us. On a bigger scale, this is also how Blixen sees Christianity, as one big lie that has become true since it has been the dominant ideology and norm that people have lived by in the Western world for thousands of years. This is one of the main critical elements in *Sandhedens Hævn* and one of the reasons why Blixen around the time when the play was published, identified with

Lucifer since she connects this symbolic figure, who denies God, with the notion of truth (as I have also mentioned before):

Jeg kommer til at tænke paa, at jeg vist burde nærmere forklare, hvad jeg mener med det symbolske Udtryk: Lucifer (...) Jeg opfatter det som om det betyder: Sandhed, eller Søgen efter Sandhed, Stræben mod Lys, Kritik, - ja, vel det man kalder *Aand* (...) Og sammen hermed (...) en sense of humour, som ikke er bange for *noget*, men *efter sin Overbevisning* tør gøre Nar ad alt, og Liv, og nyt Lys, Vekslen. (Blixen 1976b, 31)

This is a very good description of Blixen's rhetorical strategy in *Sandhedens Hævn* (and her other counter-narratives with regard to Kierkegaard), which is precisely a mix of "Søgen efter Sandhed" and "Lys, Kritik" mixed with a "sense of humour som ikke er bange for noget" and "tør gøre Nar ad alt." These are the elements that make the play a remarkable mix of criticism of Christianity (with clear threads back to Brandes and The Modern Breakthrough) and the substitution of it in the shape of materialistic-metaphysics that proposes another version of the Kierkegaardian notion of how to become oneself, wrapped in the guise of a comedy in the tradition of Holberg and the young J. L. Heiberg.⁵³ Behind Blixen's notion of Lucifer we again find Georg Brandes as the big influence. In a speech Brandes gave in Odd Fellowpalæet, Copenhagen in 1891, he presented this verse about Lucifer:

—”Lucifer, ildens ophav og flammernes bærer og luernes aand
er selve livets gnist, der gløder i blodet;
det er selve den kundskabens stjerne,
der lyser paa vor himmel,
det er den gode aand.
Han er en lysets engel.
Tro aldrig den løgn, at lysets engel nogensinde faldt eller kunne falde—”

(Brandes 1891, n. pag.)

In the same letter to Thomas Dinesen where Blixen mentions Lucifer as her ally, she continues with a very important statement about *Sandhedens Hævn* that connects Lucifer's fall and Blixen's notion of what is necessary to become an independent individual and artist: "Jeg kan ikke, jeg kan *umuligt* skrive noget, som der er det mindste

⁵³ Blixen was inspired by the marionette comedies of the young J. L. Heiberg: *Pottemager Walther* (which she quotes in the closing lines of "Carnival") and *Don Juan* that came out together in the collection *Marionetteater* (1814). Blixen had them in her library along with the edition of Heiberg's collected plays: *Skuespil* (VII volumes) København: Shubote 1833-41. (Bondesson 1982, 68)

ved, uden at bryde med Paradiset, og nedstyrtet til mit eget Rige. "Sandhedens Hævn" er vel et Miniatur-Forsøg herpaa; den skrev jeg i Rom" (Blixen 1978b, 27). Blixen's attempt to break away from Christian-Bourgeois norms (and woman's role as a mother and homemaker) and become "herself" by following her own desires ("Lyst") and become an individual in her own right (an artist) is analog to Lucifer's revolt against God. As was the case for Lucifer, such a decision comes at a price, but in order to become an independent artist (Blixen) or intellectual (Brandes) this is indeed a necessary movement. This was the movement that Kierkegaard also made, but the irony was —according to Brandes and Blixen — that he fell subject to the illusion that his ally in this project of becoming "himself" was God, when it was in fact the Devil. With all this in mind, it is of course understandable that Blixen was furious, when she discovered that Holstein had published *Sandhedens Hævn* under her married name Karen Blixen-Finecke instead of under her Pagan penname "Osceola." Using this Pagan pseudonym was of course of utmost importance for Blixen in order to underline the critique of Christianity that permeates the play. From a letter to Moster Bess May 26th 1926 upon the publication of *Sandhedens Hævn*, we also know that Blixen already at the time of publication was well aware that *Sandhedens Hævn* was a very difficult piece and that the readers would have difficulties understanding it: "Elle skrev at hun mente, der var en Chance for at faa "Sandhedens Hævn" opført; det ville mere mig i allerhøjeste Grad, om det kunde blive af, og maaske den vilde være lettere opfattelig paa en Scene!" (Blixen 1978b, 41). The full range of Blixen's profound thinking and critique of Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven* in *Sandhedens Hævn* has so far, as I have shown in this chapter, not been fully understood by scholars. Therefore, it is about time that the play is recognized within the Blixen scholarship as an important piece in Blixen's production that outlines significant motives and ideas that came to permeate her entire oeuvre. And as significant literary counter comment to Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven*.

The Concept of Christi-Anxiety

A couple of years after the publication of *Sandhedens Hævn* and after she had written most of "Carnival," Blixen alludes to another work by Kierkegaard in a letter to her mother Ingeborg Dinesen from Africa on January 22nd 1928:

... Mohr og jeg diskuterede,—med al Respekt for Søren Kierkegaard,—“Begrebet Angst” [sic], nærmest i Anledning af min Røverbande her; jeg synes at jeg selv i Livet er kommet til det Resultat, at al Angst i Virkeligheden er nervøs, fordi der *ikke er noget at være bange for*. D.v.s.: man kan naturligvis have Lov til at være bange for at blive slaaet ihjel, for at faa Lungebetændelse, køre sin Automobil i Grøften etc.—alle disse Risks eksisterer naturligvis i Tilværelsen,—men man kan ikke have Lov til at være *rædselsslagen* for dem,—fordi der er ikke i Livet noget at være *rædselsslagen* for (hvis man ikke tror paa Djævlens, i saa Fald kan man naturligvis have Ret til at være det altid). Naar jeg f. Ex. ikke er rædselsslagen for Natives og ikke vilde være det, selv om jeg jo meget godt kunde tænkes at vide, at de stod udenfor Døren og var bestemt paa at slaa mig ihjel, og selv om jeg troede at det vilde lykkes dem, saa kommer det af, at de ikke selv vilde være rædselsslagne for at slaa mig ihjel, d. v. s.: hverken de eller jeg tror paa Djævlens, og det hele kunde meget snarere jævnføres med en Jagtepisode, f. Ex. med at drive en Bjørn ud af Hiet, som ikke har noget rædselsslagende for Jægerne, om de ogsaa ved, at de kan risikere at blive slaaet ihjel, og vistnok heller ikke for Bjørnen, hvor vred den saa kan være og bestemt paa at put up a fight. Al Rædsel er mere eller mindre Mørkerædsel: bring Lys, og det maa naturnødvendigt fortage sig, fordi det vil vise sig at der ikke er noget at nære Rædsel for. Men vi har i saa mange Aar troet paa Helvede og Djævlens og kyst hinanden op til at se noget rædselsindgydende i mange Ting, at der sidder os en Helvedes Frygtagtighed i Blodet, og den kan rejse Hovedet ved de mest urimelige Lejligheder. (Blixen 1978b, 133)

In this passage Blixen is very critical of Christianity and blames it for creating anxiety that has no ground in reality, in fact as the very *reason* for people feeling anxious. In his paper from 2010 Anz correctly observes that anxiety seems to be a theme in “En Historie om en Perle” from Blixen’s *Vinter-Eventyr* even though he, as he himself mentions, is not able to back it by any quotations or allusions:

Auch in meinem zweiten Beispiel ist der Bezug zu Kierkegaard nicht auf der Ebene der Zitation, sondern auf thematisch-motivischer Ebene zu suchen: *En Historie om en Perle* spielt im Kopenhagen der 1860er Jahre unmittelbar vor Dem Deutsch-Dänischen Krieg. Den Bezug zu Kierkegaard bildet, so scheint mir, die Genealogie der Heldin Jensine und eins der Zentralen Motive: die Angst (Anz 2010, 424)

In the above quote, Anz also correctly observes that the description of Jensine’s grandfather and father (“die Genealogie”) in “En Historie om en Perle” has striking similarities with the accounts we have of Søren Kierkegaard’s father:

For omtrent firsindstyve Aar siden stod der i København et Bryllup som vakte Opsigt. En ung Garderofficer af gammel Familie giftede sig med en rig, borgerlig Pige, eneste Barn af en stor københavnsk Købmand, hvis Fader igen havde været omrejsende Hosekræmmer i Jylland, før Skæbnen førte ham derfra til Hovedstaden (...) Hendes Fader var en honnet Handelsmand, der i lige høj Grad frygtede at miste sine egne Penge og at narre sine Kunder, og denne dobbelte Fare havde undertiden gaaet ham haardt paa Nerverne, saa at han blev tungsindig og menneskesky. (Blixen 2010, 45, 47)

Kierkegaard's father was a poor child from Jutland who became a "Hosekræmmer" in Copenhagen and a very wealthy man. As the years went on he became increasingly worried about his immortal soul⁵⁴ since he, as a poor child in Jutland, on one particular occasion had cursed God. There is also reason to believe that he had problems mediating his religious life as a strict Pietist Herrnhuter⁵⁵ with his civil life as crafty an extremely wealthy businessman. At least we know that he, when Søren Kierkegaard grew up, lived in a permanent state of melancholy and anxiety, which he passed down to his son, who became an anxiety-ridden neurotic, who, if he did not write for just one or two days, fell into melancholia. Unfortunately Anz's analysis of the tale and the relation to Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* stops where it actually should have begun, but in the following I will try to make up for that.

"En Historie om en Perle"

In "En Historie om en Perle," Jensine's father has become a very wealthy man, but as we also know from The Bible, Matthew 19:24: "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (King James Bible, Cambridge Ed.). As a man belonging to the new, emerging class of the bourgeoisie, where the members, by their own doings and craftiness, are able to create wealth for themselves, the question that arises for Jensine's (and Kierkegaard's) father in connection to Christian morals and ethics is: At what expense? Will I as a very wealthy man that has created my fortune at the expense of others (and maybe cheated them) be able to enter the "kingdom of God" or am I going straight to hell? There is an inherent (and unsolvable) conflict between the new 19th century ideology of individualism and capitalism and the Christian notions about how people are supposed to live in order to get

⁵⁴ This has also become an issue for the middle-aged Löwenhielm in "Babette's Feast."

⁵⁵ "Herrnhutismens strenge syndsbegebet og tilsvarende inderlige håb om nåde har stemt med Michael Pedersen Kierkegaards alvorlige livsholdning. Han var medlem af brødersocietetet til sin død og fik i forstanderen, J. Fr. Mathiasens indberetning til moderorganisationen i Herrnhut det eftermæle at han havde, i det indre og ydre, været societetet en tro broder og en værdifuld økonomisk rådgiver." http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon/Samfund_jura_og_politik/Ideologi_og_livsanskuelse/Filosof/S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard. Accessed August 20, 2013.

to Heaven.⁵⁶ Jensine has inherited his father's Christian-Bourgeois way of thinking that is in conflict with itself and it invades and pollutes her marriage with Alexander, who as a nobleman comes from a completely different environment (the Aristocracy) that does not subscribe to Jensine's Bourgeois-Christian ethics. It is interesting that Anz does not point out that Blixen uses the word "Angst" three times in the Danish version of the tale in situations that precisely confront her with the elements that have been rejected by Christianity (passion and sexuality). Again Kierkegaard and major ideas put forward in several of his works seem to be the targets of criticism. Here a passage by A from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel*:

under Bestemmelse af Aand er Sandseligheden først sat ved Christendommen. Dette er ganske naturligt; thi Christendommen er Aand, og Aanden det positive Princip, den har bragt ind i Verden. Men idet Sandseligheden sees under Aandens Bestemmelse, saa sees dens Betydning at være den, at den skal udelukkes. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)

And a passage by Virgilius Hafniensis in *Begrebet Angest*: "Sandselighed som saadan er Syndighed. Efterat Synden er kommen ind i Verden, og hver Gang Synden kommer ind i Verden, bliver Sandselighed Syndighed" (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.).⁵⁷ What Jensine experiences on her honeymoon in the Norwegian mountains challenges her Christian-Bourgeois "Verdensbillede" and the parts of her human nature ("Sandselighed") that it has rejected, which creates in her a state of panic and anxiety:

Hun holdt netop Eros højt i Ære, hendes Ungpige-Bogskab var fyldt med Romaner og Kærlighedsdigte, og hun havde allerede i et par Aar, urolig ved Tomheden i sit eget Hjerter, lønligt anraabt Kærlighedsguden, og hvisket: "Hvorfor tøver du dog saa længe?" *Men nu følte hun med stigende Angst at Guden*⁵⁸ *maaske havde givet hende mere, end hun havde bedt om, og at hendes Bøger ikke paa langt nær havde sagt hende ren Besked om Kærligheden (...)* Til at begynde med var alt dette hende saa nyt, at hun følte det, som om *hendes gamle Verdensbillede blev hvirvlet ad alle fire Verdenshjørner til, med hendes Skørter og Shawl.*

⁵⁶ We also have the Biblical story about "The Rich Man and Lazarus:" "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." <http://www.lazaruscomeforth.com/bible-lazarus-and-rich-man/>

⁵⁷ This passage must have sounded like sheer nonsense to Blixen's ears since "Syndens skepsis er Hedenskabet aldeles fremmed." (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

⁵⁸ The Pagan God "Eros."

Men efter nogen Tids Forløb samlede de voldsomme nye Indtryk sig til *en saadan dyb Angst*, som hun aldrig hidtil havde kendt. (Blixen 2010, 46-7, author's italics)

In *Begrebet Angest* Virgilius Hafniensis also notes that “Angest kan man sammenligne med Svimmelhed. Den, hvis Øie kommer til at skue ned i et svælgende Dyb, han bliver svimmel” (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.), thus it seems no coincidence when Blixen describes Jensine's experience in the Norwegian Mountains as “Hun var højere oppe i Æteren end hun nogensinde før havde været, og Luften gik hende til Hovedet som Vin” (Blixen 2010, 47) and later, when she gets the extra pearl and consequently believes that it is the Devil who is playing with her: “Har da alle Magter i Verden,” tænkte hun svimmel, “slaaet sig sammen for at drive en stakkels Pige til vanvid” (Blixen 2010, 57). Aside from the anxiety created by the discovery of Eros and her own lust and sexual desire in these highly natural and erotic surroundings,⁵⁹ which is the part of human nature that is excluded and neglected within Christian-Bourgeois society, one of the major things that also frightens Jensine and creates anxiety has to do with her husband Alexander, who seems to escape the normal rules and regulations of Christian ethics. In fact he seems to be completely unaware of them:

En Dag beskrev han for hende, hvordan han i Casinoet i Baden-Baden havde spillet alle sine Penge bort, sat sin sidste Krone ind, og paa den havde vundet dem alle tilbage, og en pæn Sum foruden. Han vidste jo ikke af at hun, lige ved Siden af ham i sit Hjerte tænkte: ”Han er jo i Virkeligheden en Tyv. Eller om ikke en Tyv, saa en Hæler,—og Hæleren er lige saa god som Stjæleren.” En anden Gang gjorde han Løjer med sin Ungdoms Pengesorger, og udmalede for hende, hvordan han havde maattet løbe om ad Sidegaderne for at undgaa at møde sin Skræder. En saadan Tale lød rent ud dæmonisk i Jensines Øren. For hun havde hele sit Liv betragtet Gæld som en Vederstyggelighed, og det forekom hende nu næsten naturstridigt, at hendes Brudgom skulde have levet i mange Aar midt i den Usikkerhed og Uhygge, som den maatte føre med sig, uden Frygt, og i Tillid til, at Skæbnen nok engang skulde hjælpe ham ud af den. (Blixen 2010, 49)

With her strict moral Christian-Bourgeois upbringing Jensine behaves towards Alexander as “den fromme Følelse (i Retning af det Ethiske)” that is described in this passage in *Begrebet Angest*:

men den fromme Følelse (i Retning af det Ethiske) giver sig Luft i sin Indignation paa Arvesynden, paatager sig Anklagerens Rolle, og er nu ene bekymret for med næsten qvindelig Lidenskabelighed, med den elskende Piges Sværmerie, at gjøre Syndigheden afskyeligeere og

⁵⁹ Ironically described in the quote as: “hendes gamle Verdensbillede blev hvirvlet ad alle fire Verdenshjørner til, *med hendes Skørter og Shawl*” (author's italics).

afskyeligere og sig selv i den, saa intet Ord er haardt nok for at betegne den Enkeltes
Participeren i den. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

Jensine perceives Alexander as a demonic person, who not only defies the law of Christian ethics (that you get in life what you deserve and that you in the end are judged by your moral actions), but she also believes that he will end up in hell if she doesn't save him.

The main reason why Alexander has no fear and does not seem to understand the categories of good and bad, as they are defined by Christian ethics, has to do with him being a nobleman. He is a man from the aristocracy, who, contrary to Jensine, has been born with the privileges of wealth and power through his family name, his pedigree, which at the same time also make him immortal, since he is already secured a place in history through his name: the line of genealogy of his family. The interpretation of this condition that the tale offers is that Alexander as an aristocrat has never experienced The Fall of Man, which, as we know, implies that 1) you have to die 2) that you, before you die: “i dit Ansigts Sved skal du spise dit Brød, indtil du vender tilbage til Jorden; thi af den er du taget; ja, Støv er du, og til Støv skal du vende tilbage!” (1 Mosebog, 3:19) and that 3) you have now been equipped with a consciousness in order to enable you to differ between good and evil within the realm of Christian ethics, so that you eventually will be able to return to paradise if you have behaved as a good Christian. Having not been subjected to this fall Alexander, however, neither knows the concept of sin, nor the concept of anxiety, which means that he lives intuitively in the moment following his “Lyst” without any fear or moral pangs. This idea ties to the observation that Virgilius Hafniensis makes about Adam before the fall in *Begrebet Angest*:

Angest er Frihedens Virkelighed som Mulighed for Muligheden. Man vil derfor ikke finde Angest hos Dyret, netop fordi det i sin Naturlighed ikke er bestemt som Aand (...) At der gives Mennesker, der slet ingen Angest mærke, maa forstaaes ligesom, at Adam ingen vilde have fornummet, hvis han have været blot Dyr. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

Yet, Alexander is not an animal, even though he does not know fear or anxiety. He is the earthly, materialistic embodiment of the human condition before the fall, which Blixen, contrary to Hafniensis, perceives as the natural (at least a desirable) condition for a

human being as “det Umiddelbares rene Væren” (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.).⁶⁰ Thus, in “En Historie om en Perle,” the male protagonist Alexander is the embodiment of *Adam before the fall* and the female protagonist Jensine is the embodiment of *Eve after the fall* (which is of course the worst *mésalliance* one can possibly think of). Blixen creates her narrative around this dichotomy by closely following what Hafniensis outlines in *Begrebet Angest* with regard to the conditions before and after the fall, but with the usual line-up of inversions on the level of gender and Christianity. From here, the story progresses when Jensine, in her delusional state of mind where she does not yet understand that it is herself that is the real problem, decides to try and save Alexander from the despair and perdition she is convinced awaits him (but also in an attempt to save herself since otherwise the world as she knows it will fall apart). The method she decides to apply comes from one of the old folk tales: “Hun huskede Eventyret om Drengen, som blev sendt ud i Verden for at lære Frygt at kende, og det kom til at staa for hende, som om hun, paa Liv og Død, for sin egen Skyld ligesaavel som for at beskytte og redde ham, maatte lære sin Brudgom at frygte” (Blixen 1935, 48). The fairy-tale “Eventyret om en, der drog ud, for at lære frygt at kende” is also mentioned in Kierkegaard’s *Begrebet Angest*:

Man har i et af Grims (sic) Eventyr en Fortælling om en Ungersvend, der gik ud paa Eventyr for at lære at ængstes. Vi ville lade hiin Eventyrer gaa sin Gang, uden at bekymre os om, hvorvidt han paa sin Vei traf det Forfærdelige. Derimod vil jeg sige, at dette er et Eventyr, som ethvert Menneske har at bestaae, at lære at ængstes, for at han ikke enten skal fortabes ved aldrig at have været angest, eller ved at synke i Angesten; hvo der derfor lærte at ængstes retteligen, han har lært det Høieste. Dersom et Menneske var et Dyr eller en Engel, da vilde han ikke kunne ængstes. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

Alexander is not a demon; he is either an animal⁶¹ or an angel, or both. This also means that the tale in fact suggests that it is the other way around; that it is Jensine, not Alexander, who is demonic:

⁶⁰ On a self-biographical note this way of living was what both Hans Blixen, Bror Blixen and Denys Finch Hatton embodied and which was utterly attractive to Karen Blixen, even though at times unfathomable and baffling to her. She was, on the contrary, brought up in a strict Unitarian environment where feelings of guilt and anxiety were used as means to instigate the right moral values. In *Den afrikanske Farm* she describes Denys as a man, who just like Alexander, lives before the fall with his: “fuldkomne Mangel på Selviskhed eller Selvbevidsthed, en ubetinget Sanddruhed, som jeg, foruden hos ham, kun har truffet hos Idioter” (here quoted from Behrendt 2010a, 426).

⁶¹ Blixen and her aristocratic friends in Kenya counted themselves as belonging to the wild animals:

Det Dæmoniske er Angst for det Gode. I Uskyldigheden var Friheden ikke sat som Frihed, dens Mulighed var i Individualiteten Angst. I det Dæmoniske er Forholdet vendt om. Friheden er sat som Ufrihed; thi Friheden er tabt. Frihedens Mulighed er her igjen Angst. Forskjellen er absolut; thi Frihedens Mulighed viser sig her i Forhold til Ufriheden, hvilken er lige det modsatte af Uskyldigheden, der en Bestemmelse hen til Friheden. Det Dæmoniske er Ufriheden, der vil afslutte sig. Dette er og bliver imidlertid en Umulighed, den beholder altid sit Forhold, og selv om dette ganske tilsyneladende er forsvundet, er det der dog, og Angesten viser sig strax i Berøringens Øieblik (Cfr. det Foregaaende i Anledning af Fortællingerne i det N.T.). Det Dæmoniske er *det Indesluttede og det ufrivilligt Aabenbare*. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

As the narrative unfolds, Jensine has indeed been "Angst for det Gode" and personified "Friheden sat som Ufrihed; thi Friheden er tabt" and "Det Dæmoniske er Ufriheden". Thus, "En Historie om en Perle" suggests that it is the Christian-Bourgeois Jensine, who is the embodiment of the demonic, which is another audacious subversion on the level of both gender and Christianity. Blixen wants to prove a point with regard to Christianity and Kierkegaard and show how Christian ethics in a demonic way (with its notions of sin, guilt and ideas about what is good and bad in this world) twists people's notions of love, joy, sexuality and "Sandselighed" as something sinful, to a degree so they are forced to live a life in "Ufrihed." This also means *that Christian ethics is the cause of anxiety, not the remedy* as Jensine and most of the people of the day believed until Georg Brandes suggested otherwise in 1871. As Høffding also mentions in his article about Kierkegaard and Pascal in *Tilskueren*: "Jo mere udpræget en Karakter det religiøse Liv faar, des mindre lever Mennesket i sit naturlige Element, men bliver som en Fisk paa Landjorden (Høffding 1923, 423), which is exactly what Jensine feels is happening to her, when her Christian ethics are questioned by Alexander's carefree way of living:

og nu kom pludselig et Billede, en Fortælling fra Naturhistorien op i hendes Erindring. Hun huskede, hvad hun havde læst om Dybhavsfisk, der er saa vante til Trykket af de mange Hundrede Favne Vand oven over dem, at de brister i tusind Stykker, hvis de bliver hævet til Overfladen. Var hun selv, tænkte hun grublende, en saadan Dybhavsfisk i Tilværelsen, som

Vi [Blixen and Berkeley Cole] regnede os selv til de vilde Dyr. Vi beklagede virkelig oprigtigt, og græmmede os virkelig over, at vi ikke var i Stand til at give Samfundet – og vore egen Prioritetsejere – igen hvad der var blevet sat paa os, eller til i det hele at opføre os som det ventedes af os. Men vi vidste i vore Hjerter at vi ikke, end ikke for at blive højt og almindeligt respekterede, kunde opgave den direkte Kontakt med Gud som vi havde tilfælles med Flamingoen og Flodhesten. Her, 9000 Fod over Havet, lo vi imellem ad Missionernes, Forretningsmændenes og Embedsmændenes Ambitioner om og Tro paa at faa den gamle mørke Verdensdel gjort respektabel" (Blixen 1960, 26-7). The wild animal is also described as a unity where "idea and action" are one, which is the mode of existence that Alexander lives in before the divide was created by the fall. This was also Blixen's ideal.

kun kunde føle sig hjemme, og paa sin rette Hylde, under et tungt Tryk? Var hendes Fader, og havde hans Fader før ham været, af samme Slægt? Hvad skulde da, tænkte hun videre, en Dybhavsfisk stille op, hvis den var blevet forenet med en af de Laks, som hun paa Fisketure med Alexander havde set springe lige ret op mod Fossen,—eller med en Flyvefisk selv, for der var jo også flyvende Fisk til? (Blixen 2010, 53-4)

Thus, the tale also interprets and analyses a specific historical time period with regard to anxiety, the mid-19th century, and astutely points to the fact that the combination of Bourgeois individualism and Christian ethics is a particularly explosive anxiety-producing cocktail. In the Feudal society of the 17th and 18th centuries, people, on the other hand, knew their spot and here Christianity could, conversely, be a comfort and consolation, since it guaranteed you an afterlife in Paradise if you played the social role you were given in the hierarchy to the fullest. But when Bourgeois individualism starts to meddle with the categories (earning money, making a career for yourself, breaking the social categories) it challenges the very notion of Christian moral and ethics. Blixen saw this and created a narrative that, with Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* as a starting point, deals with the notion of anxiety within the Christian-Bourgeois society of the mid 19th century. On that note it is not a coincidence that Kierkegaard's work *Begrebet Angest* (1844) was born under such conditions. It is only one out of a number of narratives belonging to the current of Romanticism that deals with the issue of anxiety in relation to Christianity within a Bourgeois environment, for example Steen Steensen Blicher's "Sildig Opvaagnen" (1828) and H. C. Andersen's "Skyggen" (1847).

Many years later Blixen would prove her point once again in a tête-à-tête conversation with Ole Wivel on her 65th birthday on April 17, 1950, when she had invited him to come to Rungstedlund alone (Wivel 1972, 212). It turned out that she was furious with him and some of the other Heretics of the day with regard to their approach to the ethical:

Karen Blixen vædede lige akkurat læberne med vinen i glasset før hun tog ordet igen. Og nu fortalte hun om sin mors slægt og om sin far, om den konflikt imellem et religiøst livssyn og et ateistisk-heroisk som hun ganske vist aldrig selv havde mærket, men senere lært at kende – og lært at leve med. Og var det ikke en af de ting ude i Afrika, som havde henrevet hende, at denne konflikt var overvundet, fuldkommen forsonet? Himmelsk og jordisk kærlighed var derude ikke modsætninger som hos de kristne europæere, som tilsyneladende hos Martin A. Hansen og nu i Heretica, en smitte fra selve den dualismens tradition, vi modigt havde forsøgt at bekæmpe. "Jeg advarer Dem," sagde hun "mod Deres moralske valg og tilbøjelighed for det etiske. Har ikke netop dette valg i vores protestantiske kulturer først os stik mod vor egen gode vilje lige i afgrunden? Har ikke kristendommen udelukket henrykkelsen ved dette livs gaver

og mysterier og spærret os ude fra åndens verden på de betingelser, som er de eneste vi har?
(Wivel 1972, 214)

Christianity is just a Sign: “Clothes Mangled Here”

In one of the most quoted and famous allusions to Kierkegaard in Blixen’s work that we find in “The Poet” (“Digteren”), Blixen delivers another blow to religion and Christianity. The quote is a reversal of the idea that A coins in “Diapsalmata” from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel*. In “The Poet” Blixen lets August von Schimmelmann re-articulate this quote in a conversation with Councilor Mathiesen:

“When,” he went on after a little pause, “you and I, on our morning walk, pass a pawnbroker’s shop, and, pointing at a painted board in the window, on which is written “Clothes mangled here,” you say to me: “Look, clothes are mangled here – I shall go and bring my washing,” I smile at you, and inform you that you will find neither mangle nor mangler here, that the painted board is for sale. *“Most religions are like that board, and we smile at them.”* (Dinesen 1991, 360, author’s italics)

“Det er sandt, at hvis De og jeg paa vor Morgentur kommer forbi en Pantelaaners Bod, og De peger paa et malet Skilt i Vinduet, paa hvilket der staar skrevet: ”Her rulles” og siger til mig: ”Se, her rulles, jeg vil gaa hen og hente mit Vasketøj”, saa smiler jeg af Dem og belærer Dem om, at der hverken findes Rulle eller Rullekone, men at det maledede Skilt er til Salgs. *De fleste Livsanskuelser er som dette Skilt, og vi smiler ad dem* (Blixen 2012, 362, author’s italics)

This is, as has been pointed out in the scholarship numerous times since Torgny Segerstedt’s review of *Seven Gothic Tales* in July 1934, a rephrasing of the notion that character A puts forward in the first section “Diapsalmata” where the target is the philosophers: “Det, Philosopherne tale om Virkeligheden, er ofte lige saa skuffende, som naar man hos en Marchandiser læser paa et Skildt: her rulles. Vilde man komme med sit Tøi for at faae det rullet, saa var man narret; thi Skildtet er blot tilsalgs” (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.). In the English version Blixen substitutes Kierkegaard’s “Philosopherne” with “most religions” but later modifies it in the Danish version “Digteren” to “de fleste Livsanskuelser” so it becomes a more general critique of dogmatic thinking.

The point is of course that we as human beings must make our own experiences and form our own opinions and live by them and not blindly subscribe to an ideology, religion or philosophy created by others. The quote is also a hidden blow to Kierkegaard, who propagated individuality and criticized contemporary philosophy (first and foremost Hegel) but ended up subscribing to a religion, Christianity, which, according to Blixen,

eventually places him in the category of the delusional people who are fooled by the sign. Blixen also seemed to have been particularly critical with regard to Kierkegaard's late religious writings (even though we do not seem to find any traces of them in her tales), which, given my analyses of *Sandhedens Hævn* and "En Historie om en Perle" in relation to *Frygt og Bæven* and *Begrebet Angest*, should not come as a surprise. In a letter from Bonn dated June 27, 1951 Thorkild Bjørnvig writes that he participates in a study circle where he, in the absence of Blixen, has been playing the role of the *Devil's Advocate* with regard to Kierkegaard and his "sidste meget hellige Skrifter":

Endelig deltager jeg ugentlig i en Studiekreds over Kierkegaard, omsider forstaaet som og i Egenskab af at være den eneste Dansker ved Universitetet. Vi gennemgaar nogle af han sidste meget hellige Skrifter – og for at forfriske Helligheden ved lidt diabolisk Dialektik *fører jeg ofte, uden at de mærker det, paa underfundig vis Djævlens Sag*, og fornøjer dem derved, uden at de vist rigtigt fatter hvorfor ... Sig saa ikke, at jeg ikke, efter bedste Evne, ogsaa fører Rungstedlunds Farver en Smule her! (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 44, author's italics)

Here Bjørnvig strongly indicates that he supported Blixen in her materialistic critique of Christianity (represented symbolically by "Djævlens"), which, as I have shown in the above section, became a very significant point of critique in Blixen's approach to Kierkegaard and his relation to Christianity.

Intermezzo

In the following middle section of the thesis I will present the three submitted articles. Each of the articles are framed by a short introduction that outlines the current status of each publication. Each article is followed by a reflection on the theory and methods I have employed in each article and a chapter with additional information that has emerged since the submission of the articles, or, alternatively, in the shape of sections that during the editorial processes were left out of the final print versions. After the three articles and subsequent chapters, I will conclude by elaborating on Blixen general view on gender in relation to Kierkegaard based on all the material presented in this thesis, before presenting my final conclusion

4. "CARNIVAL"

This article was submitted to the UK journal *Scandinavica* (Norvik Press), which is now based at the University College London (UCL). The article was published in March 2012 in the delayed 2011:2 issue of *Scandinavica*. The version here is a PDF of the final print version. Note that there is a mistake in the article on page 78 starting from “What we do know for sure...” It should read: “What we do know for sure from her letter to Thomas Dinesen is that she had read Kierkegaard’s *Enten-Eller (Either/Or)* that was in the family library at Rungstedlund before her meetings with Brandes in October 1925, but if they discussed Kierkegaard we will never know for sure (Brandes does not mention Kierkegaard in his diary entries about Blixen).” On page 76 I also claim that “a date has so far not been detected” with regard to Blixen’s meeting with Brandes. This is not correct. Since the publication of this article Ivan Ž. Sørensen has called attention to two sources, where the meeting between Karen Blixen and Georg Brandes, based on the description in Georg Brandes’s diary, has already been described. It is in the article “Karen Blixen og Georg Brandes” from 1981 (Kristensen 1981, 177-85) and in Jørgen Knudsen’s Brandes biography *Georg Brandes. Uovervindelig taber. Andet bind* (Knudsen 2004, 486-9). Both sources, however, overlook the fact that Blixen and Brandes had dinner on October 15th 1925, the day after their first meeting, as I call attention to in the article.

Flappers and Macabre Dandies: Karen Blixen’s “Carnival” in the light of Søren Kierkegaard (Bunch 2011).

Flappers and Macabre Dandies: Karen Blixen's 'Carnival' in the light of Søren Kierkegaard

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Abstract

Despite almost making the cut for what later became *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), Karen Blixen's tale 'Carnival' has so far had little attention by scholars. The tale was developed in Africa in the years 1926-1927 in a period where Blixen was very occupied with the works of Søren Kierkegaard. In the tale we find one of the female characters, Annelise, to be dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard'. She is described as a 'macabre dandy' and has her own radical views on Kierkegaard's work *The Seducer's Diary*. This article sets out to examine the meta-narrative connections in 'Carnival' to the works of Kierkegaard from the first part of his pseudonymous authorship, particularly with regard to narration strategies, notions of gender, art and seduction. The article also elaborates on the depiction of the young, rich and disillusioned smart-set of the *Roaring Twenties* as a group of Kierkegaardian aesthetes. In the tale a connection between dandyism of the 1840s, in which category Kierkegaard is placed, and the new female flapper of the 1920s is established as a way to examine the androgynous, which, I will argue, in 'Carnival' is connected to a notion of trans-gender humanism and eventually to the *modus vivendi* of the artist.

Key words

Karen Blixen, Søren Kierkegaard, Carnival, gender, narration, seduction, art, flapper, dandy, 1920s.

Introduction

Two works, both influenced by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, frame Karen Blixen's production. *Ehrengard* – the late one – is by far the most famous. It was published a year after Karen Blixen's death in 1963 and has had considerable attention from scholars, especially in the past ten years (Sørensen, Møller and Kondrup). The early one – 'Carnival' – which will be the subject of this paper, is much less known. It is an early Gothic Tale, intended for the collection 'Nine Tales by Nozdref's Cook' (Lasson 2008: 478), but it did not make the final cut (neither did 'The Caryatids') for what eventually became *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) (Braad Thomsen 2011: 152). 'Carnival' was probably for the most part written in Africa 1926-27, but revised in Denmark in the early spring of 1933.¹ It was not published until 1975 in Danish in *Efterladte fortællinger* and in 1977 in the original English version in the collection *Carnival and Posthumous Tales*.² Scholars such as Thurman (1983: 277), Wivel (1987: 83) and Heede (2001: 142) have briefly mentioned the obvious Søren Kierkegaard connection in 'Carnival' where the character Annelise is dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard'. However, an in-depth analysis of the tale with regard to the relation to Søren Kierkegaard has so far not been conducted.

Karen Blixen was displeased with the notable lack of female voices and points of view in Søren Kierkegaard's production, for example the one-sidedness with which Cordelia is depicted in 'The Seducer's Diary' (Blixen 1996b: 251). She made it her mission to fill out these gaps, with the characters Ehrengard in *Ehrengard* and Annelise and Polly in 'Carnival' as the most notable examples. In the following I will take a closer look at the connections in 'Carnival' to Søren Kierkegaard's works 'In vino veritas' ('In Vino Veritas') from *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (1845) (*Stages on Life's Way*), 'Forførerens dagbog' ('The Seducer's Diary') and 'Vexel-Driften' ('Rotation of Crops') both from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (1843) (*Either/Or*, Part I) and 'Ligevægten mellem det Æsthetiske og Ethiske i Personlighedens Udarbejdelse' ('The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality') from *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel* (1843) (*Either/Or*, Part II).³ I will also investigate the view of the narrator of 'Carnival' on the biographical Kierkegaard:

‘that brilliant, deep, and desperate Danish philosopher of the forties, a sort of macabre dandy of his day’ (Blixen 1979: 57) with regard to the connection between the dandy of the 1840s and the new androgynous *garçonne*-look of the 1920s.

Blixen, Brandes and Kierkegaard

Karen Blixen was much occupied with Søren Kierkegaard in the early 1920s, that is, in the years before she started writing ‘Carnival’. In a letter from Africa dated Aug. 3, 1924 she writes to her brother Thomas Dinesen:

Læs forresten ogsaa Søren Kierkegaard, selv om Du maaske vil synes han er lidt indviklet (maaske ogsaa lidt gammeldags for Dig!). Vi har i hvert Fald ‘Enten-Eller’ hjemme. Jeg tror ikke, at noget Menneske kan læse ham med Eftertanke uden at gribes af ham. Han var et ærligt Menneske og led under det; maaske vil Du i hans ‘Opfattelse’ af ‘Den Enkelte’ finde noget af dig selv. (Blixen 1978a: 280)

And by the way, read Søren Kierkegaard, too, even though you may find him a little complicated (he may be a little old-fashioned to you, too!); I know that we have ‘Either/Or’ at home, anyway. I do not think that anyone can read him closely without being gripped by him. He was an honest person and suffered for it; you may perhaps see something of yourself in his concept of ‘The Individual’. (Blixen 1981: 225-226)

Seven months after writing the letter to Thomas Dinesen – on March 5, 1925 – she left Mombasa for Denmark. Through Marseilles she traveled to Paris, where she stayed for the month of April before arriving in Denmark in early May (Blixen 1978b: 11-13). She then stayed with her mother at Rungstedlund for eight months and finally – after waiting more than twenty years – got the chance to meet Georg Brandes. The meeting has been mentioned by numerous scholars (e.g. Thurman 1983: 265), but a date has so far never been detected. A search

conducted in Georg Brandes' diary from 1923-1926 revealed that they actually met and talked on 14 October 1925 and that Brandes had dinner with Blixen the day after on the evening of 15 October. From his diary we understand that Brandes was fascinated with Blixen's life in Africa and he also mentions that she had divorced her husband and calls her 'vakker dame' (beautiful lady). All in all he seems very amused and entertained by her company (Brandes 1923-26: 84-85). Aside from having written about the works of Karen Blixen's father, Wilhelm Dinesen, Georg Brandes also wrote the first book about Kierkegaard in 1877 (Thurman 1983: 28). Here he especially highlights 'In Vino Veritas' and *Either/Or* as Kierkegaard's most supreme works:

De er sikkert det i litterær Henseende Ypperste, Kierkegaard har skrevet. Det er Arbejder, som skrevne paa et af Europas Hovedsprog havde gjort deres Forfatter verdensberømt, især som de fremkom, ikke udskilte, men som Led i et Hele af modsat Aand... Og tager man *In vino veritas* og holder den op mod Platons *Symposion*, som hvis Modstykke den fremtræder, da maa man med Beundring sande, at den taaler Sammenligningen saa godt som overhovedet en moderne Komposition kunde gøre det. (Brandes 1967: 121)

In the literary sense, they are surely the most excellent things Kierkegaard has written. If they had been written in one of the main European languages, they would have made their author famous, especially since they appeared, not isolated, but as parts in a whole contrasting spirit... And if one places 'In Vino Veritas', alongside Plato's *Symposium*, to which it was ostensibly a companion piece, one must acknowledge with amazement that it sustains the comparison as well as any modern composition could. (Hong 1988: xvii-xviii)

In a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz, April 19, 1924 (just a few weeks after praising Kierkegaard in the letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen and before the journey to Denmark a year after), Blixen writes bitterly about a traumatic incident in 1904, where she was nineteen years old

and sent flowers to Brandes, but was prevented by her mother from meeting him in person.⁴ In the letter she also describes the role Brandes played with regard to her interest in literature: 'jeg havde længe levet i Brandes' bøger, og kan sige at det er ham, som har aabenbaret Literaturen for mig, – for Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine – fik jeg gennem ham' (Blixen 1978a: 260) ('I had been immersed in Brandes's books for a long time and I can say that it was he who revealed literature to me. My first personal enthusiasm for books, – for Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine, – came to me through him', Blixen 1981: 209). With Blixen's admiration for both Brandes⁵ and Kierkegaard it seems likely that she also read Brandes' book about Søren Kierkegaard: *Søren Kierkegaard. En kritisk Fremstilling i Grundrids* (1877), which was the standard work on Kierkegaard at the time. She might even have discussed Kierkegaard with Brandes during their. What we do know for sure from her letter to Thomas Dinesen is that Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* (*Either/Or*) was in the meetings in October 1925, but we will never now for sure (Brandes does not mention Kierkegaard in his diary entries about Blixen). family library at Rungstedlund.⁶ It seems plausible that Blixen conducted further studies on Kierkegaard in the eight months she stayed in Denmark, given that she started working on 'Carnival'⁷ that same spring, after her return to Kenya on February 1, 1926. In this tale – as we will now see – several works by Kierkegaard play important roles as backdrop texts.

The Symposium: 'Carnival' and 'In Vino Veritas'

All in all, the structure of 'Carnival' is that of a Symposium and the frame is very similar to Søren Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' from *Stages on Life's Way*. The latter – as Brandes also mentions – is obviously inspired by Plato's Symposium (Brandes 1967: 121). *The Symposium* is a philosophical text by Plato dated c. 385–380 BCE. It concerns itself with the genesis, purpose and nature of love. Love is examined in a sequence of speeches by men attending the symposium, where each man must deliver a speech in praise of love. Blixen's 'Carnival' can be seen as a part of a Kierkegaardian 'chinesisk Æskespil' ('Chinese puzzle')⁸ of literary reworkings of the genre of the Symposium: the

drinking party, where the nature of love is discussed. It is said in 'In Vino Veritas' that 'der skulde tales om Elskov eller om Forholdet mellem Mand og Kvinde' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier paa Livets Vej*) ('the subject should be erotic love (Elskov) or the relation between man and woman', Kierkegaard 1988: 30-31). As we know 'In vino veritas' means 'In wine there is truth' and Victor Eremita opens the banquet by saluting the participants with a glass of wine: 'Med dette Bæger, hvis Duft allerede bedaarer min Sands, hvis kølige Hede allerede opflammer mit Blod, hilser jeg Eder, kjære Drikkebrødre, og byder Eder Velkommen' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('With this glass, whose fragrance already beguiles my senses, whose cool heat already inflames my blood, I salute you, dear drinking companions, and bid you welcome', Kierkegaard, 1988: 23). The narrator later states that: 'de spiste, drak og drak og bleve drukne, som det hedder i det Hebraiske, de drak tappert' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('they ate, drank and drank, and became drunk, as it says in Hebrew – that is, they drank mightily', Kierkegaard 1988: 31).

The major similarities with regard to setting, composition and theme between Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' and Blixen's 'Carnival' are that they both take place at a location north of Copenhagen and the wine flows abundantly while the participants discuss women and erotic love. Especially the significance of wine plays an important role in both works. Here from 'Carnival': 'it is wonderful to have had so much to drink that you can speak as easily as you think' (Blixen 1979: 64, Mimi), 'Hot from wine and dancing the guests arrived' (ibid. 66), 'Flushed by wine under the powder of his mask' (ibid. 68, about Julius), 'Deeply moved by drink and love' (ibid. 69, about Charlie), 'he had drunk much tonight to get an inspiration' and 'Under the influence of these various moods and wines' (ibid. 5-86, both about Tido), 'Charlie tried to run his mental eye over the situation, but he had drunk too much for that' (ibid. 89), 'He refilled his glass and drunk it down' (ibid. 92, about Rosendaal) and towards the end the narrator states that: 'The wine seemed somehow alive on its own now' (ibid. 102).⁹ On the first page of 'In Vino Veritas' the narrator compares the process of recollection to the process of making noble wine:

og som den ædle Viin vinder ved at passere Linien, fordi Vandpartiklerne fordampe, saaledes vinder Erindringen ogsaa ved at tabe Hukommelsens Vandpartikler: dog bliver Erindringen ligesaa lidet derved en Indbildning som den ædle Viin bliver det. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*)

just as noble wine is improved by crossing the line [the equator, according to the notes on page 678 in *Stages on Life's Way*, my comment] because the particles of water vaporize, so recollection is improved by losing the water particles of memory; yet recollection no more becomes a figment of the imagination thereby does noble wine. (Kierkegaard 1988: 21)

The ability to recollect is also compared to creativity: 'Betingelsen for al Productivitet er det at kunne erindre' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('The ability to recollect is the condition for all productivity', Kierkegaard 1988: 14) but the narrator underlines that: 'Erindringens Perse derimod maa Enhver træde alene' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('The wine press of recollection, however, everyone must tread alone', Kierkegaard 1988: 14). Through the comparison to recollection, the creation of fine wine can be compared to the creation of art that also contains 'the essence' of life, understood as essential truths about the world. In 'Carnival' we see how the wine influences and moves the characters in various ways and inspire them to the profound discussion 'upon life and death' and to 'speak as easily as you think' (to speak the truth, so to speak). Blixen here seems to adopt the narrator's point of view that is apparent in 'In Vino Veritas': that fine wine is a metaphor for art and in the end synonymous with truth (veritas).

In both 'Carnival' and 'In Vino Veritas' we also find the majority of the participants to be disillusioned and unhappy lovers, with a couple of exceptions in each piece: Johannes the Seducer in 'In Vino Veritas' and Camelia in 'Carnival'. We also find one character in both works that has never been in love: 'the Young Man' in 'In Vino Veritas' and Polly (Arlecchino) in 'Carnival'. Polly is *the Young Woman* of the party (only nineteen years old and a virgin), the equivalent of Kierkegaard's 'The Young Man', whom her bigger sister Mimi (Pierrot) lectures about the

trials and tribulations of love, warning her against falling in love. We also find the depraved and demonic character of 'the Fashion Designer' from 'In Vino Veritas' (indeed a 'macabre dandy' type) mimicked in the artist Rosendaal, who is dressed as an old Chinese eunuch. Both are older, demonic, yet effeminate men, who do not seem to engage in any sexual relationships with women, but are utterly fascinated by them in a spiritual sense only. And just as the five bachelors in 'In Vino Veritas' are confronted with a person who thinks and lives a very different life than themselves – the married man Judge Wilhelm – we also find a character alien to the young smart set in 'Carnival.' He is Zamor, the antiquity dealer Madame Rubinstein's assistant (who may even be her son), dressed as Madame Du Barry's black page, who turns up unexpectedly towards the end of the story and threatens the party with a gun. These are the major structural similarities between 'In Vino Veritas' and 'Carnival'.

Mask and Gender

The major difference in 'Carnival' with regard to Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' (and Plato's *Symposium* for that matter) is that Blixen in 'Carnival' breaks the rule that only men are allowed to participate and speak at a Symposium. In 'Carnival' the party consists of 'the company of four lovely women, and the conversation, upon life and death, of four men' (Blixen 1979: 102). But Karen Blixen goes further. In 'Carnival' we not only find an equal number of women and men participating, but we also find men dressed as women, women dressed as men, a man dressed as a eunuch (a sort of non-gender) thus making it very difficult to grasp who is speaking and to what gender they actually belong. Here is the line-up:

Tido / Harlequin (futuristic Harlequin): A man wearing a man's costume

Camelia / Camelia: A woman wearing a woman's costume

Mimi / Pierrot: A woman wearing a man's costume

Polly / Arlecchino (traditional Harlequin): A woman wearing a man's costume

Annelise / Young Soren Kierkegaard: A woman wearing a man's costume

Julius / Venetian Lady: A man wearing a woman's costume

Charlie / Magenta Domino: A man wearing a woman's costume

Rosendaal / Eunuch: A man wearing a non-gender costume

The purpose of this gender confusion is not only to represent the 'gender trouble' (to use Judith Butler's term) of the 1920s and the (homo)-sexual revolution (I will get back to that), but also an attempt to escape a gender-biased view on women and erotic love. This, I will argue, is a meta-narrative counter comment to Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' where woman is represented solely through the eyes of five male speakers, who in addition are also bachelors and according to Johannes the Seducer even 'Ulykkelige Elskere' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *In vino*) ('unhappy lovers') (Kierkegaard 1988: 71), meaning that we have a *very* strong gender-bias with regard to the representation of woman and love in 'In Vino Veritas'. The narration strategy in 'Carnival' is to free the words spoken and the opinions expressed by the participants, by masking the persons speaking, so the (first-time) reader is unsure whether it is a man or in fact a woman who is expressing the opinion. The main consequence of this gender obfuscation is to see the characters first and foremost as *human beings* and only secondly as gender. It consequently also forces the reader of 'Carnival' to approach the subject matter in a less biased way; to disregard the subject (the gender of the person speaking) and instead focus on the object (the subject *matter*, so to speak). Tido, dressed as a woman in a magenta domino¹⁰, articulates the project:

No woman could ever look her best as much as in a mask only, or actualize to the same extent the combined human ideals of truthfulness and dignity, equally difficult to achieve

in clothes, or all uncovered. Your own mask would give you at least that release from self toward which all religions strive. A little piece of night itself, containing all its mystery, depth, and bliss, rightly placed for giving you its freedom without renunciation. Your center of gravity is moved from the ego to the object; through the true humility of self-denial you arrive at an all-comprehending unity with life, and only thus can great works of art be accomplished. (Blixen 1979: 67-68)

The idea is that by masking the naked woman, woman *an sich* will become the object of adoration; or, in this case, the object of discussion. If unmasked, the face of the subject, the individual woman, would make the observer and the observed unable to separate subject from object.

Kierkegaard and Blixen. The Mask as Artistic Strategy

In the central passage above Blixen also lets Tido articulate an artistic strategy that would later become her own ideal, but which is inspired by Kierkegaard's strategy of making the author-individuality disappear through the use of pseudonyms and double-reflected narrators. It is the move from the individual to the artist, from subjectivity to objectivity, from the material world to the idea, and here 'the mask', or the strategy of using pseudonyms, plays a crucial role, in order to make the leap from 'the ego to the object' – from the author-individuality to the object (in Danish 'the object' understood as 'genstanden') – which according to Tido is necessary for the creation of truly great art. The individuality of the artist ('the ego') must die ('release from self') in order to create the ability to focus entirely on the phenomena of the world ('the objects' *an sich*) and from any perspective; be it with the eyes of the pseudonym or the eyes of any 'individualities' (fictional characters) thus obtaining 'an all-comprehending unity with life' as Tido explains it in 'Carnival' (ibid. 67-68). In Joakim Garff's presentation of Søren Kierkegaard's first longer publication *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer* (1838) (*From the Papers of a Person Still Alive*), which is a critique of H.C. Andersen's *Kun en Spillemand* (1837) (*Only a Fiddler*) (1845),

Garff calls attention to Jørgen Bonde Jensen's analysis of an aspect of Kierkegaard's critique of Andersen (Bonde Jensen 1996: 57-89). Here, Kierkegaard proposes that the author-personality must die in order for true art to be created:

livanskuelse forudsætter, at man ikke 'tillader sit Liv altfor meget at futte ud', ja en vis selvcensur fremhæves i det hele taget, som en betingelse for at kunne 'tilkæmpe sig en dygtig Personlighed', thi det er kun 'denne saaledes døde og forklarede Personlighed, der bør og kan producere, ikke den manglekantede, jordiske, palpable'. (Garff 2000: 128)

a life-view presupposes that one does not 'permit one's life to fizzle out too much'. Indeed, he generally emphasizes a sort of self-censorship as the precondition for being able to 'win a competent personality for oneself', because it is only 'such a dead and transfigured personality – not the multifaceted, earthly, palpable personality – that is and ought to be capable of producing anything. (Garff 2005: 143)

Garff concludes that: 'At dø er nemlig at *af*dø, at dø bort fra denne verden, sin umiddelbarhed, for at genopstå i åndens verden til en anden umiddelbarhed' (Garff 2000: 129) ('To die is, in fact, to die away, to die away from this world, from one's immediacy, in order to be resurrected, in the world of spirit, to a second immediacy', Garff 2005: 144). In an early diary entry from August 1, 1835, the young Søren Kierkegaard is already aware how this dynamic of becoming-an-artist works and how it requires a shift from constant subjective self-reflection to a focus on the outside world instead: 'Derfor kunde jeg ønske at blive Acteur, for at jeg ved at sætte mig ind i en Andens Rolle kunde faae, saa at sige, et Surrogat for mit eget liv' (quoted in Garff 2000: 52) ('Thus I could wish to become an actor so that by putting myself in someone else's role I could obtain, so to speak, a surrogate for my own life', Garff 2005: 58) which is exactly the shift that Tido in 'Carnival' calls 'self-denial'. It is worth noting that 'Carnival' was intended for publication under the pseudonym – the mask – 'Nozdref's Cook' (Lasson 2008: 478),

which is a character from Gogol's *Мёртвые души* (1842) (*Dead Souls*), who according to Brundbjerg is a chef, who uses whatever is at hand to create highly unusual combinations, sometimes with a brilliant result and sometimes with a disastrous result (ibid. 111). He is a wild and unconventional *createur* who turns conventions upside down, just like Blixen does in 'Carnival' by inverting the gender roles and breaking the conventions for what (especially) women are allowed to discuss and articulate. Using the mask strategy both internally in 'Carnival' as composition strategy (masking the characters) *and* externally by using a pseudonym (masking the author), Blixen tries to distance herself and remove her individuality as author ('afdø') from the content and the characters, closely following the ideals outlined in Kierkegaard's critique of H.C. Andersen. In *Det umenneskelige* Heede elaborates over two pages on the important passage expressed by Tido. However, he does not make the final connection to the strategy of the artist that Blixen has borrowed from Kierkegaard, the idea of de-subjectivization. Heede does, though, arrive at the same destination, when he concludes the following about Blixen's oeuvre as such in his concluding chapter:

Subjektet fremstår i de blixenske tekster – ligesom seksualiteten, kønnet, kroppen og naturen – som et åbent spørgsmål, et problemfelt, et hul eller mangel, der provokerer ved sin tomhed. Det er denne 'anti-humanisme' eller bedre: anti-tropologi, der efter min mening rummer de mest provokerende, udfordrende og aktuelle potentialer i de blixenske diskurser (...) Utopien i alle tre diskurser (Blixen, Foucault and Butler, my comment) læser jeg ikke som en genopdagelse eller erobring af 'jeg'et', men derimod som en permanent flugt fra selv'et forstået som en kritik af den type individualiseringer, som det moderne samfunds uhyre stærke herredømmediskurser påtvinger subjekterne (...) Denne ikke-subjektivering eller med Foucaults ord: 'Menneskets død' (Foucault 1966) er ikke en morbid dystopi, men en vitalistisk åbning mod former for liv og begær hinsides de antropologiske cirkelslutninger (...) (Heede 2001: 247-248)

The subject in Blixen's texts emerges – just as as sexuality, gender, the body and nature do – as an open question, a problem area, a gap or a lack that provokes through its emptiness. It is this 'anti-humanism' or better: anti-tropology, which, I will argue, accounts for the most provoking, challenging and relevant potentials in the blixenesque discourses I read the Utopia in all three discourses (Blixen, Foucault and Butler, my comment) not as a rediscovery or conquest of the 'self', but instead as a permanent escape from the 'self', understood as a critic of the types of individualizations, which the master narratives of modern society forces upon the subjects (...) This de-subjectivization, or in the words of Foucault: 'the death of man' (Foucault 1966) is not a morbid dystopia, but a vitalistic opening towards other forms of life and desire beyond the anthropological *circulus vitiosus* (...) (my translation)

Blixen's answer to this rather utopian ideal is, in 'Carnival', the idea of the androgynous, dehumanized artist, who – in the limitless works of fiction – is able to escape 'individualization' and 'totalization of modern power structures'. The utopian position that Heede mentions is actually not as utopian as one initially would think, even though it is only a privilege of the few. Blixen – in the words of Polly – as an artist, eventually becomes 'two-dimensional', which means bodiless words in a book: 'I am tired of being three-dimensional, it seems to me very vulgar (Blixen 1979: 70). Or, in the words of Aitken, 'her assertion that in writing she died into her art, becoming 'a piece of printed matter,' was never more poignantly enacted than in these years (while writing *Babette's Feast*, my comment), as her body gradually withered to skeletal, wraithlike proportions' (ibid. 255). To make the final connection to Søren Kierkegaard, she becomes what the narrator in the closing scene of 'In Vino Veritas' claims to be: 'Men hvo er da jeg?.... Jeg er den rene Væren, og derfor mindre næsten end Intet. Jeg er den rene Væren, der er med alle vegne, men dog ikke bemærkelig' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('But who then am I? I am pure being and thus almost less than nothing. I am the pure being that is everywhere present but yet not noticeable', Kierkegaard 1988: 86) as a hovering spirit, as a bodiless 'body' of work 'everywhere present yet not noticeable' – as

the work of the great, influential and immortal artist. That position appears to be (the only?) one that can fulfil the demands of Heede's depersonalized and dehumanized utopia.

The Flapper of the 1920s

Er det at være 'la garçonne', som er eders virkelige ideal? I har jo længe været det. (Blixen 1985: 11, originally written 1923-1924)

Is your real ideal to be a tomboy? Well, you have been so for a long time. (Blixen 1987: 38)

'Carnival' is, however, much more than a mere reworking of 'In Vino Veritas' and meta-reflections on the artist and artistic strategies with Kierkegaard as the major source of inspiration. It is also a precise and profound depiction of the new, young metropolitan smart set of the 1920s and their 'mode of existence' (to use a Kierkegaardian term), comparable to the like of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. This is an aspect of the tale which has so far not had the attention by scholars it deserves.

'Carnival' takes place in 1925¹¹ and is in that regard unusual since it is the only fully-developed tale Blixen wrote that takes place in a clearly defined contemporary setting and environment (the smart set of 1920s Denmark). Again Karen Blixen uses Søren Kierkegaard as a starting point to unfold her observations with regard to gender – this time on a much more concrete, historical level. An allusion to Søren Kierkegaard on the first page in 'Carnival' is the small crack in the wall that opens up an extensive discussion of androgyny and gender:

The party consisted of, to take the ladies first: Watteau Pierrot, Arlecchino, the young Søren Kierkegaard – that brilliant, deep and desperate philosopher of the forties, a sort of macabre dandy of his day – and Camelia ... The rare grace of the young Søren Kierkegaard is really familiar to a great part of the highest civilized world, for it is a favorite subject with the young painters of our day. In her own country there was not

an exhibition in which it did not figure and she hangs in the National Gallery as a lady with a fan, and at the Glyptothek in that strange pale/green study: nymph and unicorn drinking at a forest pool. She also wrote what was considered very modern poetry, and it seems likely that in her case the spirit will turn out to be, contrary to what is presumably its normal fate, transient, and the flesh immortal. (Blixen 1979: 57)

The young Søren Kierkegaard is here described as a 'macabre dandy' with a 'rare grace' that the narrator states is 'really familiar to a great part of the highest civilized world', since it is 'a favorite subject of the painters of our day' (the year 1925) without 'an exhibition in which it did not figure'. The narrator then goes on to mention that Annelise, who is dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard' but is referred to by the female pronouns 'her' and 'she', is working as a nude model and her naked body now 'hangs in the National Gallery'. The 'rare grace' that Annelise's body has in common with the 'macabre dandy' of the 1840s and which is the 'favorite subject of the painters of our day' is the androgynous look of the 1920s flapper, where fashion for young women was short hair, flat breasts and slim hips (also known as the *garçonne*-look):

In Hollywood films of the 1920s, and in the short stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the flapper is a cigarette-smoking, dance-mad young female in her teens to early twenties.... She is the most iconic figure of American 'Roaring' Twenties; and the symbol of teenage emancipation.... In France the flapper image was first projected in the pages of a novel: Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* (published in 1922). The focus of the story is a 19-year-old flapper called Monique, who leaves home (after her fiancé has been unfaithful); cuts her hair short, dresses in men's clothes and pursues a series of lesbian affairs. The book was a bestseller (it sold over 750.000 copies in its first year of publication). (Fowler 2008: 59, 62)

The term flapper is mentioned directly in 'Carnival', when Tido

reflects upon his lover Annelise, the young Søren Kierkegaard: 'It had made an impression upon him that she should, at twenty-four, his own age, have it in her to think and behave like a *flapper* of fifteen' (Blixen 1979: 83, my italics). The term is also alluded to in other passages (ibid. 72, 73, 95) and the party is described by the narrator as a classical 'smart set' of the 1920s: 'They were all friends – four of them being very much in love with one another – *disillusioned, rich, and hungry*' (ibid. 67, my italics). Rosendaal, who is the only older participant in the supper party, is however highly critical of the new modern times and gender roles in flux, especially with regard to women and the new *garçonne*-look:

To my mind you young women of your appalling smart set, as a class, the only righteous people of our town, the only contemporaries of ours who make it their object to represent an idea.... 'Do we really manage to shock you, Rosie, by having no dimples in our derrières?' asked Camelia.... I can't imagine nothing more pathetic than you young women who have had to turn your faces all round from your décolletage, because there was nothing but the Desert of Gobi in front of them (ibid. 74, 73, 72)

As Blixen correctly observes, androgyny becomes a female ideal in the 1920s, and that is historically a new phenomenon, which she discusses primarily through Rosendaal in 'Carnival.' The bodily female ideal was suddenly to have 'no dimples in the derrière' and breasts as flat as 'the Desert of Gobi'. Women started to wear 'step-in panties' too and practice a bohemian life style: drinking, driving, smoking, going to nightclubs and having many lovers. In 'Carnival' Rosendaal interprets the women of the 1920s – the flappers – as 'the only contemporaries of ours who make it their object to *represent an idea*' (ibid. 74, my italics), even though they might not be aware of it themselves. This means that the obliteration of traditional female shapes (breasts and bottom) and the promotion of the androgynous look according to Rosendaal represents the idea of female emancipation understood as the idea that we should first and foremost be recognized as human

beings and only secondly as gender, which is a point of view Blixen also expressed repeatedly in her letters from Africa during the years she wrote 'Carnival' in Africa. For example, this is the view expressed in her letter to Mary Bess Westenholz from May 23, 1926, where she also writes that she is working on a couple of 'Marionetkomedier' and one of them is 'Carnival':

Er det i hvert Fald ikke at ønske, at under saadanne Forhold, hvor Mennesker mødes for at komme til Klarhed og bestemme over store Spørgsmaal, som angaar hele Menneskeheden, de kunde komme til at mødes som Mennesker og ikke, som før i Tiden, som først og fremmest Medlemmer af en Stamme eller et Lav eller, som nu, som Medlemmer af en Nation, et politisk Parti, *eller af det ene eller andet køn*' (Blixen 1978b: 43, my italics).

Isn't it at least desirable that under such circumstances where people meet to achieve certainty and decide on great matters regarding humanity that they could meet as human beings and not as in the past, first and foremost as member of a tribe or and association, or as now as members of a nation, political party or one gender or the other. (my translation)

The androgynous flapper of the 1920s is, in 'Carnival', interpreted as the physical manifestation of this ideal expressed in young Blixen's letters, even though it is not articulated by the flappers as a deliberate intention or goal, but here viewed as an expression of the collective un-conscious. This idea also becomes the composition strategy in 'Carnival', with its masks and gender inversions. The reader is obliged to approach the subject matter as ideas expressed by *human beings* detached from gender and convention. The form of 'Carnival' (genderlessness) is also the message, which is much more pronounced in 'Carnival' compared to other tales of Blixen dealing with gender.

As has been pointed out by many scholars over the years, most recently by Braad Thomsen and Stecher-Hansen, Blixen would later leave this radical view on the two genders expressed in 'Carnival', which we also find in the essay 'On Modern Marriage and Other Observations'

(written in the first part of the 1920s, but not published until 1977). She later developed a more traditional point of view on the two genders as being fundamentally and ontologically different (woman as 'being', man as 'doing') as she expressed in the essay 'En Båltale med 14 Aars Forsinkelse' (Radio talk, Jan. 11, 1953) ('Oration at a Bonfire Fourteen Years Late') (1979). It is worth noting that she in the early 1950s not only departs radically from her idea of the genderless human being that she promulgates in 'Carnival' and in her letters from the 1920s. In so doing, she also leaves behind the position Heede assigns her in the concluding chapter of *Det umenneskelige*, according to which gender and sexuality are an 'åbent spørgsmål' (open question) (Heede 2001: 247).

The Carnival of the Roaring Twenties

The 1920s break-up from traditional gender conventions exemplified by the androgynous look of the 1920s flapper also sparked one of the most radical sexual revolutions in modern history with regard to bi- and homosexuality. As Dag Heede rightly characterizes the set-up in 'Carnival': 'Fortællingens univers er præget af mulig hermafroditisme, transvestitisme og mandlig homoseksualitet, promiskuitet og anonym sex' (Heede 2001: 142) (The fictional world in the tale is characterized by possible hermaphroditism, transvestism and male homosexuality, promiscuity and anonymous sex, my translation). This set-up is also a precise image of the new frivolous and experimental approach of the 1920s to sexuality and gender, especially among the rich smart set and artists in Paris (Herzog 2011: 50), Berlin and in Kenya too (Braad Thomsen 2011: 73-75). In the 1920s there were two hundred and twenty-one lesbian bars in Berlin and the famous yearly spring carnival of the École des Beaux-Arts on the left bank of Paris culminated in public bi-sexual orgies after the semi-nude parade through the city had taken place, as can be seen in the TV Documentary: *Legendary Sin Cities: Paris, Berlin, Shanghai* (Canell and Remerowski: 2005). In the year 1925, in which the supper party in 'Carnival' is set, Karen Blixen stayed in Paris for the month of April before arriving in Denmark in early May. She wrote to her mother that: 'Da jeg har været saa daarlig klædt,

med Huller paa Skoene og Tøjet temmeligt i Laser ... har jeg bevæget mig mest på *venstre Seinebred*, som jeg synes har stor charme' (Blixen 1978b: 11, my italics) (As I have been looking so ill groomed, with holes in my shoes and my clothes more or less in rags ... I have kept mostly to the *left bank of the Seine*, which I always find so charming, Blixen 1981: 232, my italics). The left bank of the Seine or the 'Rive Gauche' was the part of the city where the artists and writers would hang out, drinking, living a bohemian lifestyle in 1925, when Blixen was visiting. Even though she mentions nothing about participating in the 'moveable feast' (to quote the title of Hemingway's posthumous novel about his years in Paris in the 1920s), her promenades took her through the openly bi-sexual, and 24/7-partying 'Rive Gauche' (Glick 2009: 63) which must have given her some inspiration for the way she elaborates on gender, flappers and androgyny in 'Carnival' (and not just from the debauched 'happy valley circle' in Kenya, which is commonly associated with the sexual under tones of the tale' (e.g. Braad Thomsen 2011: 73-75). Sexual liberation and homosexuality were closely connected to the carnival tradition in 1920s Paris, since the carnival created room for carnivalesque inversions such as gender-inversion; the carnival thus created sort of a legitimate backdrop for the bi- and homosexual escapades, and we see Blixen making that connection too in 'Carnival'. What has been overlooked so far in the Blixen scholarship is that 'Carnival' is also a very precise and very important analysis of a decade where things – especially gender roles – were turned upside down and old conventions challenged. Blixen had a very astute eye for her own time, which is important to emphasize. I will here argue that the gender trouble of her own time, the 1920s, is the major source of inspiration behind the gender inversions and the depiction of bi- and homosexuality we find not only in 'Carnival' but also in many of the *Seven Gothic Tales* (as has been treated in depth by Heede) even though the settings are removed back in time to the nineteenth century. We find Agnese in 'The Roads Around Pisa' from *Seven Gothic Tales* to be dressed as a young dandy: 'a young saint masquerading as a dandy' (Blixen 2002: 37) just like Annelise in 'Carnival'. We also detect the exact same thoughts with regard to man and woman as human beings rather than gender. In 'The Roads Around



Peter Klæstrup's portrait of Søren Kierkegaard from ca. 1845, Frederiksborgmuseet (The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Pisa' this ideal is also propagated by Augustus von Schimmelman, when he reflects upon his conversation with Agnese and the positive effect it has for the mode of their conversation that she is dressed in mens clothes (Blixen 2002: 23, 34).

The Dandy and the Flapper

The connection Blixen establishes between Kierkegaard and the new female flapper is that the flapper – both in physical appearance and in her independent lifestyle – looks and acts a lot like a dandy of the 1840s. The dandy emerged as a new male type in the late eighteenth century and came to be associated with a certain type of intellectual

or artist in the first part of the nineteenth century, with Lord Byron (1788-1824) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) as the most famous examples. According to Blixen we can also include Søren Kierkegaard ('a sort of macabre dandy'), who was the Copenhagen *flâneur* and free spirit of the day. Dandyism is also associated with a certain type of aristocratic individualism as defined by Barbey d'Aurevilly: 'the dandy does not work; he exists' (Blixen 1979: 264), and Baudelaire, for whom dandyism was a 'cult of self' characterized by 'first and foremost the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality' (Glick 2009: 27). These definitions fit very well with the young Søren Kierkegaard's burning desire to foster an image of personal originality for himself, with emphasis on artistic and individual expression, as I shall discuss in what follows.

Like the *garçonne* or flapper, the dandy too has an androgynous appearance expressed in the shape of his body. It was the dandies of Paris who began to wear the corset again, after it had fallen out of fashion around the time of the French revolution. It persisted through the 1840s (Steele 2001: 36-39). Especially in the period from around 1820 to 1835, a wasp-waisted figure (a small, nipped-in look to the waist) was desirable for men as well as women; this could be achieved by wearing a corset so that the frock coat or morning coat would give him the hourglass shape we normally associate with the female body. We see Søren Kierkegaard appear in that type of jacket on Peter Klæstrup's drawing (presumably from 1845), even though it is difficult to tell how much the drawing is a caricature¹². Søren Kierkegaard was also very conscious with regard to his hairstyle, which would follow the latest European fashion. In the small note 'Søren Kierkegaard som dandy' (Søren Kierkegaard as a Dandy) Arild Christensen calls attention to a portrait of the young Søren Kierkegaard called *Et Portrait af Søren Kierkegaard*, which was published after his death by Dr. Ahnfeldt (Magnussen 1942: 191). The hairstyle of the young Søren Kierkegaard was mistakenly thought to be just rumpled by Kierkegaard scholar Rikard Magnussen, even though it is in fact following the latest Paris fashion called 'en broussailles' (in brush) according to Christensen (Christensen 1953: 22). The dandy was often financially independent, too, which allowed him to live a certain type of connoisseur life-style

with extravagant clothing, fine wine and lavish dining. In just one year in 1836 Søren Kierkegaard managed to spend 1262 rigsdaler on books, silk scarves, jackets, fine wine, tobacco and theatre tickets, a sum which, according to Garff, was more than the yearly salary of a university professor at that time.¹³ Because of his feminine traits and intellectual lifestyle, the dandy is commonly associated with ambiguous sexuality, even though he could also be a heterosexual womanizer.¹⁴

Karen Blixen is here again employing the Kierkegaardian 'chinesisk Æskespil' ('Chinese puzzle') to rework the dandy as a character, starting with the connection to the biographical Kierkegaard, via Kierkegaard's character Johannes the Seducer, to her own fictional character Annelise, who is dressed 'as a dandy of the forties' (Blixen 1979: 83) but who, in the 1920s setting of the tale, at the same time looks like a lesbian dandy of the day from the 'Rive Gauche'. Both the flapper and the dandy represent, I want to argue, the androgyny that Blixen connects with the idea (and ideal) of the *human being*, who has integrated traits from both genders into his or her personality and who is not constrained by traditional gender roles and conventions. She lets these two types, the flapper and the dandy, who are separated by almost a century, meld together in the character Annelise in 'Carnival'.

Annelise the Seducer

If we bear in mind the affinities between the figures of the dandy and the flapper, we begin to see that Annelise can be regarded as Blixen's version of Johannes the Seducer, but a much more radical version. Dressing like a dandy of the 1840s, she in fact also looks like the new *lesbian dandy* type of the 1920s, clad in nineteenth-century male clothing and a monocle. This corresponds to contemporary depictions of similar figures such as the portrait photo of Radclyffe Hall from 1928, and the painting of *Una, Lady Troubridge* from 1924 by Romaine Brooks (Glick 2009: 65-66). Annelise is writing modern poetry too, like Gertrude Stein or Radclyffe Hall. She has, the text tells us, developed her own radical view on Søren Kierkegaard's work 'The Seducer's Diary':

But she had her own views upon the book, and had maintained, and lectured to him upon, the idea that the triumph of Johannes is not complete as long as he keeps Cordelia in the dark as to his prospects of leaving her forever at daybreak, and that the name of seducer is falsely assumed where you are in any way deceiving your partner. More honest than Kierkegaard's seducer, she has presented her problem straight to him, this night of love was *à prendre ou à laisser*. This ultimatum she had delivered only a few days ago, now *her costume as a dandy of the forties* brought it home to him (Blixen 1979: 82-83, my italics)

With both Annelise and Tido having this demonic knowledge, their night will become much more intense and desperate, and the following departure more tragic and painful (the idea is carried out in 'The Old Chevalier' from *Seven Gothic Tales*). A very sophisticated and macabre *pas de deux* and, according to Annelise, utterly more poetic than the final scene in 'The Seducer's Diary', where Cordelia is taken by surprise by Johannes' deceit the following morning and Johannes himself returns home in content triumph. Here again we find an inversion compared to Kierkegaard, since we in 'Carnival' find a woman in the role as the seducer and propagator of this rather masochistic suggestion, completely transgressing the rules for what women – at least before the big city flapper movement of the 1920s – were normally able to articulate. But Blixen also wants to invest the text with a bit of gender equality here, since she was displeased with the one-sided way Cordelia was depicted in 'The Seducer's Diary'. This she expresses in a letter to Aage Henriksen, while she was working on her second Kierkegaard-tale *Ehrengard* during the 1950s: 'hvis hun ikke er et Menneske, da er han hellerikke noget Menneske, hvis hun ikke er en Heltinde i en Historie, da er han hellerikke nogen Helt' (letter to Aage Henriksen, October 14, 1954 in Blixen 1996a: 251) (if she is not a human being then he is not a human being either, if she is not a heroine in a story, neither is he a hero, my translation). She had even planned a third tale with the working title 'Cornelia', (similar to the name of the sister of Søren Kierkegaard's fiancée, Regine Olsen). This we find listed among the names of the tales that would later become

Winter's Tales (1942) in several books in her library, e.g. inside the copy of Georg Brandes *Hovedstrømninger* but also in a copy of H.C. Andersens's *Eventyr og Historier* (Bondesson 1982: 300, 133).

Annelise is living entirely poetically, and she is of course Blixen's female version of Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer; but much more radical than Kierkegaard's version. Whereas Johannes still operates within the frame of 1840s society, trying not to stick out too much, constantly being in control of the situation and meticulously aware of not harming himself, Annelise doesn't take such petty precautions: 'She was so fresh. Hard too, and cold' (Blixen 1979: 82). She does not care what happens to her in a physical sense, good or bad, as long it has aesthetic and poetic value, be it the macabre love affair with Tido, or enrolling in a brothel in Singapore. But at the same time she also represents another meta-narrative connection to 'In Vino Veritas' that concerns the status of women in the nineteenth century and what the flappers of the 1920s wanted to break away from. In this passage we find Annelise's answer to Julius, after he has asked her to participate in a lottery that will make one of them extremely rich and the rest of the partygoers penniless for a whole year:

Are you coming in, Annelise?' asked Julius. 'Yes', she said. 'If you do not win the prize', he said, 'you will have to go into a brothel, with my Pegasus – or, otherwise, give up having your poems published. Let us see now how much of an idealist you are'. 'Yes, you will see that, Julius', said she, 'I shall go into a brothel. At Singapore. I have read of them there'. (Blixen 1979: 93)

This is an echo of Victor Eremita's view on the 1840s fate of women:

Jeg for mit Vedkommende, hvis jeg var Qvinde, vilde hellere være det i Orienten, hvor jeg var Slavinde; thi at være Slavinde, hverken mere eller mindre, er dog altid Noget i Sammenligning med at være hu hei og ingen Ting.... Var jeg Qvinde, jeg vilde heller sælges af min Fader til den høist Bydende som i Orienten, thi en Handel er der dog Mening i. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*)

For my part, if I were a woman, I would rather be one in the Orient, where I would be a slave, for to be a slave – either more nor less – is still always something compared with being ‘hurrah’ and ‘nothing.’... If I were a woman, I would prefer being sold by my father to the highest bidder, as in the Orient, for a business transaction nevertheless does have meaning. (Kierkegaard 1988: 56, 58)

Annelise’s behaviour can thus also be regarded as a meta-narrative comment on Kierkegaard’s ‘In Vino Veritas’ and a radical showdown with the traditional romantic notion of woman as expressed by Victor Eremita, where woman is ‘hurrah’ and ‘nothing’. Annelise displays a radical will to escape this rigid gender role and create meaning through poetic fate and destiny. The point must be that the radical responses of the 1920s to conventional gender roles grew out of the fact that radical responses happen when society and gender roles have hardened so much that a large hammer – a radical reaction – is needed to break out of it. Aside from topping Kierkegaard by creating an even colder and harder, reflected (female) seducer than Kierkegaard’s own Johannes, Annelise in ‘Carnival’ is also Blixen’s version of the embodiment of such a radical response to historical gender norms.

The Aesthetics of the Day

In ‘Carnival’ it is said about Charles that his appearance is ‘fresh and *bored*’ (Blixen 1979: 69, my italics). Here we find another Kierkegaard allusion, this time to the short, witty and ironic text ‘Vexel-Driften’ (‘Rotation of Crops’) from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel (Either/Or, Part I)*. Here the narrator states that ‘De, der kjede Andre, ere Plebs, Hoben, Menneskets uendelige Slæng i Almindelighed; de, der kjede sig selv, ere de Udvalgte, Adelen’ (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller, Første Deel*) (‘Those who bore others are the plebeians, the crowd, the endless train of humanity in general; those who bore themselves are the chosen ones, the nobility’, Kierkegaard 1988: 288), and ‘Kjedsommelighed hviler paa det Intet, der slynger sig gennem Tilværelsen, dens Svimmelhed

er som den, der fremkommer ved at skue ned i en uendelig Afgrund, uendelig' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* ('Boredom rests upon the nothing that interlaces existence; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from looking down into a bottomless abyss ... All who are bored cry out for change', Kierkegaard 1988: 291). These two sentences form together a very precise description of the young smart set in 'Carnival' and their boredom and disillusion, grown out of immense wealth. As the narrator states with regard to Charlie: 'after all it did not really matter whether you won or lost in the poker of life' (Blixen 1979: 89). The young, rich smart set, who do not need to fight for their existence through hard work like the 'crowd', 'the endless train of humanity', suffer from lack of meaning and direction in their lives, since they – through their privileged position – find themselves confronted with 'the nothing that interlaces existence', 'the bottomless abyss'. Their desperate 'cry of change' is the lottery, where seven of them will be forced to make a carnivalesque inversion of their real lives: 'We are eight people here all of us ... well off. Let us make a fund of all we have in the world, and draw lots for it. The winner will keep it for a year (ibid. 88) ... It will make 'one of us very rich, and the others poor – truly poor, you understand, penniless'. (ibid. 104)

The young smart set embody the aesthetics of the day, just as the brethren-ship of dandies do in Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas': the Young Man, Constantin Constantius, Victor Eremita, Johannes the Seducer and the Fashion Designer (Bertung 1987: 45). Both groups of aesthetics are however each confronted with another point of view towards the end of each narrative. In the final scene of 'In Vino Veritas' the dandies come across Judge Wilhelm after they have demolished and left the lavish banquet. Here they overhear a conversation between Judge Wilhelm (who is the author of B's papers in *Either/Or part II*) and his wife. Contrary to the gang of dandies, Wilhelm has become a married man and entered the sphere of the ethical. In 'Carnival' the young rich banquet participants – the smart set of the 1920s – are also confronted with a person alien to their environment and ways of thinking. Zamor¹⁵ represents – like the Judge in 'In Vino Veritas' – actuality and the ethical as opposed to the rich flappers, who view life only from an aesthetic point of view. Contrary to the young smart set,

Zamor is a working class man, who, at the time he enters the supper party, has committed a crime. He thinks he has killed his employer Madame Rubinstein and now threatens the young smart set with a gun to get five hundred kroner, so he can escape imprisonment. Money, life and death do not seem to really matter for the young smart set, except insofar as they have poetic and entertainment value. As Zamor observes, after having pulled the gun on them: 'It might be either a joke of the carnival, or again a very serious situation. What was their view...*Good God in heaven these people do not know the difference between the two things*' (Blixen 1979: 106-107, my italics).

Polly and the Shadow

In the final scene Polly reproaches herself for having manipulated and seduced Zamor to come in with them on the lottery: 'do you not understand, any of you, that I am going to make up for what I have done to Zamor? That was his virginity: that he would be like any of us. I made him sell his soul for a blank in the lottery... I am giving it a year to make good its loss to Zamor' (ibid. 120). She has acted like the character A from *Either/Or*, Part I. This character represents the aesthetic point of view, and is accused by Judge Wilhelm in the piece 'Ligevægten mellem det Æsthetiske og Ethiske i Personlighedens Udarbejdelse':

Du derimod, Du lever virkelig af Rov. Du lister Dig ubemærket paa Folk, stjæler deres lykkelige Øieblik, deres skønneste Øieblik fra dem, stikker dette Skyggebillede i Din Lomme, som den lange Mand i Schlemil og tager det frem, naar Du ønsker det. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel*)

You, however, actually live by plundering; unnoticed, you creep up on people, steal from them their happy moment, their most beautiful moment, stick this shadow picture in your pocket as the tall man did in *Schlemihl* and take it out whenever you wish. (Kierkegaard 1987c: 10)

Polly's solution to this recognition of herself being a manipulator

and seducer with no conscience is the idea of employing Zamor as her 'artificial shadow', her 'artificial conscience' which she takes out of her pocket whenever she wants, but here she – from the point of view of Judge Wilhelm – makes another mistake:

Seer man det Ethiske udenfor Personligheden og i et udvortes Forhold til denne, saa har man opgivet Alt, saa har man fortvivlet.... Naar man derfor stundom seer Mennesker med en vis redelig Iver slide og slæbe for at realisere det Ethiske, der som en Skygge bestandig flygter, saasnart de gribe efter den, saa er det baade comisk og tragisk. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel*)

If the ethical is regarded as outside the personality and in an external relation to it, then one has given up everything, then one has despaired.... That is why it is both comic and tragic to see at times people with a kind of honest zeal working their fingers to the bone in order to carry out the ethical, which like a shadow continually evades them as soon as they try to grasp it (Kierkegaard 1987c: 255)

Polly realizes in the final scene that she has no conscience of her own. She sees the ethical (conscience) as something outside her own personality and tries to make a comical short cut by employing Zamor as her 'artificial conscience'. The point is of course that the ethical cannot be substituted by shadow-images such as religion, ideology or in this case a person from another social class, but must be developed in the individual from the inside and out. With that in mind Polly does appear both comic and tragic in the final scene, even though the tale does end on a high note: 'Everything is infinite, and foolery as well', which is a *bon mot* that eventually would come to characterize the sophisticated comical under-current in Blixen's production in the many years to come.

Søren Kierkegaard as a Macabre Dandy

Kierkegaard was neither the womanizer-dandy of his day as a Valmont, Don Giovanni or his own Johannes the Seducer, nor was he a queer dandy like Lord Byron or Oscar Wilde.¹⁶ According to Blixen he was the virgin dandy, the non-sexual artist, tortured by the over-activity of his brain that had forever created an irreparable gap between his mind and his body that prevented him from having any sexual relations throughout his life. The idea of the artist as a sort of third gender is a recurring motive in Blixen's production. In 'Carnival' we find the artist Rosendaal to be dressed as an old eunuch; I have argued elsewhere that in *Ehrengard* the dandy artist, J. W. Cazotte, is in fact a forty-five-year-old virgin (Bunch in Rosendal & Sørensen, n.p.), which is why he blushes in the final scene. If we juxtapose Kierkegaard's insatiable desire and prolific productivity with his life in celibacy and his tiny, thin body – which in Georg Brandes' description below almost resembles a walking skeleton – we do see where Blixen gets the image of him as 'a sort of macabre dandy of his day':

En anden Dag kunde man paa Østergade ved Middagstid mellem 2 og 4 i Sværmen følge den spinkle og tynde Skikkelse med det ludende Hoved, med Paraplyen under Armen.... Saaledes saa sært og ensformigt, tog Ydersiden sig ud af et af de indvortes mest bevægede Liv, der nogensinde er ført i Danmark. (Brandes1967: 10-11)

With regard to the significance of the body in 'Carnival' it is interesting to note what the narrator states about Annelise's body on the opening page: 'She also wrote what was considered very modern poetry, and it seems likely that in her case the spirit will turn out to be, contrary to what is presumably its normal fate, transient, and *the flesh immortal*' (because of her body in the 'immortal' paintings, 58, my italics). Again we can regard Blixen's physical description of Søren Kierkegaard (an androgynous dandy) as a meta-narrative comment on gender where she correctly observes how women, her example being Annelise, are often remembered first and foremost for their bodies and looks

(e.g. the flapper of the 1920s as the prime example) rather than their spiritual or artistic achievements, which is normally the contrary with regard to men. By alluding to Kierkegaard's bodily appearance Blixen injects gender balance into the text, so the flapper and the dandy, four women and four men, Annelise and Johannes the Seducer get a chance to meet under equal conditions in Blixen's 'Carnival.'

Conclusion

Blixen, I will argue, ultimately sees androgyny as the representation of trans-gender 'humanism' but also associates it with spirituality and the artist. The artist is, for Blixen, spiritually half man and half woman (the physical manifestations being the flapper and the dandy), but like Rosendaal and Kierkegaard a eunuch with regard to physical sexuality, and thus a sort of non-gender. The most striking picture of Karen Blixen deliberately playing with the androgynous dandy look is the picture released after the publication of *Seven Gothic Tales* (Heede 2001, cover), when it was revealed that the author, Isak Dinesen, was in fact the woman Karen Blixen. Here we find her in an extremely skinny condition, posing in a long, white dress, with her hair stroked back, white powder on her face and black painted eyebrows. Her face looks like a lesbian dandy from the 1920s, but her body is draped in a traditional white, feminine bridal dress and she appears as a sort of *macabre* bridal dandy entering into a marriage with *art*. Here the fiction of 'Carnival' became reality for Karen Blixen as has also been pointed out by Aitken: 'merging the body of her fiction with the fiction of her body, she made herself one of the preeminent figures of her own literary corpus....explicitly cast herself as an extravagant embodiment of the 'carnival' spirit' (Aitken 1990: 256). Moreover, the themes of gender and homosexuality and androgyny that we find in 'Carnival' – the *Zeitgeist* of the 1920s – would also become *the* major themes of *Seven Gothic Tales*, but removed back in time to a comfortable distance from the author's private and painful experiences with the gender trouble of the 1920s.

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Endnotes

¹ In a letter to Karen Blixen, October 7. 1932, Thomas Dinesen mentions that he has read *Carnival* (Blixen 1996a: 97). In capsule 137 in the Blixen Archive in the Royal Library in Copenhagen we find a brown envelope with black pen and Karen Blixen's handwriting, saying: 'Carnival 3.4. 1933. Thomas Dinesen Vænget, Hillerød'. This document, together with a new manuscript typed partly in blue (this manuscript is listed as a Xerox-copy in the Karen Blixen archive register: <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/692/dan/16/>, retrieved Jan 10. 2012) based on two older merged manuscripts and a fragment, shows that she re-worked the tale upon her return to Denmark probably more than once, even though the overall idea, themes and characters including 'the young Søren Kierkegaard' are already fully developed in the first manuscripts from Africa. The title 'Carnival', a list of the characters and two short outlines are to be found in a household account book from 1926 (Karen Blixen online archive register: <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/692/dan/9>, retrieved Jan 10. 2012). The changes she made in the latest, blue-print manuscript (probably from April 1933) appear to be only minor compared to the older manuscripts.

² For a more thorough description of the genesis of 'Carnival' and how the tale relates to the letters Blixen wrote primarily 1923-1926, her relationship to Denys Finch-Hatton and the ideas about gender that would later become the essay: 'On Modern Marriage and other observations' (1977), see: Braad Thomsen 2011: 67-101, Thurman 1983: 275-281, Wivel 1987: 78-86 and Lassen 2008: 478.

³ The English titles are all from *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press. All Danish Titles are referring to the SKS online edition of Søren Kierkegaard's Collected Works: www.sks.dk

⁴ Georg Brandes was young Karen Blixen's great idol. In 1904, when Brandes was ill in hospital, she sent him flowers and a card expressing her admiration for his work. Brandes upon his recovery later turned up at Rungstedlund to thank her personally, but her mother told him that Karen was not home. When Brandes had left Karen was corrected and scolded for having contacted this considerably older man and great seducer of the day (Thurman 1983: 95).

⁵ In a letter to Thomas Dinesen shortly after returning back to Kenya, Blixen frivolously calls Brandes 'gamle Georg' (old Georg) and includes a letter to him, which she asks Thomas Dinesen to forward for her. Three months after in a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz she mentions that she: 'var ude i Somalibyen for at se at finde en eller anden Ting at sende gamle G.B., som jeg tænker paa med stor Venlighed; jeg er Dig meget taknemmelig for, at Du hjalp mig til at træffe ham' (Blixen 1978b: 19, 40) (I was out in the Somali village to look for something to send to old G.B., whom I thinking of with great kindness; I am very

grateful that you helped me meet him, my translation). It definitely seems that their meetings back in Denmark turned out well and that they kept a warm and friendly connection upon Blixen's return to Africa. Blixen never got a second chance to meet Brandes since he died already in Februar 1927, just sixteen months after Blixen met him for the first time.

⁶ At Karen Blixen's library in Rungstedlund we find the 1865 edition of Søren Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller*. It had belonged to her father (owner signature 'Wilhelm Dinesen' with pencil in volume I inside on the cover) (Bondesson 1982: 179).

⁷ 'Jeg skriver paa et Par andre Marionetkomedier,- Holstein vilde jeg gerne have tre for at udgive dem som Bog' (in a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz, 23 May 1926, Blixen 1978b: 41) (I am writing on a couple of other Marionette Comedies,- Holstein wanted to have three to publish as a book, my translation).

⁸ 'idet den ene Forfatter kommer til at ligge inden i den anden som Æsker i et chinesisksk Æskespil' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten Eller. Første Deel*): ('since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle', Kierkegaard 1987d: 9).

⁹ Since 'Carnival' is originally written in English, I only quote the English version without the Danish translation.

¹⁰ A Domino is a costume consisting of a hooded robe worn with an eye mask at a masquerade.

¹¹ Originally the year was 1927, but it was erased with white eraser ink and substituted with the year 1925.

¹² Peter Kæstrup's drawing of Søren Kierkegaard, presumably from 1845, can be found online here: <http://www.kb.dk/en/nb/tema/webudstillinger/sk-mss/sk-portraetter/klastrup.html>, retrieved Dec. 20. 2012.

¹³ Over the next seventeen years Søren Kierkegaard spent his entire inheritance of 31,335 rigsdaler according to Garff, which – if we take into consideration that a professorial salary at that time was less than 1200 rigsdaler – today would be the equivalent of twelve million kroner or well over one million pounds sterling (rough estimate) on fine dining, first growth Bordeaux wines, books, bespoke clothing and personal servants. In 'Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed' (published by his brother posthumously in 1859), Kierkegaard however claims that his dandy-like lifestyle, while writing *Either/Or*, was a deliberate attempt to fool the inhabitants of Copenhagen into believing that he was just an indolent and decadent bachelor, so that they would not guess him to be the author of *Either/Or*. But as we can see from the account above, Kierkegaard did not change his life-style significantly after he was discovered to be the author and his personality, appearance and life-style do fit perfectly with the eighteenth-century notion of the dandy we have today, whether it for some time was a primarily a mask a not.

¹⁴ 'For Beau Brummel and the Regency dandies of the early nineteenth century, for example, there was not a clear-cut association of effeminate dandyism and same-sex desire. But, as Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen have convincingly argued, after Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895, the effeminate dandy was linked to the homosexual in public imagination' (Glick 2009: 7)

¹⁵ 'Good evening', said Pierrot, 'you are very welcome. I know who you are.'

You are Zamor, Madame du Barry's Negro page. I have seen you in a picture of a supper party, in Paris'. The painting Mimi is referring to is called *Feast given by Madame du Barry (1743-93) for Louis XV on 2nd September 1771 at the inauguration of the Pavillon at Louveciennes*, by Jean Michel Moreau the Younger, which Karen Blixen probably saw at the Louvre during her visit in April 1925.

¹⁶ Even though queerness is indicated, since Annelise 'lisps' repeatedly, which could be interpreted as a gay-lisp': 'Oh Dear Rosie 'lisped' Søren Kierkegaard' and: 'Young Søren Kierkegaard said in her low voice, with its slight lisp which still managed to catch, as in a vice, the whole being of Tido on the other side of the table' (Blixen 1979: 76, 73). It is difficult to know, but at least it does enhance the androgynous appearance and add to the gender confusion.

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“Carnival”: Theoretical and Methodical Reflections

The theoretical approach I use in the article with regard to “Carnival” and Kierkegaard falls within the discourse of cultural studies, when I analyze the gender roles in flux and the emergence of the female dandy of the 1920s and the male dandy in the first part of the 19th century, to which the narrative claims that the young Søren Kierkegaard also belongs to. The method with regard to the relation between Blixen’s narrative and Kierkegaard’s work is comparative and pragmatic. This way of looking at Blixen’s “Carnival” from a perspective on gender that is rooted in specific historical time periods, where gender roles were in change (particular in the 1920s), is another new historical way of approaching the text compared to Susan Hardy Aiken and Dag Heede’s post-structuralist approaches where the starting points are *gender theory*, rather than *gender history*. To me Aiken and Heede’s approach in each their own way generates an incorrect image of Blixen as a writer who turns gender and sexuality upside down to a degree so that gender is only a construction, completely plastic and always in flux. When looking closer at the gender inversions in “Carnival” caused by the costumes that the characters are wearing and their sexual orientation, we find that they all, even though homosexuality is indicated, have perfectly normal heterosexual relationships (except from the nonsexual artist Rosendaal): Mimi is married to Julius, Annelise and Tido are lovers (so are their former partners, they have swapped) and Polly is in love with Charlie (Mimi’s former lover). So even though the text is flirting with the homosexual revolution of the 1920s, it is only on the surface of the narratives as well as on the surface of characters: their costumes. As I also argue in the article, the androgynous and non-sexual is connected specifically to the artist. It is not seen as a general condition for human kind. That means that gender is an open concept that has just been constructed socially (which is what Heede claims). On the contrary, Blixen sees the two genders as powerful agents that both create mutual inspiration (but, gender, admittedly also at times as something that define and confine the female protagonists in a restricting and painful way), which in the end, is what changes and develops the world (see the chapter: “Woman as God(dess) of Man”). That said, she does, however, suggest that the stereotypical (in most of her tales 19th century) way of looking at the two genders is way too rigid, and that things are in fact sometimes

completely opposite of what we think with regard to our notion of the two genders in general. This transgresses *the way we think about gender, but not gender as such*.

“Carnival”: Additional observations

As I also point out in the article that it seems no coincidence that Blixen upon her stay in Denmark in 1925 and after her conversations with Georg Brandes, started working on her writing with much more focus and determination. It also seems no coincidence that her stay in Denmark fueled her interest in Kierkegaard; leading up to what eventually became the tale “Carnival.” It, however, still seems to be a common notion within the Blixen scholarship that Blixen’s effort to promote her writing during her stay in Denmark in 1925 did not bear any fruit (for example Ganzberg and Greene-Ganzberg 1993, 124 and others), but as we understand from the previous chapter about *Sandhedens Hævn* and from the article chapter about “Carnival” this was not the case. It was indeed a big help that Blixen finally got to meet Georg Brandes and managed to pass on *Sandhedens Hævn* to *Tilskueren*, so that this play that she had been working on for more than twenty years finally got published in May 1926 nineteen years after her debut with “Pløjeren” in 1907. Blixen even got the editor Ludvig Holstein interested in two or three more marionette comedies to publish in a separate book (maybe together with *Sandhedens Hævn*?) as she mentions in a letter to Moster Bess in May 1926: “skriver paa et Par andre Marionetkomedier – Holstein vilde gerne have tre for at udgive dem som Bog” (Blixen 1978b, 41). Holstein even wrote her a letter dated November 19th 1925 where he encouraged her to also write something about Africa: ““De bør gøre Alvor af at skrive noget fra Afrika om Dyr og Mennesker. Hvad vi ved om dem, hvad de tænker og føler?” (Kjældgaard 2007, 424). Based on this information, the chapter about *Sandhedens Hævn* and the article about “Carnival,” it seems safe to conclude that the years 1925-1926 *did mark a turning point* in Blixen’s artistic career, even though the public breakthrough did not come until 1934.

Annelise and Kierkegaard’s “det unge Menneske”

Since the publication of the article about “Carnival,” new connections and allusions to Kierkegaard’s works have been discovered, which I will present and elaborate on in the

following chapters. I will start with an allusion to Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*, which is a work I do not mention in the article:

"Come," said Julius, "I will play you a tune upon a tin trumpet. You all know that we would blow in the air, sun, moon, and all the starry legions to give our sweethearts a diverting show, but you also know that we cannot. We must blow what we can, and give them such a show as is possible to us with the instruments we have got. Exiled from the dark, according to Rosie, and shut out from the pit, I will honestly try to take as high a note as the scale will allow me." "We do not want a high note," said Pierrot, "you are all mistaken when you think that we love cocks – we love nightingales. *We want a melody, something that has got some sense in it, and repeats itself, and will go on.* Alas, that you cannot play us." (Dinesen 1979, 87, author's italics)⁶²

This quote is referring to the passage in *Gjentagelsen* where Constantin Constantius, hails "Posthornet" as the epitome of his idea that there is no repetition, which is what he has just concluded after his disappointing trip to Berlin:

Leve Posthornet! det er mit Instrument, af mange Grunde og fornemmelig af den, at man aldrig med Sikkerhed kan aflukke dette Instrument den samme Tone; thi der ligger en uendelig Muelighed i et Posthorn, og den, der sætter det for sin Mund og nedlægger sin Viisdom i det, han skal aldrig gjøre sig skyldig i en Gjentagelse, og den, der istedetfor Svar rækker sin Ven et Posthorn til behagelig Afbenyttelse, han siger Intet, men forklarer Alt. Priset være Posthornet! Det er mit Symbol. Som de gamle Asketer satte et Dødningehoved paa Bordet, hvis Beskuelse var deres Livsbetragtning, saaledes skal Posthornet paa mit Bord altid minde mig om, hvad Livets Betydning er. (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag.)

As we see from the juxtapositions of the quotes, Mimi disagrees with Julius (and Constantin). She wants the opposite in life, she, as a woman ("we"), wants repetition: "We want a melody, something that has got some sense in it, and repeats itself, and will go on. Alas that you cannot play us" (Dinesen 1979, 87). Here Mimi repeats another exalted conclusion about life and repetition put forward by Constantin in the opening pages of *Gjentagelsen* before his disillusioned travel to Berlin:

Men den, der ikke fatter, at Livet er en Gjentagelse, og at dette er Livets Skjønhed, han har dømt sig selv og fortjener ikke bedre end, hvad der og vil hænde ham, at omkomme; thi Haabet er en vinkende Frugt, der ikke mætter, Erindringen er en kummerlig Tærepænge, der ikke mætter; men Gjentagelsen er det daglige Brød, der mætter med Velsignelse. (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag.)

⁶² The passage with the nightingale and the melody that repeats itself is also an allusion to H.C. Andersen's fairy-tale "Nattergalen," (1844) but first and foremostly to Denys Finch-Hatton, whom the character Julius is modeled after, and his inability to provide Karen Blixen with a melody that repeats itself and goes on and on as a metaphor for marriage and a stable life together at the farm which was Karen Blixen's wish at the time.

Mimi's view on life is the opposite of the rest of the group of young aesthetes, who, as Constantin Constantius is, are only interested in taking the highest note possible so that life can continue to fascinate, allure and be "interesting" to use a Kierkegaardian term. In hindsight it also seems no coincidence that Blixen chose to name Annelise's character "the young Soren Kierkegaard," when recalling Kierkegaard's character "det unge Menneske" ("the young man") from *Gjentagelsen* and "In vino veritas." "Det unge Menneske" and Annelise have the androgynous in common: He is an effeminate young man and she is a very masculine young woman dressed as a male dandy of the 1840s. Here, however, the similarities stop since Annelise, in all regards, is a radical reversal of Kierkegaard's character. Annelise has already been married ("det unge Menneske" refuses marriage), didn't care much for it, got a divorce and instead lives her life as an independent, full-blooded poet and aesthete, who does not care at all for the ethical or the religious. She does not suffer from bad conscience and has no moral pangs with regard to her new life style. She is an idealist in the sense that she is fully dedicated to the idea of living materialistically-poetically no matter the costs: "Let us see now how much of an idealist you are." "Yes, you will see that Julius," said she, "I shall go into a brothel. At Singapore. I have read of them there" (Dinesen 1979, 93). Annelise is only interested in the erotic as long as it is placed in the realm of the materialistic-aesthetic and has poetic value, even if that means a brothel in Singapore or meeting and departing with her lover Tido in a masochistic, one-night stand that she herself has suggested to him. She is Blixen's radical materialistic-aesthetic, female, bodily version of "det unge Menneske," which will have nothing to do with marriage or the ethical:

for she would walk out of the arms of Casanova as fresh as a lilly, with a little ironical smile, were not other forces brought into play. Very loose and casual in most of her modes of living she was, with other young women of her own age, as disciplined as a Prussian soldier in regard to her imagination. She might want an orgy, but a sacred orgy, according to rites as ceremonial as the king of Spain's coronation, and she would turn in disgust from anything which could be had cheaper. (Dinesen 1979, 84)

Blixen here suggests that a young woman can be ruthless in her determination when it comes to sexual fantasies and bodily pleasures in a way Kierkegaard was never able to understand, which, to give him credit, might also have been a bit more difficult in the

1840s. Blixen experienced the frivolous 1920s that marked a sexual revolution on a scale (including openly bi- and homosexual relationships—there were 220 Lesbian bars in Berlin, see Bunch 2011, 91) that must have been impossible to imagine from a 1840s point of view, even from the point of view of the turn of the century just twenty years before. But the 1920s did definitely reveal something about the suppressed nature of women as sexual beings that lies miles away from the image of Madonna that the speakers of “In vino veritas” propagate and the idea put forward by Virgilius Hafniensis in Kierkegaard’s *Begrebet Angest*; that woman is more anxious than man, because she is more sensual: ”Dog forinden vi gaae over til dette, vil jeg først lidt nærmere oplyse den Sætning, at Qvinden er mere sandselig end Manden og mere angst” (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.). Annelise, and the other women of the 1920s smart set (except from maybe Mimi) do not show any signs of “Angest” even though both Fritze and Annelise are very “sandselige.” They have had multiple lovers and are not the least afraid of engaging in obligation-free sexual relationships. Rosendaal also describes this characteristic of female sexuality in a passage that glitters with irony: “If women were as intemperate in regard to food as they are sexually, a supper party would become entirely repulsive” (Dinesen 1979, 72). The only anxious character in that regard seems to be a man, namely Kierkegaard’s “det unge Menneske” from *Gjentagelsen*, who is haunted by anxiety, a bad conscience and feelings of guilt towards the girl he is in love with and who rejoices when she finally marries another man. This also seems to be an important point that Blixen wants to communicate with her character Annelise dressed as “the young Søren Kierkegaard.”

The Shadow as Conscience and Guilt

When Constantin in *Gjentagelsen* is visiting the Königsberg Theater in Berlin he is thinking about young people’s desire for the theater and for acting. He describes the dynamic using the image of the shadow:

Der er vel intet ungt Menneske med nogen Phantasi, uden at han engang har følt sig fængslet af Theatrets Trylleri og ønsket selv at være revet med ind i hiin kunstige Virkelighed, for som en Dobbeltgænger at see og høre sig selv, at adsplitte sig selv i sin al-mulige Forskjellighed fra sig selv og dog saaledes, at enhver Forskjellighed igjen er Een selv. Det er naturligviis I en meget ung Alder, at en saadan Lyst ytrer sig. Kun Phantasien er vaagnet til sin Drøm om Personligheden, alt Andet sover endnu trygt. I en saadan Phantasies Selvanskuelse er

Individet ikke en virkelig Skikkelse, men en Skygge, eller rettere, den virkelige Skikkelse er usynlig tilstede, og nøies derfor ikke med at kaste een Skygge, *men individet har en Mangfoldighed af Skygger, der alle ligne ham, og som momentviis ere ligeberettigede til at være ham selv.* (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag., author's italics)

In “Carnival” Mimi propagates the opposite, here articulated by her husband Julius:

“Are you coming in with us, Mimi?” asked Julius. “You said on New Year’s night *that it made you tired to be, at a lot of various times, the same person, and that you would rather be, at the same time, a lot of various persons.* You might change, at least, your name, and the color of your hair, twelve times, or more, within this year, and perhaps you would like it.” “That is good advice Julius,” said Mimi.” (Dinesen 1979, 88, author's italics)

This idea is carried out in “Drømmerne” when it becomes Pellegrina’s new way of living after she has had to abandon her former life where she had one fixed identity as the great opera singer and prima donna Pellegrina Leoni, which was everything to her. In a passage, containing a secret allusion to Kierkegaard, she explains to Marcus Coccoza her new “modus vivendi” while also hinting at the above passage from *Gjentagelsen* and Kierkegaard in particular:

Jeg føler, Marcus, ja, jeg er sikker paa, at alle Mennesker, hvert eneste Menneske paa Jorden, burde være mere end een Person, da vilde de alle, ja alle, føle sig lettere om Hjertet. De vilde faa lidt Fred i Hjertet, lidt Kommers. *Er det ikke mærkeligt, at ingen Filosof har tænkt paa dette, men at det skulde være mig, som fandt ud af deraf?* (Blixen 2012, 327, author's italics)

Another desire that Mimi has that she mentions in a conversation with her younger sister Polly, is that she wants to be her husband Julius’s shadow. This passage seems informed by the idea that Assessor Wilhelm introduced in *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel*: “Det adler hele Mennesket ved den Undseelsens Rødme, der tilhører Qvinden, men som er Mandens Tugtemester; thi Qvinden er Mandens Samvittighed” (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.).

Mimi wants to be Julius’ conscience, so that she can come to have significance in their relationship, but Julius doesn’t care to have one. He wants to run parallel with her, like they are good friends, two individuals who make no demands or claims on each other (regardless of gender), which makes Mimi sad and depressed, even though she, from an ideological point of view, knows that he is in the right. As I also point out in the article, Polly realizes towards the end of the play, that she, contrary to Mimi, has no conscience, alluding to a passage in Kierkegaard’s *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* (Bunch 2011, 100-1).

Instead she is playing with the idea of hiring Zamor as her shadow — her artificial

conscience — for a year. This idea about the shadow as conscience is developed further in “Drømmerne,” when Lincoln describes Pellegrina:

Jeg forstod, at hun i dette Øjeblik, for een Gangs Skyld, talte den bogstavelige Sandhed. Thi idet hun sagde det, slog det mig: Hun havde virkelig ingen Skygge. Der var intet sort eller trist i hendes Nærhed, og alle de mørke Skygger af Bekymring, Savn, Ærgerrighed og Frygt, der tilsyneladende var uadskillige fra alle menneskelige Skabninger, endogsaa fra mig selv, skønt jeg dengang var en ret letsindig Person, var forvist fra hendes Nærhed. *Saa jeg kyssede hende blot, og sagde, at vi vilde lade hendes Skygge blive udenfor på Gaden, og selv rulle persiennen ned.*⁶³ (Blixen 2012, 274, author’s italics)

In “Carnival,” Rosendaal also touches on this notion of the shadow when he in an important passage connects the color black with the notion of conscience and deadly sin. Here the young Søren Kierkegaard’s response to Rosendaal’s ideas about conscience and sin, on the level of the author, becomes an ironic remark to Kierkegaard, when Annelise dressed as the “young Søren Kierkegaard” responds to Rosie’s ideas:

“What black do you want to use for the couch of love then?” asked Tido, who had an acute personal interest in the matter. The painter thought this question over for a little while. “Well,” he said after a time, very slowly and somehow bashfully, “they had, upon a time, there, *a very good black from a terrible bad conscience, a deep guilt, you know. Sin, yes, deadly sin.*” “Oh, dear, Rosie,” *lisped Søren Kierkegaard.* “Why, yes,” said the old man with growing self-confidence, folding his hands over his stomach, “they had it. A fine lovely black. It has gone, you have never seen it, the working secret has been lost. But fine it was.” (Dinesen 1979, 76, author’s italics)

The notion of black and the shadow is related to the notion of conscience,⁶⁴ which is what the young aesthetes, except for Mimi, really don’t know about, since they are all nobility. They are all Alexander’s from “En Historie om en Perle,” which means that they escape the normal way of thinking that includes the shadow; bad conscience caused by Christian-Bourgeois ethics. At the same time they live in a decade, the 1920s, where the new frivolous lifestyle that propagates joy, lust and dance will have nothing to do with conscience and the moral pangs and ideas of “deadly sin” that plagued the inhabitants of the 18th and 19th centuries including Kierkegaard’s character’s “det unge Menneske” and the pseudonyms Johannes de Silentio (author of *Frygt og Bæven*) and Virgilius

⁶³ Note the humor with regard to skygge/ conscience and sex in the closing lines. This is of course also an ironic remark to H. C. Andersen’s *Skyggen* (1848)—and another indication of how Blixen disagreed with how sexuality and the sensuous are connected to (bad) conscience (“skyggen”) within the Christian-Bourgeois system of norms and values.

⁶⁴ Expressed in the Western idiom “black conscience” [sort samvittighed].

Hafniensis (author of *Begrebet Angest*). Not to forget the biographical Kierkegaard himself.

The painter and aesthete Rosendaal in “Carnival” loves the black color (equaling the shadow and black conscience), but only insofar as it is regarded under the principle of aesthetics: the blacker, the more macabre; the better aesthetical value.⁶⁵ He explains the idea by using a story about the French King, who deliberately gave his wife syphilis out of jealousy: “He died, as you perhaps heard, from the *vérole*—a good black, which they are also managing to do away with now, a strong black, which could run with you, like a long shadow, throwing itself forward and backward, from street lamp to street lamp, on your way to a rendezvous”⁶⁶ (Dinesen 1979, 78). Just as Rosendaal, Blixen will have nothing to do with real life “Skygger” when they come in the shape of Christian-ethical conscience that makes people anxious, depressed and un-free. Instead she subjects it to aesthetic treatment when she often makes it one of the major topics in her tales by turning Kierkegaard’s ideas upside down⁶⁷ as we just saw in “Carnival” and “En Historie om en Perle.” This seems to be the only value that Blixen, in line with Rosendaal, ascribes to Christian ethics; that, this otherwise limiting and destructive agency, has great artistic and aesthetic value, which also seems to be what Anz suggests with regard to “Carnival” (Anz 1999, 211, see the full quote in the research survey). This is furthermore supported by the fact that Blixen’s female heroines have no conscience in the Christian-ethical way we normally understand it (for example Pellegrina and Alkmene).

The final additional observation I would like to make with regard to “Carnival” is that it concludes with an allusion to one of Heiberg’s marionette comedies “Pottemager Walter” from 1814 (Anz 1999, 212), which Polly in the concluding lines of “Carnival”

⁶⁵ “Shocked Fritze?” he said. “Yes, I am shocked Aesthetically” (Dinesen 1979, 74).

⁶⁶ Again the allusion to H. C. Andersen’s “Skyggen” is obvious.

⁶⁷ A search for the word “skygge” in the online version of Kierkegaard’s collected works (www.sks.dk) generated 185 results. There is no question that Blixen’s various notions of the shadow are inspired by Kierkegaard and the essay “Ligevægten mellem det Æsthetiske og Ehtiske i Personlighedens Udarbejdelse” from *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* in particular. The idea of the shadow as conscience is not only present in “Carnival” and “Drømmerne” but also, and maybe most prevalent, in the tale “En opbyggelig Historie” from *Vinter-Eventyr* where Blixen presents the notion of the beggar as the shadow of the king. The word also appears in the title of her last work *Skygger på Græsset* (1960), but here probably understood as silhouettes or shadows that the people she new in Kenya are bringing up in her mind, when she is looking back at her years in Africa. An extensive investigation of the various notions of “Skyggen” in Blixen’s oeuvre in relation to Kierkegaard calls for a separate article. Here I am only able to point out what I see as her most important interpretation of the shadow in connection to Kierkegaard, Christianity and the ethical, without elaborating further on the other leads.

calls a “classic.” This could very well be understood, as one last blow to Kierkegaard, since Heiberg, as we know, was Kierkegaard’s enemy number one in the academic environment of 1840s Copenhagen, but also a statement that has connections to the Lucifer quote and Blixen’s self-proclaimed right to “gøre Nar ad alt”:

“I may inform you, Arlecchino,” said the old painter, quoting an ancient Danish comedy. “That everything has got an end, and foolery as well.” “No on the contrary, Signor Lothario,” answered Arlecchino, *who was well versed in her classics*. “Everything is infinite, *and foolery as well*.” (Dinesen 1979, 121, author’s italics)

Blixen first intended “Carnival” to be one of two (or three) new marionette comedies (together with “Elmis Hjerte” and maybe “Jaques”) to publish in a separate book as she mentions in the letter to the editor of *Tilskueren*, Holstein, which I have already quoted. This publication strategy seems to be a repetition of J. L. Heiberg’s debut from 1814 *Marionetteater* that included the marionette comedies “Pottemager Walter” and “Don Juan” about which Fenger observes: “Hermed var Heiberg for alvor trådt ind i dansk litteratur” (Fenger 1992, 51).

5. “EHRENGARD”

The article was submitted to the US journal *Scandinavian Studies* in July 2011 and received a positive peer review in January 2012. The article was re-submitted in April 2012 following a few suggestions for revisions. Editorial changes have, however, delayed the publication. The version printed here is similar to the one that the editor of *Scandinavian Studies* has submitted to the copy-editor at the University of Illinois Press where the journal is now published, so minor revisions and reformatting can be expected before the article goes into print. The article is scheduled to appear in the winter issue 2013/2014 of *Scandinavian Studies*.

“Ehrengard,” Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note” (Bunch 2013a)

“Ehregard,” Kierkegaard, and the Secret Note

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Introduction

The novella “Ehregard” from 1963 has commonly been regarded, and rightly so, as Karen Blixen’s (Isak Dinesen’s) answer to Søren Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog” from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (1843) (1987; “The Seducer’s Diary” in *Either/Or. Part I*). Shortly after the publication, Robert Langbaum was the first scholar to point out the connections between “Ehregard” and “Forførerens Dagbog” in his book *The Gayety of Vision* (1964). Since the publication of this work, at least twenty articles or separate book chapters discussing the novella in various ways have been published, for the most part focusing on the notion of gender, art and seduction¹. A visit to the Royal Danish Library (December 2010) where seven different manuscript versions of the novella are to be found in the Karen Blixen archive, confirmed that even though “Ehregard” has received renewed scholarly attention in the past ten years², important information crucial to our understanding of the novella has so far been overlooked. In this paper I will focus on the following in order to renew and enrich our understanding of this significant work by Blixen: 1) I will point out new meta-narrative connections to “The Seducer’s Diary” significant for the interpretation and understanding of the narrative, 2) I will show how deleted passages in the earlier drafts carry new information crucial for our understanding of J.W. Cazotte’s blush in the final scene, 3) I will show how hidden homophonic

¹ In addition to the works mentioned by Ivan Z. Sørensen in his small bibliography containing articles and chapters about “Ehregard” in Sørensen 2002 (190-93) we can add: Timm Knudsen (1992), Gemal (1999), Paahus (2001), Brantly (2002), Mieszkowski (2003), Møller (2005), Rosdahl and Sørensen (2011) and Kondrup (2011).

² Mieszkowski (2003), Rosdahl and Sørensen (2011) and Kondrup (2011).

puns add to the understanding of the novella as a comedy and connects it to Kierkegaard in new ways.

”Ehrengard”

Already as early as the middle of the 1920s, Blixen expressed her interest in Kierkegaard in various letters from Africa. The most elaborate passage we find in a letter from August 3, 1924 to her brother Thomas Dinesen:

Læs forresten ogsaa Søren Kierkegaard, selv om Du maaske vil synes han er lidt indviklet (maaske ogsaa lidt gammeldags for Dig!) Vi har i hvert Fald ”Enten-Eller” hjemme. Jeg tror ikke, at noget Menneske kan læse ham med Eftertanke uden at gribes af ham. Han var et ærligt Menneske og led under det; maaske vil Du i hans ”Opfattelse” af ”Den Enkelte” finde noget af dig selv. (Blixen 1979a, 280)

And by the way, read Søren Kierkegaard, too, even though you may find him a little complicated (he may be a little old-fashioned to you, too!); I know that we have “Either/Or” at home, anyway. I do not think that anyone can read him closely without being gripped by him. He was an honest person and suffered for it; you may perhaps see something of yourself in his concept of “The Individual.” (Dinesen 1978, 225-6)

Later, in 1926-27, after a yearlong trip to Denmark in 1925 where she met Georg Brandes on two occasions in October (Bunch 2011, 77) and during a turbulent time in her relationship with Denys

Finch Hatton, Karen Blixen started working on her writing with much more focus and ambition. She wrote the first draft of “Carnival” in Africa during these years. The tale is about a supper party in a house north of Copenhagen in 1925 after a great masked ball has taken place. At the supper party we find one of the female characters, Annelise, dressed as “the young Søren Kierkegaard” and the plot of Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog” plays a significant role in the tale. Here Annelise plays the role of the seducer, when she is trying to create a new version of the seduction plot in “Forførerens Dagbog” with her lover Tido.³ “Carnival” was eventually stored away and not published until 1975 in Clara Selborn’s Danish translation and two years later in the original English version (1977). Blixen, however, never gave up on her interest in Kierkegaard, and “Forførerens Dagbog” in particular, and in the early 1950s she decided to develop a full-length tale based on this work, drawing in part of some of the ideas from “Carnival.” The tale, or the novella as I will refer to it in this paper, was titled “Ehrengard.”

The process from the first draft written in the late winter and spring of 1952 to the final manuscript, which was published posthumously in 1963, was long and challenging. In April and May 1952, while working on the first draft, Blixen and her secretary Clara Selborn had problems collaborating. Selborn did not like the novella and was not able to hide it, when she took dictation (Selborn 1974, 77). Selborn, who was a Catholic, had problems with the humorous sexual content in the novella and felt that Blixen went too far. This made Blixen furious (Selborn 1974, 83). The outcome of their dispute was that Blixen sent Selborn on a mandatory leave to France and Italy in May 1952, so she could continue working on “Ehrengard” alone without Selborn meddling (Selborn 1974, 76-7 and Blixen 1996b, 85-7). In the summer and fall of 1952, she sent the first draft to Erik Clemmesen (he answered July 14) and Ellen Dahl (she answered July 18) for comments, and later in the fall to Jørgen Gustava Brandt (he answered October 10) (Blixen 1996b, 92-6). They were all very appreciative and her sister Ellen Dahl, who was one of Blixen’s preferred readers and critics,

³ The tale and the relation to Kierkegaard have been thoroughly treated by Bunch 2011.

even went as far as to call it: “en storartet Historie, ja, at den egentlig er, som Liddas Cyclekørsel, da hun tog Undervisning hos en Professional: “Næsten fuldkommens“ (Blixen 1996b, 94) [a splendid story, yes, it is in fact, like Lidda’s biking, when she was taught by a professional: “almost perfect”].⁴ Blixen was, however, not satisfied with the story and stored it away, even though the responses from the three readers were unanimously positive. Nine years later she took it up again and rewrote it several times in 1961 and 1962, until she finally submitted it to the *Ladies’ Home Journal* in June 1962 (Langbaum 1964, 274). The journal, however, thought that the novella was too long for a magazine story and asked for the number of pages to be significantly reduced. This was very hard for Karen Blixen to accept after having worked on it for more than ten years. She mentioned that it felt to her “som at skære i mit hjerte” (Lasson 2008, 481) [like cutting my heart], but she needed the money and had to accept the changes. The shortened version was published in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in December 1962 under the title “The Secret of Rosenbad” just a few months after Blixen died (Langbaum 1964, 274). The year after in 1963 ”Ehregard” was published in full length in both the original English version and in Clara Selborn’s Danish translation. The narrative complexity, the subtle intrigue, and the profound insights into the anatomy of art and seduction are products of this long and complex process through which it came into being. The end result is a novella of great depth and complexity.

Johann W. Cazotte and Johannes Forførelsen

The male protagonist in ”Ehregard” is a composite of three characters, but only two of them will be included in this examination of the novella⁵. As the name suggests, the character of Johann

⁴ Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ The third character is French writer and occultist, Jaques Cazotte, who was beheaded during the French Revolution in 1792 on the part of his counter-revolutionary letters. His most popular work is *Le Diable amoureux* [*The Devil in Love*]

Wolfgang Cazotte is based on German writer and painter Johann Wolfgang Goethe: “that great artist Geheimrat Wolfgang Cazotte” (Dinesen 1963, 218). The character in the tale is well aware of the name similarity: “The world did not grudge sweet Gretchen – the heroine of my gigantic namesake – her guilt, it admitted her crime of infanticide and her debt to the sword of justice” (Dinesen 1963, 245). The depiction of the psychological make-up of Johann W. Cazotte is however closer to Søren Kierkegaard’s character Johannes Forførereren from “Forførerens Dagbog” (1843). They have very similar names (Johann and Johannes) and Johann W. Cazotte’s approach to seduction closely follows what Johannes Forførereren expresses in “Forførerens Dagbog.” As readers, we do not know much about Johannes Forførereren, only that he is some kind of intellectual and a devotee of living esthetically. He is a seducer, but not in an ordinary sense as A correctly notices in the foreword: “Han levede altfor meget aandeligt til at være en Forfører i almindelig Forstand” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“He lived much too intellectually to be a seducer in the ordinary sense” (Kierkegaard 1987, 307)] and this passage in the diary explains why: “Det er mig slet ikke om at gjøre i udvortes Forstand at besidde Pigen, men kunstnerisk at nyde Hende” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“I do not care at all to possess the girl in the external sense but wish to enjoy her artistically” (Kierkegaard 1987, 372)].

Blixen elaborates on this connection between art and seduction in “Ehrengard” in the letters Johann W. Cazotte writes to his confidante and former beneficiary Countess von Gassner (this character is the novella’s equivalent to Goethe’s Charlotte von Stein). Through the voice of Johann W. Cazotte, Blixen implicitly answers the question Johannes Forførereren poses in “Forførerens Dagbog,” but never answers himself: “Men hvor træffer man slige systematiske Forførere, hvor slige Psychologer” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“But where does one meet such systematic

from 1772 was highly appreciated by Blixen. The role this work plays in connection to “Ehrengard” has been thoroughly examined by Sørensen 2002 (143-5).

seducers, such psychologists?” (Kierkegaard 1987, 363)]. The answer in ”Ehrengard” is of course the artist:

You call an artist a seducer and are not aware that you are paying him the highest of compliments. The whole attitude of the artist towards the Universe is that of a seducer. For what does seduction mean but the ability to make, with infinite trouble, patience and perseverance, the object upon which you concentrate your mind give forth, voluntarily and enraptured, its very core and essence. (Dinesen 1963, 219, italics original)

The juxtaposition between seduction and art, seducer and artist, Johannes and Johann, is a dominant structure that runs all through the novella. Both Johann and Johannes see the whole process of seducing a young girl first and foremost as a process of personal inspiration and artistic stimulation. As the narrator describes Johann W. Cazotte: “The course of things was inspiring, and of all things in the world Herr Cazotte really with his whole heart wanted only one: inspiration” (Dinesen 1963, 266) and as A notes about Johannes in the preface to “Forførerens Dagbog:” “Individerne have for ham blot været Incitament, han kastede dem af sig, ligesom Træerne ryste Blade af – han foryngedes, Løvet visnede” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“For him individuals were merely for stimulation; he discarded them as trees shake off their leaves – he was rejuvenated, the foliage withered” (Kierkegaard 1987, 308)]. Aside from the personal stimulation and inspiration the seduction process brings them, Johann and Johannes are also addicted to the intoxicating feeling of omnipotence that emerges from being a sovereign creator; that being of a seduction story with a young girl or the creator of a work of art: “Jeg er beruset ved Tanken om, at hun er i min Magt” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“I am intoxicated with the thought that she is in my power” (Kierkegaard 1987, 377)]. Johann W. Cazotte: “He is at this moment an artist absorbed in and

intoxicated by the creation of his chef d'oeuvre. Food and rest are nothing to him, he is fed by winged inspiration" (Dinesen 1963, 244). In *Skygger paa Græsset* (1960, *Shadows on the Grass*). Blixen compares the hunter with the seducer and mentions that she has often thought of "Forførerens Dagbog" when experiencing the exhilarating feeling of omnipotence during the hunt, most apparent in the Danish version:

Jægeren maa tænke sig om og holde sig Vind- og Terrænforhold for Øje, falde ind i Landskabet og gøre sig lydløs som Vildtet selv. Det er en henrykkende Idræt, som kalder paa alle Evner i Jægeren og skænker Øjeblikke af sød og storslaet Selvfølelse. Jeg har paa Jagt husket Situationer og Stemninger fra "Forførerens Dagbog". Dog er denne Jagt efter det flygtende Vildt aldrig la vraie chose [but the seduction of a young girl is, my comment]. (Blixen 1960, 58)

The hunter must take wind and terrain into account and sneak close to them slowly and silently without their realizing the danger. It is a fine and fascinating art, in the spirit of that masterpiece of my countryman Søren (sic!) Kierkegaard, *The Seducer's Diary*, and it may, in the same way, provide the hunter with moments of great drama and with opportunity for skill and cunning, and for self-gratulations. (Dinesen 1960, 45)

Johann and Johannes also agree that one must break off the relationship as soon as the desired reaction, the object's complete fall into surrender and devotion, has been achieved. Johannes: "Naar en Pige først har hengivet sig aldeles, saa er det Hele forbi" (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["As soon as a girl has devoted herself completely, the whole thing is finished" (Kierkegaard 1987, 435)] and Johann W. Cazotte: "The honest and loyal seducer, when he has obtained the smile, the side glance,

the waltz or the tears, will uncover his head to the lady, his heart filled with gratitude, and will be dreading only one thing: that he may ever meet her again” (Dinesen 1963, 220). For Johann and Johannes the “breaking off” is the only way the love affair can be preserved as an infinite source of spiritual recollection and also the only way for them to keep full control over it, since they can recollect, shape and narrate it as they please, without any interference from reality. If not broken off, the future fiancée or wife will have something to say too; compromises have to be made, reality takes over and the omnipotent, spiritual aspect of the love affair is annulled.

Life versus Art

Even though Johannes and Johann are similar in many ways, we do find a couple of fundamental differences. Johannes’ mission in life is to *live artistically*, whereas Johann’s mission is to *be an artist*. Johannes wants to *live poetically*, in the moment, in full presence and enjoyment: “Hans Liv har været et Forsøg paa at realisere den Opgave at leve poetisk” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“His life has been an attempt to accomplish the task of living poetically” (Kierkegaard 1987, 304)]. Conversely, Johann wants to *create art* that is infinite and immortal. Johannes shapes, stages and creates poetic situations in life with his intellectual power and ability to manipulate and seduce. This makes Johannes a *poet of life*, but not a poet or an artist, since the diary is strictly reserved for his private observations. As the narrator A correctly observes in the preface with regard to the diary: “at den i strængeste Forstand blot har havt personlig Betydning for ham, er iøinefaldende; og at ville antage, at jeg har et Digterværk for mig, maaskee endog bestemt til at trykkes, forbyder saavel det Hele som det Enkelte” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“it is obvious that in the strictest sense it had only personal importance for him, and to assume that I have before me a poetic work, perhaps even

intended for publication, is excluded by the whole as well as by its parts” (Kierkegaard 1987, 305)]⁶. In “Forførerens Dagbog” Johannes proudly proclaims that “Hendes Udvikling det var mit Værk” (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) [“Her development — that was my work” (Kierkegaard 1987, 445)], but this *work of life* of his, Cordelia and her love, will die (and so will he) and the infinite aspect of their love will eventually be annulled. Johann on the contrary, artist that he is, is obsessed with the idea of eternity. His main aim is to immortalize his relationship with Ehrengard in a work of art:

In what possible way could he more fully and thoroughly make the girl his own than by capturing, fastening and fixing upon his canvas every line and hue of her young body [...] and immortalizing it, so that nobody in the world could ever again separate the two of them. It would be, unmistakably and for all eternity, Ehrengard, the maid from the mountains, and it would be, unmistakably and for all eternity, a Cazotte. In the picture the face of the bather would be turned away. By no means would he betray or give away his maid-of-honor. He might show his masterpiece to Princes and Princesses, art critics and enraptured lookers-on, and the girl herself at the same moment, and no one but he and she would know the truth. (Dinesen 1963, 251)

Physical versus Spiritual Seduction

⁶ The author Søren Kierkegaard of course meant “The Seducer’s Diary” to be “a poetic work [...] intended for publication,” so this passage could be read as authorial irony, since Kierkegaard himself was very well aware of the immortal aspect of art. But here we have to differ between his fictional character, Johannes (that might also very well have been created as a fictional character by A, even though he claims otherwise), and the author, Søren Kierkegaard. In “Ehrengard” Blixen is primarily interested in interpreting *the character of Johannes* in connection to her own character Johann W. Cazotte. And the character Johannes seems to have no intention of having his diary published as a work of art.

Another fundamental difference exists between Johann and Johannes, which is probably also the most important one. It concerns the nature of the seduction. Contrary to Johannes, Johann W. Cazotte intends to carry out his final seduction of Ehrengard exclusively as a spiritual seduction, and not an actual physical one involving sexual intercourse. He explains why, in this passage:

I might, upon your friendly advice, undertake to seduce the girl in the orthodox and old-fashioned manner, and the task might not be as difficult as it looks [...] I might seduce her, for she is impulsive and unreflecting, in a particularly impetuous moment of hers. And, Madame, it would mean nothing. *For her ruin in such a case, would be fact and reality.* (Dinesen 1963, 244, my italics)

Johann W. Cazotte continues and imagines the implications of this type of spiritual seduction of Ehrengard:

Alas, Madame, she will not catch me up, for I shall be away painting other fair ladies, having handed her over, intact but annihilated, to the fond cares of a young husband who will never have the faintest notion that he is drinking up my remains. And will not then, you ask me, her ruin be a fact and a reality? Verily, my friend, it will be so, inasmuch as the reality of art be superior to that of the material world. Inasmuch as the artist be, everywhere and at all times, the arbiter of reality. (Dinesen 1963, 246)

Blixen is here delivering a clever response to Kierkegaard's plot in "Forførerens Dagbog" with regard to the humiliating situation in which Johannes eventually leaves Cordelia. After their pre-marital sexual intercourse Johannes abandons Cordelia for good. He leaves her a fallen woman, and

from an eighteen-forties societal point of view, her life is in fact forever ruined. Thus, in Blixen's eyes Johannes has deceived his own idea of having created "et skønnere og betydningsfuldere Forhold til Cordelia" (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["a more beautiful and significant relationship to Cordelia" (Kierkegaard 1987, 376)]. In "Forførerens Dagbog" Cordelia's ruin is "fact and reality," which is exactly what Johann W. Cazotte wants to avoid in his dealings with Ehrengard. This is Blixen's deliberate critique of the character Johannes in "Forførerens Dagbog" and also the background for one of the major changes she makes in her version of the story, namely that Johann W. Cazotte will seduce Ehrengard only insofar as he is not compromising her virginal honor and social position: "I insist on obtaining full surrender without any physical touch" (Dinesen 1963, 244). This means that Cazotte will leave Ehrengard "intact" from a societal point of view, even though he does succeed in annihilating her on a private and spiritual level. This is also a significant blow to the guarantee Johannes issues in "Forførerens Dagbog:" "Overhovedet kan jeg tilsikre enhver Pige, der vil betro sig til mig, en fuldkommen æsthetisk Behandling (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["I can guarantee perfect esthetic treatment to any girl who entrusts herself to me" (Kierkegaard 1987, 380)]. Blixen's "Ehrengard" thus becomes the *true version* of how to apply "perfect esthetic treatment" in the discipline of seducing a young girl. This inversion of the seduction strategy and its implications stand out as a prominent and significant meta-narrative counter-comment to "Forførerens Dagbog."

Cordelia versus Ehrengard

Blixen also thought that the character of Cordelia was too simple and one-sided and that Kierkegaard's "Forførerens Dagbog" underestimates the female intellect and a young woman's ability to understand men and the subtle game of love and seduction. This point of view is expressed by Lincoln Forsner in "The Dreamers" (Dinesen 1934) where he states that a woman in a love affair

is very well aware of her seducer's intention and in the end is the one, who is deciding whether her seducer is going to be successful or not: "The ladies *who have done me the honour of letting me seduce them* have, all of them, insisted upon deciding themselves which was the central point in the picture" (Dinesen 1934, 256, my italics). We also find Cordelia's point of view to be almost absent in the story. The only passages representing her point of view are the two short letters to Johannes we find in the foreword.⁷ Here we, surprisingly, discover that she is still hopelessly in love with him, even though he has annihilated her and left her a social outcast. Cordelia's one-sided role in the story has implications for Blixen's view on Johannes as she expresses in this letter to Aage Henriksen on October 14, 1954: "hvis hun ikke er et Menneske, da er han hellerikke noget Menneske, hvis hun ikke er en Heltinde i en Historie, da er han hellerikke nogen Helt" (Blixen 1996a, 251) [if she is not a human being then he is not a human being either, if she is not a heroine in a story, he too is not a hero]. In "Ehregard" Blixen creates a scenario that follows a more equal situation when she gives Ehregard a voice and an intellect of her own (as outlined in the above passage). She basically grants Johann W. Cazotte what Victor Eremita in the foreword to *Enten- Eller. Første Deel* thinks would be Johannes the Seducer's wish, if he had known about the publication of "Forførerens Dagbog":

Giv mig et halvt Aar, og jeg tilveiebringer en Historie, der skal være
 interessantere end Alt hvad jeg hidtil har oplevet. Jeg tænker mig en ung,
 kraftfuld, genial Pige faae den ualmindelige Idee at ville hævne Kjønnets paa mig.
 Hun mener at skulle kunne tvinge mig, at lade mig smage ulykkelig Kjærligheds
 Smerter. See det er en Pige for mig. Hitter hun ikke selv dybt nok derpaa, saa skal
 jeg komme hende til Hjælp. Jeg skal vride mig som Molboernes Aal. Og naar jeg

⁷ These two letters from Cordelia are the only examples in Kierkegaard's entire production where a female character is granted her own point of view (!).

da har bragt hende paa det Punkt, jeg vil, saa er hun min. (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.)

Give me half a year, and I will produce a story that will be ever so much more interesting than everything I have so far experienced. I picture to myself a young, energetic girl of genius having the extraordinary idea of wanting to avenge her sex on me. She thinks she will be able to coerce me, to make me taste the pains of unhappy love. That, you see, is a girl for me. If she herself does not think of it profoundly enough, I shall come to her assistance. I shall writhe like the Molbo's eel. And when I have brought her to the point where I want her, then she is mine. (Kierkegaard 1987, 9-10)

This meta-narrative connection has already been pointed out by Selboe 1996 (145-6) and Kondrup 2011 (90) but this re-match between Johannes and Cordelia in "Ehrengard," I will argue, ends in a tie and not with Ehrengard's triumph and Johann W. Cazotte's demise as previous scholars have so far agreed upon (I will get back to that later).

Johann W. Cazotte as the Puppet Master

In "Forførerens Dagbog" Johannes develops a master plan for the seduction of Cordelia that he follows meticulously and succeeds in realizing without any missteps. In "Ehrengard" we slowly discover that Johann Cazotte's plan to seduce Ehrengard was in fact also in place from the very beginning of narrative. When unraveling the plot, it becomes clear that Johann, meticulously as a chess player and with the strategic skills of a Napoleon, has been the master puppeteer of the whole affair: Lothar's falling in love with Ludmilla and their pre-marital physical love-relationship have

just been a firing ramp for Johann W. Cazotte to launch the setup at Schloss Rosenbad and involve Ehrengard as Ludmilla's maid-of-honor (also pointed out by Heede 2001, 88 and Sørensen 2002, 120). Up until his first meeting with Ehrengard at the Leda Fountain, Johann has cleverly managed to put himself in a position where he has been able to direct and manipulate the course of events. The key passage revealing that Johann W. Cazotte has had his eyes on Ehrengard, and a desire to seduce her long before he brings Lothar to the court of Leuchtenstein to fall in love with Ludmilla, is first disclosed well into the story:

I saw, at a court ball, a girl in a white frock, the daughter of warriors, in whose universe art, or the artist, have never existed. And I cried with Michelangelo: "My greatest triumph hides within that block of marble." Since then I have at times ventured to believe that it be this vision of mine which has caused our entire course of events, and has, in the end, lifted my young eaglet off her native mountain peak to drop her in the flower Garden of Rosenbad. (Dinesen 1963, 232-3).

Other crucial passages in the novella support this interpretation of Johann W. Cazotte as being responsible for the whole chain of events: "Herr Cazotte from the beginning had had his eyes on a particular court [...] He led his steps, and those of Prince Lothar, to Leuchtenstein" (Dinesen 1963, 222), "He developed to the Grand Duchess a plan, which, although it must have been conceived on the spot, seemed well thought through" (Dinesen 1963, 225), "The choice of residence itself was entrusted to Herr Cazotte" (Dinesen 1963, 227) and finally: "A problem presented itself with the nomination of a maid-of-honor to the Princess [...] Herr Cazotte sat for some time in silence with a thoughtful face. Possibly he had already made his choice, but was taking pleasure in letting the highborn maidens of Babenhausen pass muster before his inner eye" (Dinesen 1963, 227-8). Johann

W. Cazotte's relationship to the Grand Duchess and his ability to manipulate her is similar to the way Johannes manages to manipulate Cordelia's aunt in "Forførerens Dagbog," which eventually clears the way for her giving him her consent to his engagement to Cordelia: "jeg gjør ingen Hemmelighed af mine Udgydelser for Tanten, Torvepriser, en Beregning over, hvor mange Potter Mælk der skal til eet Pund Smør, igjennem Flødens Medium og Smørkjernens Dialektik...jeg sværmer med Tanten." (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["I make no secret of my effusions to the aunt — market prices, an estimate of how many quarts milk it takes for one pound of butter through the medium of cream and the dialectic of the butter churn...I romance with the aunt" (Kierkegaard 1987, 349-50)] and "Tanten overbyder sig selv ved min kraftige Bistand i denne Retning. Hun er næsten bleven fanatisk, Noget, hun da kan takke mig for." (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["With my powerful assistance on this score, the aunt is outdoing herself. She has become almost a fanatic — something she can thank me for" (Kierkegaard 1987, 353)]. Johann W. Cazotte is equally capable of manipulating the Grand Duchess in order to get what he wants: "The slightest of hints was sufficient, the painter read the Grand Ducal mind like a book, and like an Aeolian harp responded to its inaudible sigh" (Dinesen 1963, 221). We see from Johann W. Cazotte's role in the narrative that the only step with regard to the seduction of Ehrengard that was *not* planned in detail before he arranged the affair between Lothar and Ludmilla was the actual seduction method (the nude painting), but the idea of the outcome – the blush – was there from the very beginning.

The Seduction Set-up and the Blush

The surroundings and the set-up for Johann W. Cazotte's spiritual seduction of the young virgin Ehrengard follow the basic ideas of Johannes Forførereren, when he meticulously prepares the love nest for the final seduction of Cordelia in "Forførerens Dagbog:"

Intet er glemt, der kunde have nogen Betydning for hende, og derimod er der Intet anbragt, der slet og ret kunde erindre om mig; medens jeg dog overalt er usynligt tilstede [...] Beliggenheden er som hun kunde ønske sig den [...] Illusionen er fuldstændig. (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.)

Nothing has been forgotten that could have any significance for her; on the other hand, nothing has been forgotten that could directly remind her of me, although I am nevertheless invisibly present everywhere [...] The location is just as she would like it [...] The illusion is perfect. (Kierkegaard 1987, 442-3)

Johann W. Cazotte uses a similar strategy when he decorates his love nest “Schloss Rosenbad:”

You may mount the stairs at liberty and walk undisturbed from room to room: an artist and poet, you will then admit, has gone through the house before you and has made it speak (...) Look up and down, right and left, with your most critical eye – you will not find a single tone which be not harmoniously tuned into the harmony of the whole. (Dinesen 1963, 231)

Until Johann W. Cazotte discovers that Ehrengard swims naked in a nearby lake every morning, it has been unclear to himself — as well as the reader — how he would actually execute the final seduction. So far he has only contrived the desired outcome of the seduction: Ehrengard’s final and fatal “blush,” but he has so far been unable to come up with an actual method to provoke it. After seeing her naked at the lake, a diabolic plan finally emerges. From a hiding place on the bank he will paint Ehrengard, when she is taking her morning bath, and when the work is finished, he will show the painting to her in order to trigger the desired reaction:

Her mind never worked quickly, it would take her two or three minutes to grasp her position. Three facts she would at the end of them have made her own. That she was beautiful. That she was naked – and already in the third chapter of Genesis such a recognition is reported to be fatal. And, lastly, that in being thus beautiful and naked she had given herself over to the Venusberg. And to him [...] her blood is to rise, in pride and amour-propre, in unconditional surrender to those perils, in the enraptured flinging over of her entire being to the powers which, till this hour, with her entire being she has rejected and denied, in full, triumphant consent to her own perdition. In this blush her past, present, and future will be thrown before my feet. (Dinesen 1963, 234 and 252)

When seeing the painting Ehrengard will understand that Johann W. Cazotte has enjoyed her many mornings and she will never be able to tell anybody. The painting will be admired at the courts of Europe but Ehrengard's face will not be visible: "In the picture the face of the bather will be turned away. By no means would he betray or give away his maid-of-honor" (Dinesen 1963, 251). Since Ehrengard cannot be recognized she will keep her social honor, but through self-reflection she will discover sexuality (her naked body as a desirable sexual object), love (in the deep and secret connection with Johann W. Cazotte) and eternity (the immortal artwork by the famous Johann W. Cazotte) in one and the same moment, and in the blush she will throw her past (her as a naïve being, a spiritual virgin so to speak), her present (her fall into reflection and self-consciousness) and future (her new level of consciousness and the infinite implications of the painting) before his feet. He and she will forever be united in this secret spiritual — yet highly erotic — relation, and no matter whom Ehrengard will marry later in life, her husband will forever be a spiritual cuckold, since she

will never be able to tell him about the painting and the piquant, pre-marital affair with Johann W. Cazotte. Contrary to Johannes' "priceless" and "delicate" blush in "Forførerens Dagbog:"

Der er forskellige Arter af qvindelig Rødme. Der er den grove Rødsteens-Rødme. Det er den, Romanskriverne altid have nok af, naar de lader deres Heltinder rødme *über und über*. Der er den fine Rødme; det er Aandens Morgenrøde. Hos en ung Pige er den ubetalelig. (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.)

There are various kinds of womanly blushes. There is the dense brick-red blush. This is the one novelists always have in good supply when they have their heroines blush *über und über*. There is the delicate blush; it is the spirit's sunrise-red. In a young girl it is priceless. (Kierkegaard 1987, 364)

Johann W. Cazotte has another type of blush in mind for Ehrengard, which also counts in the aftermath of the spiritual fall, and here we arrive at another crucial difference. The type of blush Johann W. Cazotte wants to provoke in Ehrengard is not a delicate *sunrise*-red blush, but instead an intense and fatal *sunset*-red — a last desperate glow of daylight, whereupon black night will follow upon the recognition that she will forever be Johann W. Cazotte's bride in spirit. His example is the phenomenon of the "Alpen-Glühen:"

She is to be the rose which drops every one of her petals to one single breath of the wind and stands bared. In high mountains, as you will know, there is a phenomenon of nature called Alpen-Glühen [...] After the sun has set, and as the whole majestic mountain landscape is already withdrawing into itself, suddenly the row of summits, all on their own, radiate a divine fire, a celestial, deep rose

flame, as if they were giving up a long kept secret. After that they disappear, nothing more dramatic can be imagined: they have betrayed their inmost substance and can now only annihilate themselves. Black night follows [...] what void afterwards. (Dinesen 1963, 234)

Again we see how Karen Blixen creates another astute meta-narrative counter comment to “Forførerens Dagbog.” She develops the plot so it also counts in the tragic aftermath of the seduction, the spiritual fall, which is an element that is completely absent in “Forførerens Dagbog” where Johannes is only able to see Cordelia’s fall as a positive development, since he is only able to evaluate it from an esthetical point of view.

The Turning Point: The Leda Fountain

Johann W. Cazotte never gets the final and fatal blush from Ehrengard that he had hoped for, but it is important to remember that Ehrengard actually *does* blush at their first meeting at the Leda fountain. The significance of this slight blush is, however, downplayed and obfuscated by the narrator, which makes it tempting for the reader, in accordance with Johann W. Cazotte, to misunderstand the situation:

On a very lovely evening he had been reading to her in the garden and was slowly accompanying her back to the house, when he stopped and made her stop with him by a fountain representing Leda and the swan and repeated a stanza from the poem they had last read together. He was silent for a while, the girl was silent with him, and as he turned toward her he found her young face very still. “A penny for your thoughts, my Lady Ehrengard,” he said. She looked at him, and for

a moment a *very slight blush* slid over her face. “I was not,” after a pause she answered him slowly and gravely, “really thinking of anything at all.” He had no doubt that here, she was speaking the truth. (Blixen 1963, 243, my italics)

The stanza that Johann W. Cazotte recites for Ehrengard must be the passage with Leda and the swan from Goethe’s *Faust* part II (1832):

Homunculus (*Astonished.*)

Interesting!

(*The phial slips out of Wagner’s hands, hovers over Faust, and shines on him.*)

Lovely surroundings! – Clear water
In thick forest! Women there: undressing.
The loveliest of all! – It’s getting clearer. 6905
One’s left, different from the rest, gleaming:
Of highest race, for sure, a heavenly name.
She places her foot in the transparent glow,
Her noble body’s sweetly living flame
Cools itself in the yielding crystal flow. – 6910
But what’s that rush of beating wings for:
That thrashing, splashing, in the mirror?
The lovely girls, intimidated, flee:
Their queen, alone, looks on, composedly,

To see, with a proud feminine pleasure, 6915
 The Swan-Prince press against her knee, there,
 Forward yet tame. Familiar, he seems. –
 But suddenly a vapour heaves,
 And covers, with the veil it weaves,
 The loveliest of scenes. 6920

(Goethe 1832, n. pag.)

Sørensen, however, relates the stanza that J. W. Cazotte is quoting to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (Sørensen 2002, 131) but there are good reasons to believe that Blixen is instead aiming at the scene in Goethe's *Faust*, Part II. Firstly, *Faust* is written by Johan W. Cazotte's great "namesake" Johann W. Goethe, who is playing such a big part in the novella as a background figure. Secondly, the Leda and swan scene in *Faust* fit the scenery of Ehrengard's morning bath much better than the shorter and much less descriptive scene in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (quoted in Sørensen 2002, 132). Thirdly, the description of Leda in the passage from Goethe's *Faust* also fits with the ways Johann W. Cazotte describes Ehrengard elsewhere in the novella as a "white-hot young angel" of the highest race, stern and proud (Dinesen 1963, 228-9). The purpose of reading the stanza is to see how Ehrengard responds to him quoting this highly erotic passage from Goethe's poem that obviously put her in the role of Leda and him in the role as Zeus (the swan). To enhance the effect of his words, he does it in front of a fountain that is displaying the exact same scene. With this setup Johann W. Cazotte hopes to provoke the crimson-red fatal blush that he has longed for so long, but when he asks Ehrengard about her thoughts only "a very slight blush slid over her face" (Dinesen 1963, 243). Shortly after she "slowly and gravely" claims that she was "really thinking of nothing at all" and Johann W. Cazotte believes her: "He had no doubt that here, as ever, she was speaking the

truth” (Dinesen 1963, 243). But Ehrengard is far less naïve than Johann thinks, and in this situation she *does* actually see the connection between Leda (herself) and the swan (Cazotte) and what this connection implies. The “very slight blush” stems from the fact that she is now aware that *this is the way Johann W. Cazotte is seeing* their relationship – not because she discovers her own sexuality, since: “She is a country-bred girl and familiar with the facts of life. She knows at what date after the wedding a child should be born” (Dinesen 1963, 237). On the contrary, she blushes in discontent and anger, since she realizes that her friend and confidante, whom she up until now has perceived as a loyal father figure, is thinking about their relationship in a completely different way and has so far been doing everything he could to manipulate her. Ehrengard’s newly gained knowledge is detrimental for Johann W. Cazotte’s plan, since she is now aware that he has a hidden agenda and this means that he will not be able to take her by surprise anymore. In fact she is turning against him from now on in an attempt to change the power dynamics and reverse the roles. When analyzing the events following this first meeting at the Leda fountain, it is striking that Johan W. Cazotte only a few days after reciting the stanza to Ehrengard finds her nude bathing at the lake in the forest, which is a repetition of the passage he just read to her. Thus, the morning bath sessions are the first step in the reversal of the roles and mark the beginning of Ehrengard’s seduction of Johan W. Cazotte, even though he is completely unaware of it. This interpretation is supported by the following chain of events: The very same evening when Ehrengard’s maid discovers Johan W. Cazotte at the lake (July 13th), Ehrengard presents Lothar and Ludmilla’s child to him, while looking him straight in the eyes. He avoids her gaze, completely unaware of the subtle subtext and continues to view Ehrengard as a work of art and not as young woman of flesh and blood:

At her request Ehrengard lifted the basket and the child from the Princess’ knee, and on her strong arms presented them to Herr Cazotte. The painter, still reluctant to look her in the face, let his eyes rest on the baby. But the pose of her figure

recalled to him a group by the great sculptor Thorvaldsen, “Psyche selling amorini.” (Dinesen 1963, 256)

The very same evening they stroll in the garden with Countess Poggendorff, but when the Countess withdraws, Ehrengard deliberately stops at the Leda fountain to use it as a backdrop for their second meeting. Again Johan W. Cazotte underestimates her completely: “Herr Cazotte wondered whether Ehrengard, as upon an earlier evening, was thinking of nothing at all” (Dinesen 1963, 257), but she is indeed thinking and this is what she has prepared for him:

As upon that earlier evening they passed the Leda fountain, Ehrengard slowed her steps, stopped and stood for a moment with the tips of her fingers in the clear water of the basin from which the breast and *the proud neck of the swan rose toward's Leda's knees*. As she lifted her head, turned and faced Herr Cazotte, she was a little pale, but she spoke in a clear voice. “My maid tells me,” she said, “that you want to paint a picture. Out by the east of the house. I wish to tell you that I shall be there every morning, at six o'clock. (Dinesen 1963, 257, my italics to underline the phallic symboism of the sculpture)

In this scene Ehrengard cleverly destroys Johann W. Cazotte's master plan. When she has the nerve and audacity to voluntarily invite him to come and paint her naked at the lake, he of course cannot expect her to blush, when showing her the painting. Johan W. Cazotte, understandably, spends a sleepless and troubled night upon this disturbing second meeting that has forever ruined his plan. The day after, the small Prince is kidnapped from Schloss Rosenbad, and when the situation at the loft of Black Boar Inn develops, Ehrengard cleverly seizes the moment and teaches Cazotte the final lesson. Here she eventually succeeds in making Cazotte look at her as a sexual object of flesh and

blood, when she announces their pre-marital sexual intercourse, which ultimately leads to his fall into physical sexuality. This has been Ehrengard's plan since their first Leda fountain meeting without Cazotte having had the faintest idea of it.

Nemesis Strikes

As A writes about Johannes in the preface to "Forførerens Dagbog:"

Som han har ledet Andre vild, saa tænker jeg, han ender med selv med at løbe vild. De Andre har han ledet vild ikke i udvortes Henseende, men i indvortes dem selv betræffende [...] Saaledes tænker jeg det vil gaa ham selv efter en endnu langt forfærdeligere Maalestok. (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.)

Just as he has led others astray, so he, I think, will end by going astray himself.

He has led others astray not in the external sense but the interior sense with respect to themselves [...] I think he himself will have the same experience on an even more terrible scale. (Kierkegaard 1987, 308)

This is a very precise description of the scenario Blixen has prepared for Johann W. Cazotte in "Ehrengard," as well as another meta-narrative blow to Johannes' omnipotent status in "Forførerens Dagbog" and the fact that Johannes actually gets away with playing with the Gods: "jeg som kan ansee mig for Gudernes Yndling" (Kierkegaard 1843, n. pag.) ["I, who can regard myself as a favorite of the gods" (Kierkegaard 1987, 334)]. But it is dangerous to play with the Gods as Cazotte correctly observes in "Ehrengard:" "But the generosity of the Gods was more alarming and astounding still [...] and dangerous for a mortal, even for an artist, to associate with." (Dinesen

1963, 250-1) And this time Nemesis *does* strike, as we have seen it many times before in Blixen's works. Towards the end of the story, the baby child of Prince Lothar and Ludmilla is kidnapped by Matthias. He is the husband of the Lispeth who is also the child's nurse. Ehrengard immediately sets out to find the kidnapper and eventually finds Matthias, Lispeth and the little Prince at the loft of The Blue Boar Inn and Johann W. Cazotte soon joins her. It is of course paramount that the child's identity is kept secret, so when questions arise about the nature of the conflict and the identity of the child, Ehrengard tells the party (even though her fiancée and future husband Kurt von Blittersdorff is standing right next to her) that the child is hers and Cazotte's. When uttering these crucial words she is looking Johann W. Cazotte straight in the eyes and, seconds after, his head turns crimson-red in a heavy blush. He is now himself becoming the victim of the emotional reaction he had planned for Ehrengard:

At these words Herr Cazotte's blood was drawn upwards, as from the profoundest wells of his being, till it colored him all over like a transparent crimson veil. His brow and cheeks, all on their own, radiated a divine fire, a celestial, deep rose flame, as if they were giving away a long kept secret. And it was a strange thing that he should blush. For normally an onlooker in a *fauteil d'orchestre* would grow pale at seeing the irate hero of the stage suddenly turn upon him. (Dinesen 1963, 276)

The big question is of course: Why does the powerful and always composed Johann W. Cazotte blush at the idea that he should be the father of Ehrengard's child? Why does he not grow pale? Or why does he not laugh off Ehrengard's farfetched suggestion? The answer is: Through the idea that he should be the father of an actual child, Johann W. Cazotte becomes aware of physical sexuality, or rather the lack of it in his own life, since children don't come — as we all know — with the stork.

Up until this crucial moment the artist Johan W. Cazotte has not been a sexually active human being, but has instead been sublimating all his sexual energy into the creation of divine and spiritual art with the nude painting of Ehrengard as the diamond he was to set in his crown. Johann W. Cazotte blushes because he now knows that Ehrengard knows that he is a virgin, and that is — for a man of forty-five — a rather embarrassing revelation. This is exactly the “long kept secret” the blush gives away: “brow and cheeks [...] radiated a divine fire [...] as if they were giving away a long kept secret” (Dinesen 1963, 276). The closing lines of the novella that describe Johann W. Cazotte’s love affair in Rome succeeding the events at Schloss Rosenbad, supports the idea that a significant transformation of his nature has indeed taken place:

A week later the betrothed couple were present at the baptism of the new-born Prince in Dom of Babenhausen [...] Herr Cazotte to the surprise of the court was not present at the ceremony. He had been called back to Rome to paint a portrait of the Pope. It was here, now, that he had that famous liaison with a cantatrice of the Opera which caused much talk and made his acquaintances smilingly alter his name to that of Casanova. (Dinesen 1963, 276-7)

Johann W. Cazotte’s blush in the final scene, in combination with the love affair in Rome, which causes his acquaintances to alter his name to that of Casanova, supports the interpretation that Johann W. Cazotte undergoes a crucial transformation succeeding his fatal blush at the loft at the Blue Boar Inn: from a spiritual seducer (an artist) to a physical seducer of flesh and blood (a Casanova).

“The Secret Note”: The Key to the Final Interpretation

A certain piece of biographical information about J.W. Goethe is crucial for the validation of this interpretation. Goethe did most likely not have a physical love relationship with a woman until his second journey to Italy 1786-88 when he was thirty-nine years old. Goethe scholars have commonly acknowledged this since the publication of K.R. Eissler's *Goethe, A Psychoanalytic Study 1775-1786* in 1963, where Eissler states that:

It seems – as I observed previously – that Goethe had sexual intercourse for the first time in his life during his second sojourn in Rome, after his return from Sicily. That he had intercourse in Rome can be proved; that it was for the first time is, of course beyond proof, but nevertheless an assumption of such high probability that I tend to consider it a certainty. (Eissler 1963, 1019)

Eissler assesses the event to have taken place close to the date of a decisive letter Goethe sends to Duke Karl August on February 16, 1788, describing his new experiences in the erotic (Eissler 1963, 1027-8) and Eissler concludes: “first intercourse at the age of thirty-nine” (Eissler 1963, 1031).

Danish Goethe scholar, Per Øhrgaard, and Danish Blixen and Goethe scholar, Aage Henriksen, both agree with Eissler:

En omfattende psykoanalytisk studie over Goethe i de første Weimar-år (K.R. Eissler) mener, at Goethe ikke oplevede et fysisk fuldbyrdet forhold til en kvinde før under sit ophold i Rom i 1787-1788, og det forekommer trods al Sturm und Drang-følelsesfylde ikke usandsynligt. (Øhrgaard 1999, 73)

(A thorough psychoanalytical study of Goethe in the first Weimar-years (K.R. Eissler) suggests that Goethe did not have a sexual relationship with a woman

before his stay in Rome in 1787-1788 and despite all the Sturm und Drang-emotions it does not seem improbable.)

In the passage below Aage Henriksen explains why Goethe denied himself a sexual relationship until he was almost forty years old. Henriksen's explanation fits very well with the psychological constitution of the artist Johann W. Cazotte and the hidden plot in "Ehrengard:"

Der er tale om en erotisk karriere, som nok havde været umulig, hvis han ikke som adskillige kunstnere havde været sådan indrettet, at den letvakte, uforløste seksualitet steg op igennem ham og frigjorde syner og kunstneriske erkendelser. Dette forsagelsesprogram, i tiltagende grad utåleligt, holdt indtil midten af 1780'erne, hvor han flygtede fra sit gamle liv til sine længsels land, Italien [...] i sit praktiske liv foretog han en ændring, som under omstændig-hederne må kaldes radikal, idet han endelig frigav sin så længe bundne seksualitet. (Henriksen 2004, 103-4)

(We are dealing with an erotic career, which had most likely been impossible if he had not as most artists had a psychological makeup that allowed the easily awoken, yet unresolved sexuality, to rise through him and release visions and artistic recognitions. This type of renunciation, increasingly unbearable, prevailed until the mid 1780s when he escaped to the land of his longings, Italy [...] in his day-to-day life he carried out a change, which under the circumstances must be called radical since he finally released his latent sexuality.)

Shortly after returning from Rome, Goethe decided to follow the newfound path of physical sexuality he discovered in Italy, and — head over heels — began a sexual relationship with the

twenty-three year old Christiane Vulpius, who took the opportunity to ask for economic support for her family. Shortly after their first meeting she moved in with him (Øhrgaard 1999, 115). The role this small piece of biographical information about Goethe plays in "Ehregard" is what Danish Blixen-scholar Poul Behrendt calls "den hemmelige note" [the secret note]. The secret note is a crucial piece of information that is impossible to detect in the text itself, but when (or rather "if") the reader discovers it, it changes the whole interpretation: "Den forandrer begivenheder radikalt, ikke ved at gribe ind i dem, men ved at ændre synspunktet på dem" (Behrendt 2007, 8) [it changes the events radically, not through direct interference, but because the view on the events is changed].

The above interpretation of the story propagating Goethe's sexual development as the key to the final interpretation of Cazotte's blush was validated during a visit to the Royal Library in Copenhagen in December 2010. In Capsule 133 in the Karen Blixen Archive, we find seven different versions of the Ehregard-novella: The first draft is most likely from the late summer or fall of 1952. It is titled "Forskrift" with Blixen's handwriting, but with no date,⁸ two different re-writings from 1961 (one titled "Arbejdseksemplar" with a calendar sheet dating the draft to April 28, 1961), three different re-writings possibly from 1962 (at least two of them)⁹ and the final manuscript with a few minor corrections made by Clara Selborn from 1963. In all of the versions up until the re-writings in 1962, the tale ends with this passage:

⁸ The earliest version of the manuscript at the Royal Library is not identical to the version that Blixen sent to Erik Clemmesen and Ellen Dahl in the summer of 1952. In a letter to Karen Blixen dated July 14 1952, Erik Clemmesen writes: "Gartneren er vred – hvor er han dog vred! – Men hvor er det dog mærkeligt. Cazottes Forhold til de andre – han er baade indenfor og udenfor paa en Gang. Han har rigtig godt af, at han ikke kan faa Brug for de Miniaturemalerier senere hen – for han kan jo ikke sidde i Rom og male Prins Echo. Det er det bedste ved Prins Lothar, - at han kunne hitte paa det Navn"! [The gardener is angry – so angry! – But it is really curious. Cazotte's relationship to the others – he is both inside and outside at the same time. And he really deserves to not benefit from the miniatures later on – since he can't sit in Rome and paint Prince Echo. That is the best thing about Prince Lothar – that he could come up with such a name!]. Neither the gardener, the miniatures or Prince Echo (the suggested name for Lothar and Ludmilla's son) as Clemmesen mentions in the letter appear in the earliest manuscript we have at The Royal Library in Copenhagen. The earliest manuscript at The Royal Library must consequently be a rewriting of the first draft Blixen got back with comments from Clemmesen and Dahl in July 1952.

⁹ "Karen Blixen satte kun yderst sjældent dato og årstal på udkastene." (Selborn 1974, 62) [Blixen only very rarely put date and year on the drafts].

He stayed in Rome for the same length of time as — fifty years earlier — his great namesake Johann Wolfgang Goethe. And at his return to Babenhausen he declared that the Eternal City had had exactly the same effect on his own genius as upon that of the poet. “But”, the old lady concluded, “as unfortunately I am not an expert on Goethe, I cannot tell you exactly what that effect was.” (“Ehrengard,” first four drafts 1952-1961, Capsule 133, Royal Library in Copenhagen)

The above passage has been crossed over in the first revision from 1962 and in the second revision, from the same year, it has been changed to: “If I had really known,” she said, “what kind of man Cazotte was,” but then changed again in the third version from 1962, to the ending we know today:¹⁰

It was here, now, that he had that famous liaison with a cantatrice of the Opera which caused much talk and made his acquaintances smilingly alter his name to that of Casanova. When the Grand Duchess heard of it she was upset. “I had really,” she said, “during that time at Rosenbad, come to have such faith in Geheimrat Cazotte” (Dinesen 1963, 277)

When reading the earliest, and now presumably lost, July 1952 version, Ellen Dahl is not sure what the Goethe allusion means (letter to Karen Blixen July 18, 1952):

Også for mig har den dunkle Punkter. Saaledes ved jeg ikke, skønt jeg netop er i færd med at læse en Bog om Goethe, hvor ogsaa den italienske Rejse og dens

¹⁰ Except for one small detail; Clara Selborn changed *Herr* Cazotte to *Geheimrat* Cazotte in her last revision in 1963 before the final print (manuscript in Capsule 133 at the Karen Blixen Archive at The Royal Library in Copenhagen).

Indflydelse paa hans Produktion behandles, hvori denne falder sammen med Hr. Cazottes? (Blixen 1996b, 94)

(Also for me it has dim points. Thus, I don't know, even though I am just reading a book about Goethe where his journey to Italy and its influence on his production is also treated, how this coincides with Cazotte's?)

We do not know where Blixen got the idea of Goethe's arrested love life from as early as 1952, eleven years before Eissler's book came out. In Bondesson's register over the books in Blixen's library, we, however, find a book that could have lead her on the track with regard to the plot and inspired her to write "Ehrengard."¹¹ In January 1952 Danish poet and close friend Thorkild Bjørnvig gave her Thomas Mann's book *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) in an English translation from 1948 (Bondesson 1982, 118). The dedication in the book dates the event to "Sletten d. 25 Januar, 1952" (Bondesson 1982, 119), which corresponds very well with the fact that Blixen started working on "Ehrengard" in that very same spring. *Lotte in Weimar* is the story of Charlotte Kestner, who was the historical model for Goethe's character Lotte in his *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (1774, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*). In his novel, Thomas Mann creates a second meeting between them forty years after, when Charlotte comes to Weimar to try to settle things with Goethe regarding the unhappy love triangle that unfolded when they were both young. The book must have been a major source of inspiration for Blixen, even though we have to remember that Blixen's interest in Goethe emerged early and was already there when she wrote *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), which contains another Goethe-parody: "The Poet." Clara Selborn also noted a strange Goethe/Italy-related incident at Rungstedlund as early as 1944: "Jeg husker det elegante og maleriske syn af Karen Blixen, i slacks og med stor havehat på, siddende med benene oppe i kaminsofaen, grangiveligt lignende et

¹¹ Thanks to Ivan Z. Sørensen and Ole Meyer for directing my attention to this important piece of information.

maleri af “Goethe” i Italien.” (Selborn 1974, 24) [I remember the elegant and picturesque sight of Karen Blixen wearing slacks and a big garden hat, sitting with her legs up on the fireplace couch, looking exactly like a painting of Goethe in Italy]. With these connections to Goethe in mind it seems likely that Blixen put the pieces together herself regarding Goethe’s love life and the role his second trip to Rome played, since she knew a lot about Goethe, artist psychology, sexual sublimation and creativity.¹² Even though it is obvious that Goethe is one of the characters, which Johann W. Cazotte is modeled after, no scholars have so far discovered this “secret note” about Goethe and the crucial role it plays for the interpretation of “Ehregard.”

Johann W. Cazotte and the Comic

“You might call it,” she wrote to the *Ladies’ Home Journal* on June 25 1962, “The Seducer’s Diary” — which is, of course, a quotation from Kierkegaard, but which is here to be taken ironically and might give the reader an idea of the nature of the story” (Langbaum 1964, 274)

With the secret note in mind, we suddenly discover the irony in the title (“The Seducer’s Diary”) that Blixen proposes in the letter to *Ladies Home Journal* and we suddenly understand “the nature of the story” as deeply comical on the part of Johannes the Seducer disguised in the narrative as Johan W. Cazotte. The comical lies in the inversion of common sexual practice for a middle-aged man and the great artist and seducer, who has not yet experienced physical love at the age of forty-five and blushes like a young schoolboy when Ehregard points him out as the father of her child. The

¹² Georg Brandes does not mention anything about Goethe’s sexuality in his Goethe-biography from 1920. Ole Meyer and Poul Behrendt, however, believe it was common knowledge among scholars and writers with particular interest in Goethe at the time, when Blixen wrote “Ehregard” that Goethe was a virgin until his second trip to Italy (personal comments), even though Eissler was the first to publicly claim it in 1963.

inverted power roles between Ehrengard and Johann W. Cazotte also contribute to the comic since the supposedly weak character (Ehrengard), which we up until the final scene have thought to be in the hands of the great artist, suddenly outwits him, thus transforming the supposedly strong character of the story into the underdog. Another comical element in this final scene lies in the involuntariness of the blush. As Kierkegaard's character "Det Unge Menneske" ["The Young Man"] correctly observes in "In vino veritas:"

I Henseende til det Uvilkaarlige er Modsigelsen oprindelig tilstede, som den: at man af et frit Fornuftvæsen ikke venter det Uvilkaarlige. Naar man saaledes antog, at Paven i det Øieblik han skulde sætte Kronen paa Napoleons Hoved kom til at hoste, eller at Brud og Brudgom i Vielsens høitidelige Øieblik kom til at nyse, saa viser det Comiske sig. Jo mere den givne Leilighed accentuerer det frie Fornuftsvæsen, desto mere comisk bliver det Uvilkaarlige. (Kierkegaard 1845, n. pag.)

As for the involuntary, the contradiction is initially present: that we do not expect the involuntary from a free rational being. Suppose, for instance, that the pope started coughing the very moment he was about to place the crown on Napoleon's head or that in the solemn moment of exchanging vows the bride and bridegroom began to sneeze – the comic would be apparent. *The more the given occasion emphasizes the free rational being, the more comic the involuntarily becomes.* (Kierkegaard 1988, 41, my italics)

In this case we see the older, rational, powerful artist, who has so far controlled the events, involuntarily lose control over the color of his face. Together with the sudden inversion of the power roles it arguably places him in the category of the comical.

Turning Pale: Ehrengard and the Tragic

Johann W. Cazotte is obviously playing the comical role in the novella but another fall that carries a tragic dimension also takes place in the final scene, even though it has so far been overlooked by scholars:

To Ehrengard, too, something was happening as here she stood up straight, face to face with Kurt's straight figure. She too felt, in a new way, the depth of life. There was a sweetness in it which she till now had never known of, *there was a terrible sadness as well*. She would never have believed, had anybody told her, that to meet and part with Kurt von Blittersdorff could mean so much. The recognition at this moment was, she felt, the outcome of her stay at Rosenbad. (Dinesen 1963, 274-5, my italics)

What Ehrengard in this moment discovers is the implications of Johann W. Cazotte's plan that despite marrying Kurt von Blittersdorff, she will forever be isolated and alienated in this relationship, since she, due to the machinations of Johann W. Cazotte, now possesses a deeper knowledge of the world (about how to manipulate and seduce) that she will never be able to communicate to Kurt. As the Plutarch quote, which is the motto for Kierkegaard's essay "Adskilligt om Ægteskabet mod Indsigelser" ["Some Reflections on Marriage in Answer to Objections"] in "In vino veritas" rightfully states: "Den Bedragne er visere end den Ikke-Bedragne" (Kierkegaard 1845,

n. pag.) [“The deceived is wiser than one not deceived” (Kierkegaard 1988, 88)]. This also means that Johann W. Cazotte eventually gets from Ehrengard what he wants (her spiritual fall), but the physical manifestation turns out to be the opposite of what he had hoped for (the blush); when all the blood leaves her face and she turns deadly pale:

Ehrengard had grown pale [...] So colorless did her face become that the light in her eyes seemed dark in it, like two cavities. Then she turned and looked straight at Herr Cazotte. Under her glance the gentleman rose from the bed. The girl’s glance was strong and direct, like an arrow’s course from the bowstring to the target. In it she flung her past, present and future at his feet [...] “It is he,” she said. “Herr Cazotte is the father of my child.” (Dinesen 1963, 275-6)

Both Kierkegaard and Blixen work consciously with the physical reactions of “blushing” and turning “pale” as significant outer symbols of inner emotions. In “Ehrengard” the notion of “pale” is connected to intellectual and spiritual recognitions with tragic implications (which seems to be the case for most of her tales). Ehrengard turns pale, when she invites Johann W. Cazotte to come and paint her naked at the lake: “As she lifted her head (...) she was *a little pale*, but she spoke in a clear voice” (Dinesen 1963, 257, my italics), which is also the case when she finally succeeds in seducing Cazotte at the loft: “Ehrengard had grown pale (Dinesen 1963, 275). Kurt also turns “very pale” in the final scene when Ehrengard asks him to give up his love for her forever (Dinesen 1963, 274). It is, however, the description of Ehrengard’s face: “So colorless did her face become that the light in her eyes seemed dark in it, like two cavities” (Dinesen 1963, 275) resembling the skull of a dead human being that most directly points to the tragic implications of her newborn recognition and “the terrible sadness” that follows this fall; that when this higher level of reflection is born, something else in her dies. She will now forever be disconnected from her former naïve self and more

devastatingly, from her future husband Kurt. In the beginning of the novella, Ludmilla encourages Ehrengard to have a secret. She eventually gets it, but unfortunately with the wrong man:

“Have you two ever had a secret together?” “Yes,” Ehrengard again answered.

“When the boys had done something bad, and I helped them to keep it from Papa.” The Princess was silent, then suddenly exclaimed in a low voice: “Try to have a secret with him [Kurt, my comment]. Something that, in the whole world, only you and he know of. You will be feeling, then, that he is you and you are he.

(Dinesen 1963, 236-7)

Through the secrets that Ehrengard and Johann W. Cazotte share, that he has painted her naked at the lake every morning for a full week, that she invited him to do it and that he – the great seducer – is a virgin, he and she will forever be united because they will never be able to share these secrets with anyone else within the frame of this nineteenth-century environment. This is an ironic fulfillment of Ludmilla’s description that “he is you and you are he,” since it happened with the wrong man and Ehrengard’s nemesis.

Tragedy and Gender

In a bold statement about woman and tragedy in Kierkegaard’s “In vino veritas,” Constantin Constantius concludes: “Gjører ligesaa kjære Drikkebrødre, og forstaaer nu Aristoteles. Han bemærker rigtigt, at kvinden ikke ret er brugbar i Tragødien” (Kierkegaard 1845, n. pag.) [“Do likewise dear drinking companions, and then understand Aristotle. He makes the correct observation that woman is really not usable in tragedy” (Kierkegaard 1988, 54)]. In the final scene Blixen seems to think the opposite of Constantin, when she lets Johann W. Cazotte blush and Ehrengard grow

pale. Comedy, not tragedy, is the privilege of *man*, in this case Johann W. Cazotte, and tragedy the privilege of *woman*, in this case Ehrengard. This brings us back to a crucial sentence in the beginning of the novella where a double movement of the story is indicated, but never taken up again: “So to begin with, my dearest, I shall inform you that the stage of *our little comedy or tragedy* was the lovely country and the fine city of Babenhausen” (Dinesen 1963, 215-6, my italics). The Old Lady never elaborates on the story as being either “a comedy or a tragedy,” but the logical answer to this question is, as we understand from the final scene, that the story is *both*, depending on which one of the main protagonists we are considering. In Blixen’s world comedy is viewed as the divine poetic contradiction of life, and tragedy is the only way to achieve a deeper and more profound relation to life. Blixen reserves comedy for the “Gods,” in this case the God-like figures in her tales, which in almost all cases are men: Rosendaal in “Carnival,” “The Councilor” in “The Poet,” Prince Potenziani in “The Roads Around Pisa,” The Uncle in “Sorrow-Acre,” Mr. Clay in “The Immortal Story” and Johann W. Cazotte here in “Ehrengard.” These seemingly omnipotent lords, artists and businessmen are often sexually impotent, which is exactly the comic contradiction. In Blixen’s world, tragedy on the other hand is the exclusive privilege of common people and women. Examples are plenty: Polly in “Carnival,” Agnese in “The Roads Around Pisa,” Anne-Marie in “Sorrow-Acre,” Miss Virginie in “The Immortal Story,” Malli in “Tempest” and of course Ehrengard, to mention a few. Both comedy and tragedy are closely connected to Blixen’s idea of nemesis. Comedy is the nemesis of the privileged (which includes men) and tragedy is the nemesis of the common people (which includes women). This is a consistent juxtaposition throughout Karen Blixen’s production.

This interpretation of the two roles concerning the comic and the tragic is supported when examining the developments of the two characters in the various drafts of “Ehrengard” at The Royal Library in Copenhagen. Johann W. Cazotte’s birthday is changed from the “twenty-first of May” to “first of April, a true fool” in the revisions following the first draft, sharpening the comical aspect of

his character. In the first draft we also find the crucial passage about Ehrengard's transformation in the last scene to be much less tragic compared to the final version: "She would not have believed, had anybody told her so, that to part with Kurt von Blittersdorff could mean such a *strange physical sadness*." This passage is subsequently changed to the much stronger: "there was a *terrible sadness* as well" (Dinesen 1963, 275, my italics in both passages) as we know it from the final version. The tragic element of the Alpen-Glügen phenomenon in connection to Ehrengard's fall was also sharpened. The passage "black night will follow" is missing from the Alpen-Glügen passage in the first version, but later added as the tragic contours of Ehrengard's character became clearer for Blixen (Dinesen 1963, 234). Together with the deliberate cover up of "the secret note" about Goethe, these are the major changes Karen Blixen made to the novella during the many revisions. If she had kept the obvious Goethe allusion in the closing lines, the novella would have become too light and jokey, pushing the allusions to "Forførerens Dagbog" and the tragic elements with regard to Ehrengard too much in the background. Blixen was also adamant that the tales intended for magazine publication should in no way be second rate (Selborn 1974, 45, 61), proudly following the motto of Babette from "Babette's Feast:"¹³ "Through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost!" (Dinesen 1963, 59), which is another reason for why she had to hide the comical Goethe allusion, so she would not jeopardize the serious elements and her own artistic standards with regard to this, her last, magazine story.

The Names: Authorial Double Irony

Karen Blixen's use of puns is for the most part inspired by one of her favorite authors William Shakespeare.¹⁴ Henri Bergson defines the pun as a sentence or utterance where "two

¹³ Published before "Ehrengard" as a magazine story in *The Ladies Home Journal* in June 1950 (Langbaum 1964, 248).

¹⁴ Shakespeare's extensive use of sexual puns is described in Rubinstein 2003.

different sets of ideas are expressed, and we are confronted with only one series of words” (Augarde 2003, 205). In “Ehregard” Blixen uses a special variation of the pun; the homophonic pun. A homophone is defined as one of two or more words, such as *night* and *knight* that are pronounced the same but differ in meaning, origin, and sometimes spelling. When choosing the names in “Ehregard,” Blixen had an astute eye for their hidden homophonic qualities with regard to the English, Danish and German pronunciations. When we analyze the hidden homophonic qualities of the names, The Old Lady’s introduction suddenly becomes loaded with a deep, underlying irony created on the level of the author:

I am not going to give you the real name of this country, nor of the ladies and gentlemen within my tale [...] I shall inform you that the stage of our little comedy or tragedy was the lovely country and fine city of Babenhausen, and that you will be devoting your attention to a chronicle of the Grand Ducal house of Fugger-Babenhausen. And as in the course of my narrative new gentlemen and ladies make their appearance in it, I shall endeavor to find a new *noble* name for each of them. (Dinesen 1963, 215-6, my italics)

It is not just the names of the characters, but also the names of cities and places that turn out to be anything but “noble” when analyzing their homophonic qualities. The Grand Ducal house *Fugger-Babenhausen* becomes saucy *Fucker-Babe-n-hausen* when pronounced in English. We also find Ludmilla to be from the princely house of *Leuchtenstein*. *Leucht* means *bright* in German, but when pronounced in Danish the word sounds like *lugt*, meaning *smell*, and as we see in this passage, it is obviously on the level of the author meant to have a clear sexual connotation:

Within the cluster of Leuchtenstein maidens the artist had *scented* a quality of unconscious seductiveness, that rose-like fullness and fragrance which guilelessly allured the passer-by to pick the flower. (Dinesen 1963, 222, my italics)

We also find Ehrengard's father General von Schreckenstein to be: "first married to a von Kniphausen and by her had five sons" (Dinesen 1963, 228). *Knip* sounds like *knep* in Danish, which is the short form of the infinitive *kneppe* (slang for sexual intercourse) and the young couple must indeed have been very active since they had five sons. The first part of Ehrengard's name, *Ehre*, means *honor* in German and Danish (*ære*) and the second part *gard* is a homophone on the English word *guard*. When combining the Danish and English sounds, Ehrengard's name means "Guard of Honor." If we also take a closer look at Ehrengard's last name, von Schreckenstein, then *schreck* means *skræk* in Danish (*terror* in English) and the German *von* means *from* in English. This means that Ehrengard's full name, when combining the words and sounds from Danish and English, means *The Guard of Honor from the Area of Terror*. The joke here is of course that this *area of terror* is bodily female sexuality (embodied by the young maiden of Ehrengard), which is the only area that the great Johann W. Cazotte has so far not dared entering. In the novella we also find the young nurse's name to be Lispeth with *p*, instead of the *b* we normally find in the Danish name and this is obviously a homophonic pun on *pet*, since she is nursing and petting the child (Clara Selborn changed this name to Lisbeth in the Danish version¹⁵).

The ironical and astute twist in the tale with regard to these names is that they are in fact historically correct e.g. Fugger-Babenhause, Kniphausen, Leuchtenstein, Schreckenstein and Ehrengard.¹⁶ The Old Lady is using the names to protect the historical persons in her tale, while Blixen behind her back is using them as homophonic sexual puns. But since the names are in fact

¹⁵ Clara Selborn's Danish translation in Capsule 133 in the Blixen Archive at The Royal Library in Copenhagen.

¹⁶ Ehrengard Melusine Baroness von der Schulenburg, Duchess of Kendal and Duchess of Munster (1667-1743) is a historical person.

real names of German nobility, Karen Blixen could – tongue in cheek – fence off any possible accusations regarding the saucy and sexual content of the names, since they are in fact historically correct, and then, why would they be vulgar?

Kierkegaard and the Secret Note

The fact that Blixen chose a female name ending in *gard*, when dealing with a work by Kierkegaard is also not a coincidence. *Gard*, *gaard* and *guard* are homophones when pronounced in English and when we combine the Danish and English meanings of the two words *Kierke* and *gard* it means “Guard of The Church” (Christianity). This stands out as a significant contrast to the connotations of Ehrengard’s name “The Guard of Honor from the Area of Terror” (female sexuality). In the 1953 edition of the selected diary entries *Søren Kierkegaards dagbøger* (Rohde 1953) we find this quote on the first page before the introduction:

Efter min Død skal Ingen i mine Papirer (det er min Trøst) finde en eneste Oplysning om hvad der egentlig har udfyldt mit Liv; finde den Skrift i mit Inderste, der forklarer Alt, og som ofte gjør hvad Verden vilde kalde Bagateller til uhyre vigtige Begivenheder for mig, og hvad jeg anseer for Ubetydelighed, naar jeg tager den hemmelige Note bort, der forklarer det. (Rohde 1953, 6)¹⁷

After my death no one will find in my papers (this is my consolation) the least information about what has *really* filled my life, find *that* script in my innermost being that explains everything, and which often, for me, makes what the world would call trifles into events of immense importance, and which I too consider of

¹⁷ The title of Poul Behrendt’s book *Den hemmelige note* [The Secret Note] is inspired by this quote (Behrendt 2007, 7).

no significance once I take away the secret note that explains it. (Kierkegaard 2008, 157)

This 1953 edition is to be found in the collection of books in Karen Blixen's Library (Bondesson 1982, 344) and it came into her possession while working on "Ehregard" (1952-62). When counting in the secret note about Goethe as being a virgin up until his journey to Italy, the sexual content of the novella and the hidden homophonic meaning of Kierkegaard's name, it seems plausible that Blixen on the level of the author in "Ehregard" also suggests that Kierkegaard was a virgin ("Guard of The Church") but – contrary to Goethe – stayed so for his whole life. There is nothing – neither in his own diary entries or in the biographies so far written – that indicates that Kierkegaard ever had a sexual relationship with a woman, and it seems likely, with Blixen's insight into Goethe's late blooming physical sexuality and knowledge about artist sublimation, that this was also Blixen's interpretation of Kierkegaard's "secret note." In a letter to Aage Henriksen from July 29, 1953, while she was working on "Ehregard," she mentions that they have discussed Søren Kierkegaard's body and his secret:

Jeg vil gerne bemærke at jeg aldrig har sagt eller tænkt mig, at "Hemmeligheden ved S.K. var hans ubehagelige Krop", – det er langt fra mig at paatage mig nogen Forklaring af S.K. eller hans Hemmelighed. Min Udtalelse skulde kun forklare, hvorfor det "personlige Forhold til S.K.", som jeg gennem Deres Bog paa en Maade følte at være kommet til, altid maa forblive *noget* fjernt eller afmaalt. Jeg kunde jo falde Shakespeare om Halsen og kysse Heine, – men jeg vilde, i denne Forstand, – allerhøjest i uhyggelig Grad falde S.K. for Brystet, – ja, undskyld et dumt Ordspil! (Blixen 1996b, 150)

(I would like to note that I have never said or thought that the “The secret about S.K.” was his unpleasant body, – it is not within my limits to take upon me any explanation of S.K. or his secret. My remark was only supposed to explain, why the “personal relationship” to S.K.”, which I have felt in a way through your book, always will stay *something* distant or formal. I could throw myself in the arms of Shakespeare and kiss Heine, – but I would, in that sense, – at the very utmost be an offence to S.K., – to use a silly pun!)

In the letter Blixen uses an indirect message to describe her relation to Kierkegaard, which is also delivered in the shape of a pun: “falde S.K. for Brystet.” This sentence literally means: “fall to his chest” but originally refers to an uncomfortable feeling of pressure on the chest caused by bad air or smoke. In a metaphorical sense, it however means “to be offended by” something or someone. Blixen uses the pun on one level to describe her lack of erotic attraction to Kierkegaard as a contrast to the erotic loaded descriptions of her relationship to Shakespeare and Heine: “throw myself in the arms of Shakespeare” and “kiss Heine.” On another level she uses the pun to describe her own humorous approach to the erotic, which she also has in common with Shakespeare and Heine, but which she is convinced would be an offence to Kierkegaard. As Sørensen correctly observes in this passage dealing with Blixen’s approach to humor in relation to Kierkegaard:

En mere afgørende anstødssten for Kierkegaard ville dog være, at for Blixen er humoren ”det højeste”, hvor den for Kierkegaard befinder sig på et stadium ”før” det religiøse, før troen, før kristendommen. (Sørensen 2002, 153)

(A more decisive stumbling block for Kierkegaard would be the fact that for Blixen humor is "the highest," where it for Kierkegaard is situated on a level "before" the religious, before faith, before Christianity.)

Kierkegaard was very clever with regard to protecting his own legacy, which means that we will never know for sure what this "secret note" was about, or if there was any secret at all, and that that is in fact the secret as Poul Behrendt points out as a possible interpretation (Behrendt 2007, 7). But in this humorous novella dealing with two male giants of world literature – Goethe and Kierkegaard – Blixen for certain seems to indicate that the secret note behind their success as artists and philosophers was sexual sublimation. She is also unable to hide that she finds this contrast between spiritual omnipotence and physical impotence in a man to be highly comic – even emasculating. As Sørensen correctly observes with regard to Blixen and her view on humor:

Den store Humor hedder Høffdings berømte værk fra 1916, hvori han – inspireret af, men også i polemik med Kierkegaard – hævder humorens førsteplads i en verdslig, anstændig og ansvarsbevidst livsanskuelse. Og der er ingen tvivl om at Blixen står ved hans side når han fastslår: "Den store Humor vil være forbunden med en stadig Søgen og staar i Modsætning til al dogmatisk Visdom, hvad enten den optræder i den sunde Menneskeforstands, Videnskabens eller Religionens Navn." (Sørensen 2002, 155)

(*The Great Humor* is the name of Høffding's most famous work from 1916, where he – inspired by, but also in contention with Kierkegaard – claims the supreme status of humor in a profane, decent and responsible view of life. And there is no doubt that Blixen is on his side when he establishes: "The great humor

will be connected to a continuous quest in opposition to all dogmatic insight, whether that be in the name of healthy common sense, science or religion.”)

In her last big opus – ”Ehrengard” – Blixen certainly upheld this ideal and leaves a legacy as one of the great humorists of world literature.¹⁸

¹⁸ Very special thanks go to Poul Behrendt for his tireless feedback, help and invaluable comments throughout the long process of writing this paper. To Lasse Horne Kjældgaard for feedback on the final draft of the manuscript and to Mark Mussari for help with the translations of the Danish quotes. Finally, to Ivan Z. Sørensen for kindly giving me access to his extensive material about the connections between Karen Blixen and Søren Kierkegaard.

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“Ehrengard”: Theoretical and Methodical Reflections

The method I use in the article about “Ehrengard” can be described as comparative, historical and rhetorical. The observations deriving from the comparative studies between Blixen’s novella and Kierkegaard’s works (and “Forførerens Dagbog” in particular) and the close reading I conduct are supported by studies of the original manuscripts (in order to verify the close reading), which add a philological component to the methods employed. In the article I also, employ Poul Behrendt’s narrative theory about “the secret note” as a narrative “super-brig,” which is a rhetorical strategy that comes in the shape of a crucial piece of real, historical information that, when first discovered, becomes the key to the interpretation of the events in the fictional story world and leads to a higher level of understanding of the narrative. This rhetorical strategy is a strategy that Kierkegaard also used as Behrendt correctly observes:

Denne ’hemmelige note’ tydeliggør under alle omstændigheder et dialektisk særtræk ved Karen Blixens vintereventyr, som de deler med Søren Kierkegaards værker fra hans æstetisk-pseudonyme forfatterskab 1843-1846: at hendes historiers mere eller mindre skjulte citater og allusioner ikke bare er referencer til et isoleret tekststed fra et andet værk, men at der fra den citerede sammenhæng, dvs. konteksten i ’fremmedteksten’, falder et fortolkende lys tilbage på momenter eller på helheden i det vintereventyr, hvor referencen indgår. Sande noter til en fortælling af Karen Blixen er ikke bare fodnoter, de er øjenåbnere – af den art, som forandrer, men ikke forklarer alt. (Behrendt 2010a, 459)

In the article, we see how Blixen applies one of Kierkegaard’s rhetorical strategies and turns it against him.⁶⁸ The following chapter was initially part of the original “Ehrengard” article, but was eventually left out. It is added here in order to explain the narrative and rhetorical strategy that Blixen put in use in order to successfully cover up the secret note and obscure the readers understanding of the novella. In the chapter I use some of the latest narrative theory: James Phelan’s theory about character narration and unreliability (Phelan 2005) and Poul Behrendt’s theory about unreliable 3rd person narratives and Ambiguous Discourse (AD) in the works of Karen Blixen (Behrendt and Hansen 2011).

⁶⁸ Recent scholarship have been increasingly aware that Kierkegaard arranged his texts (that on the surface claim to be philosophy or psychology) so they also had a hidden polemical message that only one person (for example P. L. Møller, Heiberg or Regine) or, alternatively, only a circle of people, were able to understand (Behrendt 2005; Behrendt 2007; Bøggild 2005b and Jessen 2010). In Blixen’s case it is only scholars with an extensive knowledge of Kierkegaard (or other writers from world literature, in this case also J. W. Goethe), who are able to understand the secret polemics in her tales. This elusive way of communicating with an inner circle of readers is common of the two.

The “Chinese Puzzle” as a Composition Principle

The narrative structure in ”Ehregard” is very complex. It follows some of Kierkegaard’s strategies but at the same time operates with what we can describe as an unreliable observer narrator that creates ambiguous discourse. This extremely complex narration situation is the main reason why no readers have so far been able to understand the novella. In the following analysis I will explain why using the terminology and categories following what James Phelan outlines in *Living to Tell about it – A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (2005) with one exception: I have decided not to operate with his category “implied author” and instead follow Genette and Walsh, who both agree that this category should be merged with the category of “the author” (Walsh 2007, 82-3). With that in mind, the structure of ”Ehregard” can be described as consisting of four different diegetic levels using Phelan’s terminology:

1. The author (Karen Blixen)
2. A noncharacter [*sic*] narrator (a neuter narrator without any gender, any name, any age or “I”)
3. An observer narrator (the Old Lady)
4. A character narrator (Johann W. Cazotte)

One level from the author we find a noncharacter narrator (a 3rd person narrator—or in Genette’s terminology a “heterodiegetic narrator”), who is introducing the story by telling us that: “*An old lady told this story. A hundred and twenty years ago, she began*” (Dinesen 1993a, 215, author’s italics). This noncharacter narrator also appears in the middle of the novella: “Here, *said the old lady who told the story*, finishes that second part of my story which I have named ‘Rosenbad’” (Dinesen 1993a, 257, author’s italics) and towards the end of the novella: “But as I gave you a prelude to my story, *said the old lady who told it*, I shall give you an epilogue” (Dinesen 1993a, 276, author’s italics). It is only in these three passages we detect this noncharacter narrator, who does not seem to play any other role in the narrative than removing the observer narrator, the Old Lady, from the level of the author. Thus, the agency of narration is quickly passed on to the Old

Lady, who begins her narrative by addressing the audience as a character narrator (1st person): “*I am not going to give you the real name of this country*” (Dinesen 1993a, 215, author’s italics). Throughout the story we find a total of six very short 1st person digressions (Dinesen 1993a, 215, 218, 219, 222, 224, 230), but otherwise the Old Lady narrates the story about Ehrengard and Johann W. Cazotte as a 3rd person past tense narrative (similar to noncharacter narration), which accounts for more than 95 percent of the narrative: “The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Babenhausen for a long time were childless and grieved over *their* lot” (Dinesen 1993a, 216, author’s italics).⁶⁹ Using Phelan’s terminology the Old Lady belongs to the category of the “observer narrator,” which Phelan describes as: “narration by a character narrator who is not a protagonist” and where “our interest ultimately is in the characters other than the character narrator” (Phelan 2005, 198-9). Phelan then goes on to elaborate on different versions of observer narrators:

It is even possible for the observer to be someone who neither affects nor is affected by the main action beyond being moved to pass on the tale (some character narrators who give way to other narrators such as John Ray Jr. fit this pattern; *a character narrator who discovers a story about the past and wants to pass it on would be another example*). (Phelan 2005, 198-9, author’s italics)

The Old Lady fits the description in the last part of the quote, but is at the same time a strange hybrid between a character narrator (referring to herself as “I”) and a noncharacter narrator (3rd person past tense narrator)⁷⁰ claiming insight into events that took place “A hundred and twenty years ago” (Dinesen 1993a, 215) and having access into the minds of people, whom she has never met, and who are long dead and gone. Phelan does recognize that this technique can have some problematic implications:

But it is fair to say that the technique involves high risks as well as high rewards, because it violates other conventions of narration, particularly the dictum that once an author chooses to

⁶⁹ In that sense we are here dealing with a 3rd person past tense narrative disguised as a 1st person narrative. This is the opposite situation of “The Sailor Boy’s Tale” from *Winter’s Tales*, which according to Behrendt and Hansen is a first person narrative disguised as a third person narrative (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 236).

⁷⁰ In that regard she fits three of the four characteristics that Behrendt and Hansen associates with 3rd person past tense narration, except from the obvious fact that she is not a “neuter narrator” (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 227).

use character narration, she should respect the limitations of that character's knowledge and perception. (Phelan 2005, 200)

The implications in "Ehrengard" is that the reader—through suspension of disbelief—grants the Old Lady authority to convey the thoughts and motives of people, who lived a hundred and twenty years ago, which of course far exceeds the limitations of the knowledge she has as a character narrator. Underneath these three diegetic layers (author, noncharacter narrator and observer narrator), we eventually find a fourth: Johann W. Cazotte, who in the letters to Countess von Gassner is narrating from a 1st person point of view: *"I have bared my head to her and left her, any touch of physical delight within her life to her will be but the echo of my celestial embrace"* (Dinesen 1993a, 245). Johan W. Cazotte must here be acknowledged as a character narrator, since he—when writing his letters—is a part of the action, he writes about, even though the Old Lady later got access to the letters through her great grandmother. In the other passages than the letters written in 1st person by J. W. Cazotte, it is however the observer narrator, the Old Lady, who on the basis of Cazotte's letters and the public opinion of him, describes his thoughts and motives in the same way that a noncharacter narrator would in a 3rd person past tense narrative.

On a structural level, Blixen seems inspired by the narrative structure of Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.). Here we not only find four, but five diegetic levels. These levels follow the pattern of one of Kierkegaard's preferred narrative systems, where "den ene Forfatter kommer til at ligge inden i den anden som Æsker i et chinesisisk Æskespil" (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.). The levels in "The Seducer's Diary" consist of 1) Søren Kierkegaard (the author), 2) Victor Eremita (editor of *Enten-Eller*), 3) the character A (author of the preface to "The Seducer's Diary" and the other papers in *Enten-Eller. Første Deel*), 4) Johannes Forførereren (1st person narrator of the diary) and finally 5) Cordelia as a 1st person narrator in the two short letters we find in the foreword to Johannes. Blixen employs this "Chinese Puzzle" narration strategy in "Ehrengard" too. The four levels in "Ehrengard" fit Kierkegaard's levels, since both Victor Eremita and the noncharacter narrator in "Ehrengard" are created merely for the sake of removing the author from the other narrators and the events about which they narrate. The person A in the preface to "Forførerens Dagbog" is an observer-

narrator and corresponds to the Old Lady in "Ehrengard." Johannes Forføreren, who is the character narrator of "Forførerens Dagbog," corresponds to Johan W. Cazotte. We do not have a fifth level in "Ehrengard" that corresponds to Cordelia. This "Chinese Puzzle" structure in both makes it very difficult to figure out who is narrating and from what point of view. Eventually it makes it very difficult to identify the levels of unreliability and authorial irony.

Unreliable Observer Narration and Ambiguous Discourse (AD) in "Ehrengard"

In their groundbreaking article "The Fifth Mode of Representation: Ambiguous Voices in Unreliable Third Person Narration" Poul Behrendt and Per Krogh Hansen break away from the traditional focus on 1st person unreliability and instead develop a theory about unreliability in 3rd person past tense narratives based partly on Blixen's tales (Behrendt and Hansen 2011). Here they suggest a fifth mode of representation they call "Ambiguous Discourse" (AD), which, I will argue, is also the dominant mode of representation in "Ehrengard." Below we find Behrendt and Hansen's model⁷¹ followed by their thorough explanation of how the interplay between FID and CID creates a fifth mode of discourse (AD) that corresponds to the mode of ambiguity and unreliability in Karen Blixen's (Isak Dinesen's) tales:

⁷¹ In a recent article "Hvad er en forfatter?": En dobbeltforelæsning" in Danish literary journal *Kritik*, Behrendt has revised and improved the model (Behrendt 2012, 86).

	Level of Narration: Narrative modes						
	← Narrator dominated/authorial ← External ← Diegesis ← Signs of dating						
	Character dominated/figural → Internal → Mimesis → Signs of deixis →						
Level of Discourse: Modes of Re-presentation:	CID Character-(In)dependent Discourse	← Sliding transitions (÷ inquit)	ID Psycho-Narration	→ Sliding transitions (... , he thought, ...)	FID Narrated monologue	→ Sliding transitions (÷ inquit ÷verbs ÷quotation marks)	DD Quoted Monologue
Person:	Third person (he/she/they)		Third person (he/she/they)		Third person (he/she/they)		First person (I/we)
Inquit:	÷ Mind-inquit		+Mind-inquit (thought that ...)		÷ Mind-inquit		+ Mind inquit: (... thought: '...')
Tense:	Past tense		Past tense		Past tense		Present tense
Syntax:	Main clause		Subordinate Clause		Main clause		Main clause
The fifth mode of representation: AD							
← Identity in → Person, Inquit, Tempus & Syntax The mode of ambiguity and of narrative unreliability							

The convergence of mode 1 and mode 3 is the fifth mode, which we in what follows will label Ambiguous Discourse (AD). This is the mode of ambiguity and unreliability on the level of discourse in the stories of Isak Dinesen (to be discerned from the dual-voice phenomenon on the narrative level of FID). Even though they may seem fraudulently alike, the relation between CID and FID on the discursive level is contradictory (either it is FID, or it is CID). But on the level of narration in FID the relation between the voice of the narrator and the voice of the character is varying according to specific narrative circumstances (see below for 'authorial' and 'figural' invasions, respectively). By causing the reader to confuse the mode of free indirect discourse (FID) with the character-(in)dependent discourse (CID) *and thereby*

authorizing the convictions of a character to be judgments of the impersonal narrator, the fifth mode (AD) leads the reader to overlook story world facts of decisive importance for understanding the story.

However, AD might just as well make the reader convinced of events to come, which in fact will not occur. Thus, it lasted forty years before anybody suspected that the young Norwegian actress of Isak Dinesen's anecdote of destiny, "Tempests", takes her own life at the end of the story (Selboe 1996). Any first-time reader would expect her to resume playing the part of Shakespeare's Ariel (...) One of the reasons why readers never discover this story-world fact but adhere to the conviction that the heroine will continue to play the role of Ariel for the rest of the season, is that the fifth mode of representation is put into use, just a few pages before the end. While the two are embracing each other, we are told about the director and his pupil, in the equivocal manner of AD:

He was not to abandon his precious possession, but she was still his and would remain with him, and he was to see his life's great project realized (Dinesen 1958: 130).

Just as in "Sorrow Acre", the reader—by means of AD—is invited to rely on this not being the personal conviction of a theatre director, but a story-world fact expressed and authorized by the third person narrator. (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 230-1)

The obfuscation technique Blixen employs in "Ehregard" has a lot in common with the one Behrendt and Hansen describe in Blixen's "Sorrow Acre":

Nevertheless, after sunset, on the very day of his arrival to the manor, the nephew will be having a one-night stand with his newly married aunt—thereby begetting an heir to the estate. The point is that no reader of "Sorrow-Acre" has ever been able to grasp this fact when reading the story for the first time. To a first-time reader this simply never happens; *first of all, because it is never explicitly told; secondly—as shown in the above quotation—because the reader is told the exact opposite.* (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 226, author's italics)

No reader of "Ehregard" has so far been able to grasp the fact that Johann W. Cazotte is a virgin because 1) it is never explicitly told (since the observer narrator—the Old Lady—does not know about it) and 2) the reader is in fact told the exact opposite:

The Grand Duchess so far had not favored the friendship, for if Herr Cazotte was famous as a portraitist of fair ladies, he was no less celebrated and talked about as their conqueror and seducer, the irresistible Don Juan of his age. (Dinesen 1993a, 218)

In the first part of the passage the Old Lady is referring to a conviction of the Grand Duchess, and in the second part she is referring to the public opinion about Johan W. Cazotte, starting from "he was no less celebrated." The Old Lady passes on this information to the reader as a story-world fact, even though it is just her *referring* to the common gossip about J. W. Cazotte as the great seducer of the day, which is a common

notion that the Grand Duchess too personally subscribes. Since the Old Lady is unaware of the secret note she is misreporting⁷² (although in good faith) on the basis of the Grand Duchess' and the public's misevaluation of Johan W. Cazotte and his skills as a physical seducer. The passage is an example of AD since the reader is invited to believe that what is only the Grand Duchess and the public opinions view on Cazotte (FID) is in fact a story world fact authorized by the 3rd person observer narrator the Old Lady (corresponding to CID in the model). It is; admittedly, easy to understand why most readers buy into this claim that Cazotte is a real Don Juan, since he supports and promotes this notion in a letter to Countess von Gassner. Here he deliberately obfuscates his embarrassing secret with a bold statement about his own seduction skills, thus becoming guilty of a severe case of mis- and underreporting with regard to his own (missing) erotic skills: "I might, upon your friendly advice, undertake to seduce her, for she is impulsive and unreflecting, in a particular impetuous moment of hers. And, Madame, it would mean nothing. For her ruin, in such case would be a fact and a reality" (Dinesen 1993a, 244). Based on Johann W. Cazotte's own claim and the image of him passed on by the Old Lady, the reader readily accepts the common notion that whoever is the painter of nudes *must* of course also be a seducer and a Don Juan in a physical sense. Another crucial piece of misinformation, which has to do with our female protagonist Ehrengard, also has severe implications for the final interpretation of the novella. It is the Old Lady's "en passant" mentioning of Ehrengard's and Kurt von Blittersdorff's reconciliation and betrothal towards the very end of the novella:

By the mediation of Prince Lothar and Princess Ludmilla a full understanding was obtained. A week later the betrothed couple Kurt and Ehrengard was present at the baptism of the newborn Prince in the Dom of Babenhausen. (Dinesen 1993a, 276)

This passage indeed suggests a happy ending, since the Old Lady evaluates the situation as "a full understanding was obtained." Scholars have so far accepted this statement as a story-world fact, when it is in fact, again, the Old Lady's (subjective) interpretation of the couple's reconciliation. It would of course not be difficult for Ludmilla, Lothar and Ehrengard to explain to Kurt the rational and honorable reason (to protect the house of

⁷² "Misreporting" and "misevaluation" are among the terms Phelan uses to describe different aspects of unreliability (Phelan 2005, 51).

Fugger-Babenhausen) behind Ehrengard's lie about the origin of the child and it also seems very plausible that he would accept this explanation and thus marry her in "full understanding." But the underlying problem here is that Kurt has not been able to grasp the subtle subtext on the loft: the demonic and sophisticated seduction battle going on between Ehrengard and Johann W. Cazotte and the secret they share together, which she will never be able to share with Kurt (so no "full understanding" between them, on this level). The main question here is: is it possible for Ehrengard to enter into this relationship with Kurt on equal terms after her spiritual fall at the loft and the secret that forever unites her and Johann W. Cazotte? The answer is of course no, since her fall is irreversible. The "terrible sadness" has already invaded her existence and will forever alienate her in her relationship to Kurt—and that is the hidden tragic point behind the narrative illusion of the happy ending.⁷³ The logical outcome in "Ehrengard" would have been that she as a result of this fall would have had to leave Kurt forever in one way or another as the female protagonists do in "Storme," "Heloïse" and "Alkmene." Or at least the story would indicate how lonely and isolated she would become in this spiritual "mes-alliance" of a marriage following her crucial transformation, as we see is Blixen's more logical solution following the fall of the female protagonists in "Ringen" and "En Historie om en Perle." Since the Old Lady is not aware of Johann W. Cazotte's secret, she can't help misreading and misevaluating the chain of events and thus misjudges Ehrengard's character and underestimates her level of consciousness. This means that the Old Lady both misreads and misevaluates the events and the characters with the unavoidable implication that her narrative becomes a severe case of misreporting, which makes her an *unreliable observer narrator*.

⁷³ This interpretation is furthermore supported by the fact that the loft scene takes place on the evening of July 14th, which is the date of the beginning of the French Revolution. This date is even mentioned twice in the novella: "On the morning of the fourteenth of July (...) Thus it happened that in the afternoon of the fourteenth of July the husband brought his cart to the gate of the park" (Dinesen 1993a, 260-1) and that is of course not a coincidence. Throughout her production Blixen juxtaposes the personal fall of her characters (in this case Ehrengard and Johann W. Cazotte, who both experience a fall on that particular day) with the French Revolution as the historical parallel, since the individual, the self-made man from the Bourgeoisie, is here introduced as the new ideal through a showdown with the nobility. In Blixen's world this new Bourgeoisie equals the new situation Adam and Eve find themselves in after they have been expelled from paradise and are no longer granted limitless resources by God, but instead have to work to sustain life. Being expelled also entails—and these are the most important implications—that they are now subjected to tragedy, pain and death (Genesis 3:19).

Behrendt and Hansen describe the implications of various levels of unreliability with regard to “Sorrow-Acre” in this way:

As a result, there are not only two but three levels involved in the experience and interpretation of unreliability (...) There is the first level, on which the reader is lead astray by the ambiguity on the level of discourse in FID and his or her “willing suspension of disbelief” [the information about Johann W. Cazotte as the great seducer of the day presented in the authoritative voice of The Old Lady, my comment]. There is the second level, as the reader discovers the deceit of the author-narrator, recognizing the mimicry between the third and first mode on the level of discourse in FID [when we realize that this information is not an authorized fact, but just the “talk of the town” reported to the reader by The Old Lady, my comment], *and finally there is the third level, that of the author; when the narrative deceit is discovered to be an ironic means to heightened insight* into the collisions between the Old and the New World [in this case the irony that a painter of nudes is in fact not a great seducer but a forty-five year old virgin, my comment] including the reader as a part of the dilemma. (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 234, author’s italics)

An example of authorial irony in “Ehregard,” that we are only able to detect on this third level, is found in the following passage where Johann W. Cazotte is spending the first night of July alone in the serene surroundings of Schloss Rosenbad.

“And even little Johann Wolfgang Cazotte,” he thought, “has been fitted in very prettily and is indeed at the moment indispensable to the mighty whole. As what?” After a pause he answered himself: “As a small, innocent and happy, wet and dirty satyr in the big dark woods.” (Dinesen 1993a, 249)

From the secret note we understand that the word “innocent” is here to be taken literally and that Johann W. Cazotte is everything but a “satyr.” This makes him stand out as a comic, naïve character in these highly erotic surroundings of blossoming flowers and moist morning dew; a Don Quixote in an erotic landscape that he is in fact not at all a master of, even though the narrator of the story claims the opposite. The passage can only be understood on the level of the author as authorial irony after the reader has discovered the secret note about Johan W. Cazotte. The secret note thus becomes *the key* to the understanding of authorial irony in “Ehregard.” According to Behrendt and Hansen we are not able to detect this irony in the voice of the narrator(s) itself, without shifting the perspective to the level of the author:

This means that the irony connected to narrative unreliability, in the case of “Sorrow-Acre”, is not fully discovered until the final shift on the third level, which is that of the author. The irony is never immediately audible and cannot be detected as a part of the narrator’s voice as

long as it is perceived as either CID or FID. It exclusively depends on the reader's tacit recognition. (Behrendt and Hansen 2011, 235)

As readers we must "see" the author "seeing" the characters "seeing" the events in order to detect their lack of coherent view on the story world facts. It is in the discrepancy between the observer narrator's interpretation and understanding of the events and the story world facts that we detect the authorial irony. In the end Ehrengard turns out to be the only character in the story that is able to see through Johan W. Cazotte's scheme and understand his psychology and motives, and that is of course why she has the power to manipulate and seduce him in the final scene at the loft. The reader has to acquire the same level of consciousness as Ehrengard in order to fully understand the novella and that requires a particular knowledge about the biographical Goethe and the biographical Kierkegaard. This level of consciousness coincides with the level of the author.

"Ehrengard": Additional observations

"Det høieste hedenske Udtryk derfor er, at det Erotiske er det Comiske." (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

Kierkegaard's Secret Note

In the article about "Ehrengard" I suggest that Kierkegaard was a virgin and that that is how Blixen understood his secret note: "den Skrift i mit Inderste, der forklarer alt" (Kierkegaard 1953, first page before "Indledning"). In this chapter I will present a couple of additional observations in order to back up this claim. In his famous, yet enigmatic, diary entry from 1846, a time when Kierkegaard is about to conclude his writing career and apply for a position as a priest, he describes a certain physical and/or psychological condition that has caused him infinite pain and hardship. The diary entry is titled "Saadan har jeg forstaaet mig selv i hele min Forfattervirksomhed":

Skjøndt ingen Ven af Medvidere, skjøndt absolut utilbøielig til at tale med Andre om mit Inderste; mener jeg dog og har jeg meent, at det er et Mskes Pligt ikke at overspringe den Instants som det er at beraadføre sig med et andet Msk; kun at dette ikke bliver en pianket Fortrolighed, men alvorlig og officiel Meddelelse. Jeg har derfor talt med min Læge, om han meente at hiint Misforhold i min Bygning mell. det Legemlige og det Psychiske lod sig hæve, saa jeg kunde realisere det Almene. Det har han betvivlet; jeg har spurgt ham, om han meente, at Aand var istand ved Villien at omskabe ell. omdanne et saadant Grund-Misforhold, han

betvivlede; han vilde end ikke tilraade mig at sætte hele min Villies-Kraft i Bevægelse, om hvilken han har en Forestilling, da jeg kunde sprænge det Hele. Fra det Øieblik har jeg valgt. Hiint sørgelige Misforhold, med samt dets Lidelser (*der upaatvivligt vilde have gjort de Fleste til Selvmordere* af dem som havde igjen Aand nok til at fatte Qvalens hele Elendighed) har jeg anseet for *min Pæl i Kjødet, min Grændse, mit Kors; jeg har meent, at dette var det dyre Kjøb hvorfor Gud i Himlene har solgt mig en Aands-Kraft*, der blandt Medlevende søger sin Lige. Dette opblæser mig ikke, *thi jeg er dog knuset* [these italics *thi jeg er dog knuset* are original, the rest in this quote mine], mit Ønske er dog bleven mig den *daglig bittre Smerte og Ydmygelse*. (Kierkegaard 1846b, "Journalen," n. pag.)

In his book about Kierkegaard, Brandes also elaborates on the nature of this enigmatic condition. He also cites the entire quote above, when he discusses the possible causes for Kierkegaard's painful and desperate situation (Brandes 1877, 70). This particular diary entry is also found in the Rohde's book *Søren Kierkegaard's dagbøger* that was in Blixen's library when she died (Kierkegaard 1953, 41-2). The general explanation for what the scholarship believes Kierkegaard is hinting at in the diary entry, is that the nature of this disease, Kierkegaard's secret note, was his "tungsind" (melancholia or depression),⁷⁴ which Brandes also mentions (Brandes 1877, 67-71). Brandes then, however, goes on to make another, much more audacious conclusion, which is probably why he put it near the end of a footnote (!):

Denne Modsigelse, sammenholdt med alle de foregaaende Udtalelser, *peger hen i Retning af det Sexuelle* som det i særlig Forstand Legemlig - Sjælelige, *der fremdeles særlig maatte komme i Betragtning ved Indgaaelsen af et Ægteskab*. (Smlgn. ogsaa Notitserne om Abailard E. P. I 325 og 444.) (Brandes 1877, 71, author's italics)

Here between the lines, Brandes strongly indicates that Kierkegaard was impotent, or alternatively had other issues with regard to his sexual performance (maybe caused by his mind) that prevented him from consummating a marriage.⁷⁵ This also explains the extremely strong words Kierkegaard is using when he describes his sad condition "der upaatvivligt ville have gjort de Fleste til Selvmordere," "jeg er dog Knuset" and "den daglig bittre Smerte og Ydmygelse" (Kierkegaard 1846b, n. pag.). It also explains why

⁷⁴ This is also the explanation that Blixen's sister Ellen Dahl delivers in her Kierkegaard essay (Dahl 1932).

⁷⁵ Which was also the case for the impotent Prince Potenziani in Blixen's "The Roads Round Pisa." We all know that Pisa is most famous for its Leaning Tower, which is an ironic allusion to the Prince's embarrassing condition. Blixen's narratives swarm with men, who for various reasons are unable to have a sexual relationship with a woman: Councilor Mathiesen in "The Poet," Rosendaal in "Carnival," Prince Potenziani in "The Roads Round Pisa," Mr. Clay in "The Immortal Story," Herr Sørensen in "Tempest" and J. W. Cazotte in "Ehregard."

Kierkegaard in no way expects Regine to marry him if he told her about the real nature of his condition:

Han kunde ikke overvinde sig til at give den sande Forklaring af det kun tilsyneladende krænkende Skridt, han agtede at foretage. Han ansaa sig for saa høit elsket, at et saa pludseligt Brud vilde foraarsage hans Elskede den største maaskee dræbende Smerte. (Brandes 1877, 71-2)

Impotence, or another type of sexual dysfunction, was the secret condition that prevented Kierkegaard from having a sexual relationship, thus from marrying Regine. This also explains why Kierkegaard knows he is in the right, even though nobody from the outside understands the break-up and scorns him for it. Kierkegaard *is in the right*, but for good reasons he is completely unable to communicate it to anyone. In that regard his situation is similar to that of Abraham, who knows that he is in the right, but looks like a madman from the outside. The impossibility of having a sexual relationship, whatever the physical or psychological causes, was Kierkegaard's painful "Pæl i Kødets," the secret note that explains everything, and Blixen had figured it out. Maybe from reading Brandes book and/or from her conversations with Aage Henriksen in combination with the diary entry from Rohde's book that came into her possession during the 1950s. We also know that Kierkegaard's posthumous work "Synspunktet paa min Forfatter-Virksomhed" was in Blixen's library (Bondesson 1982, 343). The essay was written in 1848 (but published posthumously 1859) just a few years after the above diary entry from 1846. Here Kierkegaard claims that his whole authorship from the very beginning was religious. When we compare the title of this essay "Synspunktet paa min Forfatter-Virksomhed" with the title of the diary entry about his painful dysfunction "Saadan har jeg forstaaet mig selv i hele min Forfattervirksomhed" (Kierkegaard 1846b, n. pag.) we see the irony. With her usual sense for down-to-earth explanations, her affinity for irony and her self-proclaimed right to poke fun at everything, Blixen understood what was going on, even though she never mentioned it directly in her letters⁷⁶ or in her tales and had to cover it up behind the secret note about Goethe.

⁷⁶As Aage Henriksen observes: "Enhver, som læser den, vil tydeligt kunne se, at Karen er sig fuldt bevidst, at hendes privatbreve før eller siden vil komme til at tilhøre offentligheden. Mere fortrolige tilkendegivelser blev forbeholdt samtaler." (Henriksen 1985, 92)

6. “THE POET” / “DIGTEREN”

The article was submitted to the German (Kiel) based journal *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* in the beginning of April 2013. It has not yet been peer reviewed. In the article, I use Blixen’s original English version “The Poet” from *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) as the starting point for my analysis, but all the English quotes in this article are juxtaposed with quotes from Blixen’s Danish version “Digteren” from *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) because they make the connections to Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* even clearer. As I mentioned in the foreword, this is also why I have chosen to work with the Danish versions in the background section.

Karen Blixen’s “The Poet” and Søren Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* (Bunch 2013b)

Mads Bunch

Karen Blixen's "The Poet" and Søren Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*

Abstract: It is commonly acknowledged within Karen Blixen scholarship that some of Blixen's tales are literary responses to other works from world literature. In this paper I will argue that the tale "The Poet" from *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) should be included in this line-up of responses as a literary response to Søren Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen* (*Repetition*) from 1843. Through juxtapositions of quotes and analysis of plot development and character constellations, I will show how Blixen redevelops the plot and reverses the characters from Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*. I will pay particular attention to a reoccurring character in Kierkegaard's production: the elderly bachelor esthete (Constantin Constantius), whom Blixen in "The Poet" exposes as a demonic, yet comical character. I will conclude by pointing out that repetition should be acknowledged as an integral part of Blixen's poetics, since she consistently repeats archetypal plots and characters from world literature in her works that at the same time are completely new and original, following the dialectics of repetition.

Introduction

In two previous articles I have shown that Karen Blixen's "Carnival" (written 1926-27) is mostly a response to Søren Kierkegaard's "In vino veritas" from *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (1845) (*Stages on Life's Way*) and "Ehrengard" (1963) a response to "Forførerens Dagbog" ("The Seducer's Diary") from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (1843) (*Either/Or*, Part I)¹. In this article I will argue that Blixen's "The Poet" from *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) ("Digteren", *Syv fantastiske fortællinger*) (1935) is also a literary response to Kierkegaard, in in this case to his work *Gjentagelsen* (*Repetition*) from 1843. It is, however, important to pay attention to the fact that Blixen in her literary responses never directly mentions the literary predecessor or the literary background text. Her responses always come in the shape of narratives that through allusions and reversals of plot- and/or character constellations carry a hidden interpretation of the characters and the

¹ BUNCH 2011 & BUNCH 2013 forthcoming, et al.

story-world in the literary background text. For example, “The Heroine” from *Winter’s Tales* (1942) is a response to Maupassant’s famous short-story “Boule de suif” (1880) (“Ball-of-Fat”)², where Blixen’s heroine, contrary to Maupassant’s overweight character, is an incredibly beautiful, slim nude dancer, who triumphs over both the German officer and her fellow travellers, when Blixen reverses the character and the plot of Maupassant’s story³. Blixen also mentioned in a letter late in life (1958) that “The Pearls” (*Winter’s Tales*) is a response to *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920-22): “En Historie om en Perle”, der i sin Tid er skrevet som en Slags Replik til Sigrid Undsets Mesterværk “Kristin Lavransdatter” (BLIXEN 1996, 393).⁴ Scholars have so far agreed that “Ehrengard” is also a response too Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog”, where, with the words of Blixen’s secretary Clara Selborn: “pigen ikke bliver tværet ud, som Cordelia hos Kierkegaard, men det bliver forførereren der står beskæmmet tilbage” (SELBORN 2006, 77).

“The Poet” is, however, a complicated matter, since it on the surface primarily alludes to Johan Wolfgang Goethe, whom the Councilor in the story-world of the tale has met in Weimar. We also find a line-up of characters from Goethe’s major works to be mentioned directly in the tale⁵ obscuring the fact that *Gjentagelsen* is in fact the main target of the response. This is a strategy that Blixen repeats twenty-eight years after in the novella “Ehrengard”, where we also find the main character J. W. Cazotte to be modeled over J.W. Goethe and the tale to have numerous direct allusions to Goethe’s works, despite the fact that Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog” is actually the main literary target. The title “Forførerens Dagbog” (or Kierkegaard) is never mentioned directly in “Ehrengard” and the connections are only established through allusions to passages in “Forførerens Dagbog” and through character-, plot reversal and name similarity (Johan/Johannes) (LANGBAUM 1964, BUNCH 2013 forthcoming, et al.)⁶. In both “The Poet” and in “Ehrengard” Blixen uses her own version of the Chinese puzzle composition system that Victor Eremita describes in the foreword to *Enten-Eller*. Første Deel as the main composition structure of “Forførerens Dagbog”:

² HENRIKSEN 1998, 232; SØRENSEN 2002, 24-25 & SELBOE 2008: 25.

³ This is hidden behind the more obvious allusion to Abelard and Heloïse that Blixen established in the Danish version, when she changed the title from “The Heroine” to “Heloïse.”

⁴ The story as a literary response to *Kristin Lavransdatter* has been treated more in depth by Aage Henriksen in HENRIKSEN 1956, 17 & HENRIKSEN 1998, 232

⁵ “She did not, he thought run the risk of Faust in asking the moment to stay because of it’s loveliness” (BLIXEN 1934, 407) and “Would the great poet let his own people – Wilhelm Meister, Werther, Dorothea – associate with the creations of his, the Councilor’s mind?” (ibid., 431).

⁶ More than twenty separate articles or book chapters have in various ways been treating “Ehrengard” as a response to Kierkegaard’s “Forførerens Dagbog” (SØRENSEN 2002, 190-199; BUNCH 2013, forthcoming).

“idet den ene Forfatter kommer til at ligge inden i den anden som Æsker i et chinesisisk Æskespil” (KIERKEGAARD 1843a, n. pag.) (“since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes of a Chinese puzzle”) (KIERKEGAARD 1987, 9). Thus, when we open the first box in Blixen’s Chinese puzzle, behind Goethe, we find Kierkegaard. In the following I will argue that “The Poet” is a part of an overall line-up of responses to Kierkegaard’s works that Blixen made over a period of thirty-five years, with the two tales “Carnival” and “Ehrengard” as the frame around her oeuvre and “The Poet” as the missing middle piece. Firstly, I will show how Blixen stages ideas from *Gjentagelsen* that are only suggested by the first person narrator Constantin Constantius but never carried out, secondly I will show how Blixen reverses the plot and develops the characters, and thirdly how she on a meta-level deals with the notions of poetry and repetition in “The Poet” as a response to *Gjentagelsen*. I will quote Blixen’s original English text “The Poet” but add Blixen’s own Danish translations from “Digteren” when the Danish version contains passages that pertains to Kierkegaard or otherwise sharpens or develops important ideas from the original English version⁷. I will quote Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* from the original Danish text, followed by the English translation

Structure and Composition: *Gjentagelsen* and “The Poet”

In a passage in *Gjentagelsen* Constantin Constantius expresses the following about “det unge Menneske” (“the young man”) and the nature of his own narrative:

Hvis jeg udførligt vilde forfølge Stemningerne i det unge Menneske, saaledes som jeg lærte dem at kjende, endsige hvis jeg paa Digtervis vilde tage en Mængde uvedkommende Ting med: Dagligstuer og Gangklæder, skønne Egne, Paarørende og Venner, saa kunde denne Historie blive en alenlang Novelle. Det gider jeg imidlertid ikke. (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.)

If I were to elaborate on the young man’s moods as I learned to know them, to say nothing of anecdotally including a host of irrelevant things – living rooms and wearing apparel, lovely localities, relatives and friends – this narrative could become an interminable story. That, however, I do not want. (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 141)

Karen Blixen’s response to Constantin not caring about developing his narrative is to do the opposite. In “The Poet” she closely follows the moods of “det unge

⁷ In his afterword to the new Danish DSL edition of *Winter’s Tales* (2010), Danish Blixen scholar Poul Behrendt systematically uncovers how Blixen’s Danish translations of the tales differ from the original English versions, sometimes to an extent that borders reworkings (BEHRENDT 2010, 404-430).

Menneske” as August von Schimmelmann calls the melancholy young poet Anders Kube (BLIXEN 1935, 364).⁸ Blixen does so by developing the passage in *Gjentagelsen* and ”paa Digtervis” (as a poet, lost in the English translation) create a narrative that include “uvedkommende ting” (irrelevant things”) and where “Dagligstuer” (“living rooms”), “Gangklæder” (“wearing apparel”), “skjønne Egne” (“lovely localities”), “Paarørende” (“relatives”) and “Venner” (“friends”) are indeed elaborately depicted. Even the title of the main character, the Councilor, and his behavior in Hirschholm seems to allude to a passage in *Gjentagelsen*:

Den, der vil Gjentagelsen, han er modnet i Alvor. Dette er mit Separat-Votum, der tillige mener, at det ingenlunde er Livets Alvor, at sidde i sin Sopha og stange Tænder – og være Noget f. Ex Justitsraad; eller at gaae adstadig gennem Gaderne – og være Noget, f. Ex Velærværdighed; ligesaa lidet som det er Livets Alvor at være kongelig Beridder. Alt Sligt er mine Øjne kun Spøg, og som stundom daarlig nok (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n.pag.)

The person who wills repetition is mature in earnestness. This is my private opinion, and this also means that it is not the earnestness of life to sit on the sofa and grind one’s teeth – and to be somebody, for example a councilor – or to walk the streets sedately – and to be somebody, His Reverence – any more than it is the earnestness of life to be a riding master. In my opinion, all such things are but jests, and sometimes rather poor ones at that (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 133)

The protagonist in “The Poet”, Councilor Mathiesen, is in Blixen’s Danish version “Digteren” called Justitsraad Mathiesen⁹, who is “Noget” (“somebody”) and considered a “Velærværdighed” (“His Reverence”) but who also turns out to behave completely opposite of what we would normally expect from a man with

⁸ This direct allusion to Kierkegaard’s character “det unge Menneske” from *Gjentagelsen* is deliberately enhanced in Blixen’s Danish translation. I will elaborate more on this quote later.

⁹ In Blixen’s English original Mathiesen’s Danish title is ”Kammerraad, a chamber-councilor” (BLIXEN 1934, 375), but this is changed to ”Justitsraad” in Blixen’s Danish translation. In *Gjentagelsen* Kierkegaard also mentions the name Mathiesen, even though it otherwise has no importance for the narrative: “og hvor en Dansk kan faa Leilighed til at opfriske Mindet om Lars Mathiesen og Kehlet” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n.pag.). Blixen might have combined ”Justitsraad” and ”Mathiesen” into ”Justitsraad Mathiesen” in order to establish a clearer connection to *Gjentagelsen*. In the note section to *Syv fantastiske fortællinger* (BLIXEN 1934, 622) the character ”fuldmægtig Mathiesen” from Meir Aron Goldschmidt’s *Breve fra Choleratiden indeholdende en lille begivenhed* (1865) is mentioned as a possible source for the name ”Mathiesen”, even though he in Goldschmidt’s narrative is just a subordinate ”fuldmægtig” (managing clerk), who himself is manipulated by his friend Frantz Holm (GOLDSCHMIDT 1865, n. pag.).

such a title, which is a humorous reversal of the character Constantin contemplates in the above passage. Another significant starting point for Blixen's plot development in "The Poet" is the idea that Constantin Constantius coins in *Gjentagelsen*, when he is thinking about how to solve the young man's desperate situation: "Dersom jeg ikke selv var saa gammel, skulde jeg gjøre mig en Fornøielse af at tage hende, alene for at Hjælpe Mennesket" (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n.pag.) ("If I myself were not so old, I would give myself the pleasure of taking her simply to help the man") (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 216). Constantin contemplates this bold move as a means to put an end to the young man's ethical scruples and melancholy, which stem from the fact that he is betrothed to a girl he loves but at the same time feels psychologically incapable of marrying, since she has ignited in him an unstoppable and prolific poetic creativity. Constantin never acts upon this audacious idea in *Gjentagelsen* and the girl eventually marries another man after the young man has fled to Sweden. It is, however, this unrealized love triangle, pregnant with picante possibilities that Karen Blixen stages in "The Poet" but with the opposite outcome in mind: The Councilor's goal is *to create an unhappy love, not to solve one*, so he can sustain and feed the poetic creativity of his young man Anders. During a morning walk in the woods, the Councilor at first coins the idea of marrying Anders off to the newly arrived young widow Fransine, but when he recalls her lightness and grace, he fears that the idea is no good – that Anders might instead give up poetry and decide to take on the world with Fransine and move from Hirschholm. Suddenly, in a moment of epiphany, he discovers that he in fact has to do the opposite and a Devilish plan emerges:

His thoughts went a little further while the sun rose up higher. An unhappy love is an inspiring feeling. It has created the greatest works of history. A hopeless passion for his benefactor's wife might make a young poet immortal; it was a dramatic thing to have in the house. The two young people would remain loyal to him, however much they suffer (BLIXEN 1934, 327)

Hans Tanker steg, alt som Solen steg højere paa Himlen. Ulykkelig Kærlighed er en *mægtig beaandende Følelse*, den har før inspireret unge Mænd til Historiens største *Digtværker*. En haabløs Lidenskab for hans Velynders letfodede Hustru kunde meget vel komme til at udødeliggøre den unge Digter. *Det kunde ogsaa blive et stort Drama at iagttage og følge med i*. De to Unge vilde bevare deres Troskab imod ham, hvor gruligt de end blev pint (BLIXEN 1935, 355-36, my italics)¹⁰

¹⁰ My italics show elements in the passage Blixen emphasized in her Danish translation in order to give extra detail to certain points. This allusion to Kierkegaard is not mentioned in the note section to "Digteren" in the latest Danish edition of *Syv fantastiske fortællinger* (2012). DSL. København.

By marrying Fransine, whom Anders Kube is in love with, the Councilor's plan is to make Anders a great poet, since his unhappy and unfulfilled love will be transformed into sublime poetic creativity as the above passage describes¹¹, while the Councilor at the same time will be able to keep both of them in Hirschholm. Another Kierkegaard passage from "In vino veritas" (written two years after *Gjentagelsen*) articulated by Victor Eremita also informs this passage in "The Poet". Here Eremita states that a man only becomes a poet because of the girl he did *not* get:

Der er mangen Mand bleven Geni ved en Pige, mangen Mand bleven Helt ved en Pige, mangen Mand bleven Digter ved en Pige, mangen Mand bleven Helgen ved en Pige; – men han blev ikke Geni ved den Pige, han fik; thi med hende blev han kun Etatsraad; han blev ikke Helt ved den Pige, han fik, thi ved hende blev han kun General; han blev ikke Digter ved den Pige, han fik, thi ved hende blev han kun Fader; han blev ikke Helgen ved den Pige, han fik, thi han fik slet ingen og vilde kun have en eneste, som han ikke fik, ligesom Enhver af de Andre blev Geni, blev Helt, blev Digter ved den Piges Hjælp, de ikke fik. (KIERKEGAARD 1845, n. pag.)

Many a man became a genius because of a girl, many a man became a hero because of a girl, many a man became a poet because of a girl, many a man became a saint because of a girl – but he did not become a genius because of the girl he got, for with her he became only a cabinet official; he did not become a hero because of the girl he got, for because of her he became only a general; he did not become a poet because of the girl he got, for because of her he became only a father; he did not become a saint because of the girl he got, for he got none at all and wanted only to have the one and only whom he did not get, just as each of the others became a genius, a hero, a poet with the aid of the girl he did not get. (KIERKEGAARD 1988, 59)

Young Peter Mathiesen did not become a poet, but instead married Madam Mathiesen and became Councilor Mathiesen of the town of Hirschholm (even though he never loved her and later did away with her). Now he wants to make a poet out of Anders instead, so that he can write poetry by proxy and at the same time achieve immortality as his Maecenas.

In the following I will show how Anders' love for Fransine, his melancholy, outburst of poetic creativity and the disintegrating friendship with the Councilor, closely follows the young man's development in *Gjentagelsen* up until the part where the Councilor decides to marry Fransine. Here the "The Poet" develops in new directions in order to realize other potentials in the characters from *Gjentagelsen* and develop a different outcome of the love triangle. In the final

¹¹ Christian Braad Thomsen briefly mentions this connection to Kierkegaard in "The Poet" in his book *Boganis Gæstebud* but he does not elaborate further on it (BRAAD THOMSEN 2010, 228).

scene Blixen also suggests a different interpretation of the poet personality, which is a reversal of Constantin's conclusion in the closing pages of *Gjentagelsen*.

The Melancholy Young Man: "Det unge Menneske" and Anders Kube

As previously mentioned Karen Blixen made the allusion to Søren Kierkegaard's character "det unge Menneske" ("the young man") from *Gjentagelsen* more obvious in her Danish version by calling Anders Kube "det unge Menneske" in this passage, where August von Schimmelfmann evaluates his character and his future prospects of becoming a successful poet:

Grev Augustus roste Digtets Skønhed og mente, at den unge Digter havde fundet indsmigrende Ord i sin Skildring af den lille Elledronnings Skønhed. Han tænkte ved sig selv, at *det unge Menneske* i sin Natur havde et stærkt Drag af Sanselighed, hvormed der burde holdes Øje, hvis ikke den sikre Smag i hans Produktion skulde lide derunder. (BLIXEN 1935, 364-65, my italics)¹²

Count Augustus praised the beauty of the poem and thought the beauty of the little fairy queen charmingly put into words. *The boy*, he thought, had in him a very strong streak of primitive sensuality which would have to be watched if the tastefulness of his production were not to suffer. (BLIXEN 1934, 403, my italics)¹³

As the young man in *Gjentagelsen*: "Han havde allerede i nogen Tid været forelsket, men skjult det endog for mig" (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) ("He had been in love for some time now, concealing it even from me")

¹² August von Schimmelfmann is also used as a proxy for another Kierkegaard allusion in "The Poet" (in this case well-known by the scholar-ship). It is the allusion to a passage in "Diapsalmata" about a sign that says "Her rulles" (KIERKEGAARD 1843a, n. pag.) ("Clothes mangled here") (LANGBAUM, 23). The paragraph is rephrased and developed by Schimmelfmann in his conversation with the Councilor (BLIXEN 1934, 399). Here Blixen delivers a blow to religion as an illusion (and thus to Kierkegaard), but the implications of this quote and the discussion that arise from it lie outside the frame of this article.

¹³ Blixen made an interesting choice in the English original calling Anders "boy" in this passage and a couple of others. Otherwise she refers to Anders as "the young man" seven other places in the tale, which is similar to the normal English translation of Kierkegaard's term "det unge Menneske". Important information (and the clear allusion to Kierkegaard) is however lost in the English version since "menneske" is synonymous with "man" in English. "Human being" would be a more accurate translation, but it does not work properly in English.

(KIERKEGAARD 1983, 134), Anders also hides his newfound love from the Councilor:

All through the service the Councilor's mind was playing about with his recent impression. It had come to him at a seasonable moment, for he had lately been uneasy about his poet. This young slave of his had been singularly absent-minded, and even absent bodily from one or two of their Saturday suppers. There was in his whole manner an unconscious restlessness, and underneath it the sign of a melancholy about which the Councilor was anxious, for he knew well that he could find no remedy for it (BLIXEN 1934, 385)

What the Councilor does not yet realize is that Anders has discovered Fransine at "La Liberté", watched her nightly dance-sessions, and has fallen in love with her. Contrary to the young man, who confides his love to Constantin, Anders keeps his love for Fransine a secret all through the tale, even though the Councilor figures it out and starts to exploit it. Anders's melancholy condition upon falling in love is however similar to the one that strikes "det unge Menneske" in *Gjentagelsen*: "Store Gud! Tænkte jeg, en saadan Melancholi er endnu aldrig forekommen i min Praxis. At han var melancholsk vidste jeg nok, men at Forelskelse kunde virke saaledes paa ham!" (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) ("Good God, I thought, never in my practice had I seen such melancholy as this. That he was melancholy, I knew very well – but that falling in love could affect him in this way!") (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 136). In both cases their melancholy stems from the unhappy love affair, but the reasons are very different: the young man is melancholy because he is caught in the paradox that he is able to get the girl he loves, but feels psychologically incapable of marrying her. Anders on the contrary is melancholy because he is in love with a girl he in no possible way is able to get. At the same time the unrealized love affair makes both of the young men extremely creative poetically. Constantin notes about the young man: "En digterisk Productivitet vaagnede i ham efter en Maalestok, som jeg aldrig havde troet mulig." (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) ("A poetic creativity awakened in him on a scale I had never believed possible") (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 137-38) and Anders experiences a similar outburst of poetic creativity when he creates several significant long poems during the months he is in love with Fransine.

The big difference between the young man in *Gjentagelsen* and Anders is that the young man could very well have married the girl he was in love with. His love was requited and nothing stood between them, except for the young man's own psychological indisposition and ethical scruples. Anders finds himself in the complete opposite situation: He can't have Fransine, since she is betrothed to the Councilor and this is the material from which tragedies are created (*Romeo and Juliette*: the young lovers who can't have each other). Instead of fleeing from the unhappy love affair, as the young man eventually does in *Gjentagelsen*, Anders

decides to stay. Contrary to the young man who hopes to receive his former life back free from guilt towards the young girl, Anders has instead made up his mind to take it on the very same day that Fransine is to marry the Councilor. When he can't have Fransine he prefers to die instead of returning to his former life, or go on living as a poet in the sphere of ideas, which in the end becomes the fate of the young man in *Gjentagelsen* (I will get back to that later). In relation to woman this makes Anders the tragic hero in Blixen's tale.

Repetition of the Archetypal Mentor-Protégé Relationship

In *Gjentagelsen* there are passages where Constantin Constantius's description of his relationship with the young man borders what one would find in a description of a love relationship. At the same time Constantin does everything he can to manipulate the young man and stir up his melancholy for the sake of his own pleasure and enjoyment:

Det er omtrent 1 Aar siden, at jeg ret for Alvor blev opmærksom paa et ungt Menneske, hvem jeg tilforn allerede oftere havde berørt, fordi hans skjønne Udortes, det sjælfulte Udtryk i hans Øie næsten fristede mig (...) Ved Hjælp af disse skjødesløse, tilnærmende Conditor-Inclinationer havde jeg allerede draget ham til mig, og lært ham i mig at see en Fortrolig, hvis Tale paa mange Maader fristede det Melancholske i ham frem under Brydningens Form, idet jeg ligesom en Farinelli lokkede den sindssvage Konge ud af hans mørke Gjemme.¹⁴
(KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.)

About a year ago, I became very much aware of a young man (which whom I had already often been in contact), because his handsome appearance, the soulful expression of his eyes, had an almost alluring effect upon me (...) Through casual coffee-shop associations, I had already attracted him to me and taught him to regard me as a confidant whose conversation in many ways lured forth his melancholy in refracted form, since I, like a Farinelli, enticed the deranged king out of his dark hiding place (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 134-35)

When the two of them are waiting in Constantin's home for a carriage that will take them north of Copenhagen to explore the forests, Constantin can't help glancing at the young man with a special affection: "Jeg kunde ikke lade være af og til at skotte næsten forelsket til ham; thi en saadan Yngling er nok saa

¹⁴ Here Constantin identifies with the famous castrate singer Carlo Broschi Farinelli (1705-1782), who in 1737 was hired by the Spanish Queen Elisabetta Farnese to cure her husband the Spanish King Philip V of his depression. Farinelli stayed with the King for of Spain and later his son Ferdinand VI for more than twenty years.

forførerisk at see paa som en ung Pige” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) (“I could not resist stealing an almost enamored glance at him now and then, for a young man like that is just as enchanting to the eye as a young girl”) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 135). But Constantin’s role as a father figure, his manipulation and cynicism, also becomes a burden for the young man, who wish he could finally show him off: “Gid jeg stod hos Dem, gid jeg med mit sidste Nei kunde løsrive mig fra Dem, som Don Juan fra Commandanten” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) (“Would that I stood beside you, that I could tear myself from you with the last “no” as Don Giovanni did from the Commandatore”) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 193). In a couple of crucial passages in “The Poet” we also get to know that the Councilor’s relationship to Anders has the same affectionate nature as Constantin’s:

Looking then, in the mild, glowing evening light, across the tea table at the two young people who were both so precious to him – *although their order might have surprised them* – the Councilor felt happy and in harmony with the universe (BLIXEN 1934, 411, my italics)

When Anders finally discovers how the Councilor has manipulated him and Fransine, he shoots him as a last violent “no” to “the Commandatore” that the young man in *Gjentagelsen* does not have the courage to give Constantin: “Anders half lifted his gun, and without taking aim fired it off straight into the body of the old man” (BLIXEN 1934, 429) and the deadly injured Councilor thinks: “He was going to die. The young man, *whom he loved*, had meant him to die” (ibid., my italics). Again we find this scene to be a staging of a phantasy Constantin Constantius has in *Gjentagelsen*, when he thinks about how the young man killing him would prove the sincerity of his love for the girl:

Dog maaskee forstaar jeg ham ikke ganske, maaske skjuler han Noget, maaskee elsker han dog i Sandhed. Saa bliver vel Enden paa Historien, at han engang slaar mig ihjel for at betroe mig det Allerhelligste. Man seer, at det at være Iagttager er en farefuld Stilling. (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.)

But perhaps I do not fully understand him, perhaps he is hiding something. Maybe he does in truth love after all. Then it will probably all end with his murdering me in order to confide to me the holiest of the holy. It is obvious that being an observer is a dangerous position (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 186)

Being an observer, as Councilor Mathiesen is in the temple in the final scene, can indeed be a dangerous position; we see the humor here, but even more importantly, Anders, when murdering the Councilor, also proves his love, since he confides to

him “the holiest of holy”: his love for Fransine. This is also how we are told by the narrator that Fransine perceives it, when she figures out that Anders has shot the Councilor: “At last the girl understood. Her lover had shot this old man (...) After she had gone from him, Anders had proved that he loved her. And only she and the old man knew (BLIXEN 1934, 435). In this one action Anders does two things the young man in *Gjentagelsen* is not able to do in his relation to Constantin and the young girl: He tells the Councilor no and so proves his love for Fransine¹⁵. Fransine requites it by finishing off the Councilor, which means that she will be swinging in the gallows with Anders and, thus, finally united with him in death: “Let Anders have done what he liked, he and she belonged to one another, were one” (ibid.).

Eunuchs Living by Proxy

As we saw in the quote in the previous paragraph Constantin compares himself to one of the most famous eunuchs in world history, the castrate singer Farinelli, when he describes his relation to the young man:” idet jeg ligesom en Farinelli lokkede den sindssvage Konge ud af hans mørke Gjemme” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.). We find a similar comparison to a eunuch in ”The Poet” where the Councilor’s relationship to Anders is compared by the narrator to that of a “Kislar Aga toward a budding beauty of the seraglio (BLIXEN 1934, 379).¹⁶ Constantin describes his relation to women in this way:

Hvad det andet Kjøn angaaer, har jeg min egen Mening, eller rettere, jeg har slet ingen, da jeg kun saare sjelden har seet en Pige, hvis Liv lod sig opfatte i en Kategori. Hun mangler som oftest den Consequents, der er fornøden for at man skal beundre eller foragte et Menneske. *En Qvinde er først bedragen af sig selv, før hun bedrager en Anden*, og derfor har man slet ingen Maalestok (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag., my italics)¹⁷

¹⁵ This interpretation of the two of them being genuinely in love is supported by Aage Henriksen’s analysis (HENRIKSEN 1965, 17) even though I disagree with Henriksen’s idea that Anders should know that the Councilor is in the temple with them in the final scene (ibid. 18).

¹⁶ The Kislar Aga was the black eunuch leader of the seraglio (harem) under the Ottoman Empire. Blixen later used Farinelli as a model for the character Marelli in “The Cardinal’s First Tale” (*Last Tales*, 1957)

¹⁷ The Councilor expresses a similar idea when he elaborates on the special *code de femme* that he believes Fransine to subscribe to in order for her to perceive their marriage as a good thing (BLIXEN 1934, 414).

As far as the other sex is concerned, I have my own opinion, or, more correctly, I have none at all, for I have rarely seen a girl whose life could be comprehended in a category. She usually lacks the consistency required for admiring or scorning a person. Before a woman deceives another, she first deceives herself, and therefore there is no criterion at all (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 218)

Neither Constantin Constantius nor the Councilor has any physical interest in women, but only enjoys them through observation or manipulation, making them eunuchs in relation to women, albeit not technically. The scene where the Councilor during his nightly carriage trip back to Hirschholm spies on Fransine in awe, when she dances at La Liberté, is similar to the pleasure and exhilaration Constantin gets from spying on the young girl in the early morning after one of his many nightly carriage-trips due to his insomnia. Constantin is also excited when he watches the young girl at the Königsberg Theater and gets pleasure out of fantasizing about her, but his worst nightmare would be if she found out about his excited state of mind: “Havde hun blot anet min stumme halvforelskte Glæde, da var Alt fordærvet og ikke til at erstatte, ikke ved hele hendes Kjærlighed” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) (“If she had even suspected my mute, half-infatuated delight, everything would have been spoiled beyond repair, even with all her love) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 167) and he could never dream of approaching or interact with her. The young man describes Constantin’s personality like this:

er det ikke en Art Sindssvaghed, i den Grad at have underlagt enhver lidenskab, enhver Hjertets Rørelse, enhver Stemning under Reflexionens kolde Regimente. Er det ikke Sindssvaghed saaledes at være normal, blot Idee, ikke Menneske, ikke som vi Andre (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.)

Is it not, in fact, a kind of mental disorder to have subjugated to such a degree every passion, every emotion, every mood under the cold regimentation of reflection! Is it not mental disorder to be normal in this way – pure idea, not a human being like the rest of us (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 189)

The Councilor and Constantin are all head and reflection. Therefore there are important things in life that neither of them is able to do (to love a woman or write poetry) and that is why they are so fond of their young men and need them in their lives. Constantin’s relationship to the young man could be interpreted as an attempt to experience love and affection by proxy (since Constantin himself is unable to love in the way we normally understand the word) just as the Councilor has made his astute set-up in Hirschholm in order to use Anders for making love to his young bride and write poetry by proxy:

He discussed it much with the poet, and even advised him upon it, so that not a few of the Councilor's own ideas and reflections were, in one way or another, echoed within the epos, and he was, during these summer months, *in a way making love, and writing poetry, to his bride by proxy* – a piquant situation, which would last until his wedding day (BLIXEN 1934, 415, my italics)

Who is the Poet?

It is thought provoking that the main character in "The Poet" is in fact not the poet in the story, which is, as we know, the young man Anders. Nevertheless, the Councilor is labeled "Poet" by Fransine in the dramatic final scene, right before she gives him his deathblow: "You!" she cried at him. "You Poet" (BLIXEN 1934, 436) ("Du," raabte hun til ham, "Du Digter! Poet!!") (BLIXEN 1935, 396). The explanation for this paradox is that the Councilor belongs to a very special type of poets, who do not produce, but instead *practices* poetry. Instead of writing poetry he turns life into poetry through diabolic manipulation, since his biggest enjoyment in life is the exhilaration and pleasure he feels when he can be the spectator of an unhappy love story. He is a collector of fine "fleurs du mal's"¹⁸ as erotic and picante (or evil) situations he creates in life that he can later recollect with enjoyment. This passage sums up this special type of behavior and how it relates to the overall flower metaphor:

The Councilor walked on, pleased. He thought of Count Schimmelmann's quotation: "He is a fool who knows not the half to be more than the whole." This long-forgotten incident [his boyhood love, Nanna, my comment] was a little flower in his life, in the garland of his life, a field flower, a wild forget-me-not. There were not a few flowers, violets, pansies, in his life. Would this night put a rose into the garland?" (BLIXEN 1934, 424)

These "flowers" are erotic situations that the Councilor infuses with dread and destruction: He terrorizes his mentally unstable wife using a pansy so that she falls back into insanity, eventually dies; and the rose he hopes to put in his garland tonight is Fransine showing herself naked to the devastated Anders Kube in the small temple. When the Councilor thinks about how to repeat this situation from Karl Gutzkow's novel *Wally. Die Zweiflerin*¹⁹ (1835) with Anders and Fransine in the roles of Wally and Cæsar, his conception of the idea is described like this: "Let the critics say that such things do not happen; that does not really matter, for a new variety of flower has been forced in the frame of imagination" (BLIXEN 1934,

¹⁸ This is a slight rephrasing of the title of Charles Baudelaire's poetry collection *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) (*Flowers of evil*).

¹⁹ The title in Blixen's "The Poet": *Wally: Die Zweiferiti* (sic!) is wrong (BLIXEN 1934, 415).

416-17) ("Lad kun Kritikerne sige, at den Slags Ting ikke sker i Verden. Det har ikke noget at sige, en ny Blomsterart er i alle Tilfælde drevet frem i Fantasiens Mistbænk") (BLIXEN 1935, 377)²⁰.

In *Gjentagelsen* we seem to encounter a similar paradox with regard to who is in fact the poet in the narrative. Towards the end of the narrative Constantin writes that the young man he has created is a poet, but that he himself is not:

Det unge Menneske, som jeg har ladet blive til, han er Digter. Mere kan jeg ikke gjøre; thi jeg kan i det Højeste komme saavidt, at jeg kan tænke mig en Digter og ved min Tænken frembringe ham, selv kan jeg ikke blive Digter, som ogsaa min Interesse ligger paa et andet Sted. Min opgave har beskæftiget mig reent æsthetisk og psykologisk (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.)

The young man I have brought into being is a poet. I can do no more, for the most I can do is to imagine a poet and to produce him by my thought. I myself cannot become a poet, and in any case my interest lies elsewhere. My task has engaged me purely esthetically and psychologically (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 228)

It is a paradox that the author of a narrative about a young man and his unhappy love affair denies that he himself is a poet, but claims that only his imaginative creation is. Constantin backs this claim by summing up certain differences in their personalities; the young man is emotional, bordering the religious, whereas Constantin is pure intellect and unable to make a religious movement, which in his own eyes disqualifies him as a poet. By labeling the Councilor "The Poet" Blixen seems to suggest the opposite of Constantin. In order to be a poet one needs the intellectual and manipulative skills and the ability to dedicate oneself completely to an idea no matter the costs and live by the motto: "He is a fool who knows not the half to be more than the whole." These are qualities that both Constantin and the Councilor have, but the young man and Anders lack. The reversal of this set-up in *Gjentagelsen* is carried out in this way: Constantin is a poet who has written a narrative, which he denies being a poet and instead claims his imaginative character to be one, whereas the Councilor, who is not a poet, tries to create a poet in real life (Anders) but in the end is himself labeled a poet! In the closing lines in *Gjentagelsen* Constantin furthermore claims: "Min kjære Læser! Du vil nu forstaae, at Interessen dreier sig om det unge Menneske, medens jeg er en forsvindende Person" (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) ("My dear reader, you will now understand that the interest focuses on the young man, whereas I am a vanishing person") (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 230). Blixen seems to see it differently. She (rightfully) sees that Constantin is the central figure in *Gjentagelsen* and in "The Poet" she creates a similar type (albeit way more

²⁰ Note how Blixen has sharpened the fleurs du mal-metaphor by using the Danish word "Mistbænk". English: hotbed.

radical) and lets him play the main role in a narrative, but she does it by letting her main character do the exact opposite movement of Constantin's. Blixen creates a story, in which everything a poet does only in spirit and in fiction (planning the plot, manipulate the characters and the events, living by proxy²¹ through the characters and getting pleasure out of the omnipotent position) is carried out by the Councilor in the flesh, in actuality. Conversely, Constantin arranges the narrative so we believe the events have happened in real life, but in the end tells us that it has only been a sort of spiritual exercise; that his narrative is only fiction. This way of reversing the spiritual and the actual Blixen repeated twenty-eight years later, when she made the opposite movement in a response to another of Kierkegaard's works: What Johannes Forførereren carries out in the flesh in "Forførerens Dagbog" (seduces Cordelia physically), she lets J.W. Cazotte try to carry out in spirit only in "Ehrengard", when he tries to seduce Ehrengard avoiding any physical touch whatsoever (BUNCH 2013, forthcoming).

Kierkegaard and Blixen: The Demonic Esthete

In the closing lines of his essay *Karen Blixen og marionetterne* (Karen Blixen and the Marionettes, my translation) from 1952, Aage Henriksen establishes the first substantial connection between Søren Kierkegaard and Karen Blixen.²² Henriksen finishes his essay with this bold, yet cryptic, statement:

og med det sidste ord føre tanken hen på Søren Kierkegaard, som skrev en bog, der hedder *Gjentagelsen*. I dette begreb kan Søren Kierkegaard og Karen Blixen mødes og i frygten for den dæmoniske æstetiker, men de mødes kun ved, fra denne skikkelse, at gå i modsatte retninger og følge to meget forskellige arter af fromhed (here quoted from HENRIKSEN 1965, 32)

and with one last word point to Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote a book called *Gjentagelsen*. In this concept Søren Kierkegaard and Karen Blixen can meet and in the fear of the demonic esthete, but they only meet in so far as they both depart from this figure and go in two opposite directions and follow two very different types of piety (my translation)

²¹ Which is ultimately what literature and film offer us human beings: To experience horror, triumph, sex and tragedy by proxy through the characters in a fictional story-world.

²² The essay was first given as two radio talks in May 1952 before Henriksen came to know Karen Blixen in person and later eagerly discussed Kierkegaard as we know from their prolific letter correspondence 1952-54 (HENRIKSEN 1985). Henriksen was in the process of writing a doctoral thesis about Kierkegaard during these years. Gyldendal published it in 1954 under the title *Kierkegaards Romaner* (Kierkegaard's Novels, my translation) (HENRIKSEN 1954).

Henriksen is correct when he points out that both Kierkegaard and Blixen have *Gjentagelsen* and the demonic esthete in common, but it seems to me that “fear” here is the wrong word²³. Neither Kierkegaard, nor Blixen, fears the demonic esthete; they see right through him. In Kierkegaard’s work he is a haunted elderly bachelor caught in the demonic (Constantin Constantius, Victor Eremita and Modehandleren), who is unable to enter actuality through the ethical or to make a religious movement. In Blixen’s version, he is a powerful eunuch-like elderly bachelor (Rosendaal²⁴, the Councilor, Prince Potenziani²⁵, Mr. Clay and J.W. Cazotte²⁶) who in various ways tries to assert omnipotence in life by manipulating the people who are close to him and whose pain and annihilation he secretly and sadistically enjoys. Karen Blixen submits these eunuch-like demonic esthetes to the comic through nemesis; a nemesis that hits them when their omnipotence is out-powered by a source or a person they thought they could control. The comic lies in the discrepancy between their omnipotent natures and their sexual incapability, their will to power and how they in the end are out-powered by fate²⁷. In “The Poet” we find the Councilor subjected to the comic on his death-bed, when he firmly believes to be in the safe hands of Goethe and on his way to a Weimarian Elysium, when he in fact is in the hands of Karen Blixen, who is sending him straight to hell: “he was thrown down in three or four great leaps from one cataract to the other. And meanwhile, from all sides, like an echo in the engulfing darkness, winding and rolling in long caverns, her last word was repeated again and again.” (BLIXEN 1934, 437).

To conclude: The major difference between Blixen and Kierkegaard’s demonic esthetes is that Kierkegaard’s characters gets away with their manipulative behavior without nemesis striking, but that is never the case for Karen Blixen’s demonic esthetes, who in the end must all face nemesis and the deep irony of life. Thus, to expound Henriksen’s enigmatic closing line about the different nature of Kierkegaard and Blixen’s approaches to the demonic esthete and their different paths of piousness: Blixen took the path of humor, whereas Kierkegaard took the path of the religious.

Repetition in *Gjentagelsen* and in “The Poet”

²³ Henriksen later moderated this opinion (Poul Behrendt pers. comment).

²⁴ In “Carnival” Rosendaal is dressed as a Chinese eunuch (60).

²⁵ Who is impotent.

²⁶ Who is a virgin.

²⁷ Constantin can indeed be regarded as a comical character, even though scholars rarely perceive him that way. But everything Constantin sets out to do, either fails or gets out of hand, even though he arrogantly believes he has it all figured out. He is in fact a bit of a Don Quixote, even though it can be difficult to see, since his opinions are put forward with such an authority (and Kierkegaard furthermore grants him the authority to take everything back in the final scene), so we don’t immediately see the comic.

Most scholars agree that Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen* is one of his most difficult works and as such does not offer an overall definition of the concept of repetition but instead unfolds as a polyphonic exploration of the concept with no final result²⁸. It is outside the scope of this article to explore and explain all the different notions and variations of repetition put forward in *Gjentagelsen*, but here only deal with the concept, as long as it enlightens and connects Blixen's "The Poet" to *Gjentagelsen*.

All of Constantin's attempts to orchestrate and experience a successful repetition fail: he is unable to *reset* the young man and get him out of his melancholy and spleen and when he instead tries to find repetition by repeating an earlier trip to Berlin, he finds that things have changed and that he is unable to recreate his feelings and impressions from the first trip. He returns to Copenhagen in disappointment only to find that his valet on his own accord has rearranged his apartment in order to conduct a major cleaning, which shatters Constantin's last hope of making a repetition in homely surroundings. After these three defeats Constantin finally concludes: "Jeg indsaar, at der ingen Gjentagelse er til, og min tidligere Betragtning af Livet havde seiret" (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) ("I perceived that there is no repetition, and my earlier conception of life ways victorious" (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 171).

In "The Poet" the Councilor also makes various attempts to make a repetition. He uses Anders and Fransine as guinea pigs, when he tries to make a great poet out of Anders, which is an attempt to repeat the love-story of some of the greatest poets from world literature for whom an unfulfilled love-relationship ignited their genius (Dante-Beatrice, Goethe-Lotte and Kierkegaard-Regine)²⁹. The Councilor also tries to create another type of repetition, when he attempts to repeat a situation from literature – the piquant meeting from Gutzkow's novel – and stage it in real life with Anders and Fransine in the roles of Wally and Cæsar. In both cases he fails, when his puppets revolt, and in the end he even gets himself killed. Based on Constantin and the Councilor's practical experiences with repetition we understand that certain types of repetition pertaining to actuality do not seem possible (or at last they seem to be impossible to *stage*). This leads us to believe that repetition is only possible in spirit, which is also what the young man claims in *Gjentagelsen* towards the end of the narrative. After having received a handful of sad and desperate letters from the young man over a period of half a year, Constantin finally gets a letter, where the young man triumphantly claims that he has experienced a repetition:

²⁸ For example Henriksen 1954, Tøjner 1996 and Tjønneland 1996. In his Ph.D. thesis "Tyvesprogets mester" Mads Sohl Jessen even claims that the concept of repetition should mainly be understood as a parody in relation to J. L. Heiberg (Jessen 2010).

²⁹ *Gjentagelsen* is one out of three works (the two other being "Forførerens Dagbog" and "Skyldig?-Ikke Skyldig?") where Kierkegaard in different variations repeated his own unhappy love story with Regine.

Hun er gift (...) Jeg er atter mig selv; her har jeg Gjentaelsen; jeg forstaaer Alt, og Tilværelsen forekommer mig skjønnere end nogensinde (...) Er der da ikke en Gjentaelse? Fik jeg ikke Alt dobbelt? Fik jeg ikke mig selv igjen, netop saaledes, at jeg dobbelt maatte føle Betydningen deraf? Og hvad er en Gjentaelse af jordisk Gods, der er ligegyldigt mod Aandens Bestemmelse, i Sammenligning med en saadan Gjentaelse? *Kun Børnene fik Job ikke dobbelt, fordi et Menneskeliv ikke saaledes lader sig fordoble. Her er kun Aandens Gjentaelse mulig*, om end den end i Timeligheden aldrig bliver saa fuldkommen som i Evigheden, der er den sande Gjentaelse (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag., my italics)

She is married (...) I am myself again. Here I have repetition; I understand everything, and life seems more beautiful to me than ever (...) Is there, not, then a repetition? Did I not get everything double? Did I not get myself again and precisely in such a way that I might have a double sense of its meaning? Compared with such a repetition, what is a repetition of worldly possessions, which is indifferent toward the qualification of the spirit? Only his children did Job not receive double again, for a human life cannot be redoubled that way. Here only repetition of the spirit is possible, even though it is never so perfect in time as in eternity, which is the true repetition. (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 221-222)

According to the young man repetition is possible, but only in spirit. The young man got himself again in the sense that he is now free from guilt towards the girl, which is a repetition of his guilt-free mental condition from before he met the girl (HENRIKSEN, 117): “Naar Ideen kalder, da forlader jeg Alt (...) jeg svigter Ingen, jeg bedrøver Ingen ved at være den tro, min Aand bedrøves ikke ved at jeg maa bedrøve en Anden” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.) (“When the idea calls, I abandon everything (...) I defraud no one, I sadden no one by being loyal to it; my spirit is not saddened by my having to make another one sad”) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 221). We find a similar situation in “The Poet”, when the Councilor repeats the situation with the pansy that made his wife loose her mind and successfully manages to bring her back to this former state of insanity. This is a negative reversal of the young man’s happy experience with “Aandens Gjentaelse” and an ironic variation of how one can also get oneself again in spirit. The way the Councilor is able to recollect his erotic “fleurs de mal’s” in spirit with pleasure and security also seems to be an ironic variation over the bold opening statement that Constantin put forward on the first pages in *Gjentaelsen*: “Gjentaelsens Kjærlighed er i Sandhed den ene lykkelige. Den har ligesom Erindringens ikke Haabets Uro, ikke Opdagelsens ængstende Eventyrlighed, men heller ei Erindringens Vemod, den har Øieblikkets salige Sikkerhed” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.). (“Repetition’s love is in truth the only happy love. Like recollection’s love, it does not have the restlessness of hope, the uneasy adventurousness of discovery, but neither does it have the sadness of recollection – it has the blissful security of the moment”) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 132)

Belonging to the sphere of spirit literature is also able to repeat literature, since characters, plots and ideas are preserved in the immortal piece of art and can be repeated in the succeeding works an infinite amount of times (as well as by us readers) following the dialectics of repetition: “Gjentagelsens Dialektik er let; thi det, der gjentages, har været, eller kunde det ikke gjentages, men netop det, at har været, gør Gjentagelsen til det Nye” (KIERKEGAARD 1843b, n. pag.). (“The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been – otherwise it could not be repeated – but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new”) (KIERKEGAARD 1983, 149). “The Poet” can thus be regarded, not only as a repetition and restaging of the plot structure in *Gjentagelsen*, but also as a part of a longer chain of repetitions of the archetypal unhappy love triangle from world literature to which we find many allusions in “The Poet”³⁰. The allusions are organized as a Kierkegaardian Chinese puzzle, in which one love triangle is enclosed in the other: Loke-Nanna-Balder (*Balders død* by Johannes Ewald, 1773), Albert-Lotte-Werther (*The Sorrows of Young Werther* by J. W. Goethe, 1774), The Ambassador of Sardinia-Wally-Cæsar (*Wally* by K. Gutzkow, 1835) and in last box Constantin Constantius-the young girl-the young man from Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* (1843). This strategy of repetition is an integral part of Blixen’s poetics. As she said at the foot of the Acropolis, when she visited Greece with Knud W. and Benedicte Jensen in May 1951: “al Poesi begynder ved Gjentagelsen, og hvad særligt vilde een Søjle være – men disse Søjlerækker” (JENSEN 1953, 278-79) (All poetry starts with repetition and what would one column be in itself – but these rows of columns, my translation). Thus, we can regard “The Poet” as one of the columns in the long line of love triangles that together make up the temple of world literature and conclude by quoting Harold Bloom who uses Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* in his influential essay “Kenosis or Repetition and Discontinuity” to describe the dialectics of poetry and tradition: “The strong poet survives because he lives the discontinuity of an ‘undoing’³¹ and an ‘isolating’ repetition, but he would cease to be a poet unless he kept living the continuity of ‘recollecting forwards,’ of breaking forth into a freshening that yet repeats his precursor’s achievements” (BLOOM 1973, 83).

Thank you

³⁰ Blixen also repeats and explores this type of love triangle from “The Poet” in other tales, for example “Sorrow-Acre”, “The Immortal Story”, “The Tempest” and “Ehrengard” where an older man in various ways tries to manipulate two young lovers.

³¹ As defined by Fenichel: “in undoing, one more step is taken. Something positive is done which, actually or magically, is the opposite of something which, again actually or in imagination, was done before ... (quoted in BLOOM 1973, 80).

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“The Poet”: Additional Observations

In a crucial passage in “Digteren” Anders experiences how he comes into existence when Fransine looks at him. He has a very strong feeling that somebody is seeing, for the first time, the core of his being:

Men da han havde truffet Fransine, havde hun ligestraks set ham. Uden ringeste Anstrengelse havde hendes klare Øjne opfattet ham helt og holdent. Han var henrykt bleven til foran dem, og hans Ikke-Tilværelse var forbi og helt glemt i samme Øjeblik. (Blixen 2012, 373)

This is an allusion to, and inversion of, this passage from Kierkegaard’s *Begrebet Angest*:

Hvad der da kan antages at være anerkjendt i al Erfaring, det vil jeg blot vise ved en eksperimenterende Jagttagelse. Naar jeg tænker mig en ung uskyldig Pige, og nu lader en mand fæste et attraaende Blik paa hende, da bliver hun angst. Forøvrigt kan hun blive indigneret o. s. v., men først bliver hun angst. Tænker jeg mig derimod en Qvinde fæste et attraaende Blik paa et uskyldigt ungt Menneske, da vil hans Stemning ikke være Angest, men i det Høieste en med Modbydelighed blandet Undseelse, netop fordi han er mere bestemt som Aand. (Kierkegaard 1844, n. pag.)

As we understand from the passage in “Digteren,” Blixen must have perceived this passage from *Begrebet Angest* as a male fantasy and indeed “en eksperimenterende Jagttagelse” with no root in reality since Anders does not experience any of “Modbydelighed,” when Fransine *sees him*, but is instead utterly “henrykt.” That Blixen turns this quote upside down is furthermore supported by the fact that when Anders sees Fransine in the church, she is not the least “angst” but instead shows “dyb hemmelig glæde”:

Fra Mandssiden til højre paa Kirkegulvet saa han et Par Gange over mod Kvindebænkene. Den unge Kvinde sad ganske stille. Hun var hensunken i Præstens Ord, men hendes Ansigt bevarede hele Tiden Udtrykket af dyb hemmelig Glæde. (Blixen 2012, 349).

“The Poet”: Theoretical and Methodical Reflections

The method applied in this paper can be described as pragmatic, comparative and rhetorical. Through close readings of *Gjentagelsen* and “The Poet” / “Digteren,” I compare the works and point out allusions and establish connections that show how Blixen in “Digteren” interprets and redevelops the main characters and the love triangle from Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen* and creates an ironic counter-narrative. I, however, finish the article by connecting an observation that Harold Bloom makes with regard to

influence, repetition and literature that I would like to develop in. Here I will bring in Poul Behrendt's observations about Blixen and her use of repetition as a rhetorical strategy. The main aim is to show how the notion of repetition with regard to Kierkegaard not only plays a significant role in "Digteren" but also becomes a rhetorical strategy in Blixen's narratives from *Vinter-Eventyr* onwards as has been pointed out by Behrendt (Behrendt 2010a, 170). I will conduct an analysis of "Babettes Gæstebud"⁷⁷ in order to show how the tale is a prime example of this rhetorical strategy of repetition (and another variation over Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*) with significant meta-narrative connections to Kierkegaard's three stages too and his ideas about the choice and the individual.

Dialectics of Repetition in Blixen

In a passage in his article "Juryens Veto – En boghistorie om det skjulte paradigme under deklasseringen af "Skibsdrengens Fortælling" i de amerikanske udgaver af Isak Dinesen: *Winter's Tales*" Poul Behrendt astutely unveils the two most important structuring principles in Blixen's narratives: "repetition" and "the second meeting" and how they also, from *Vinter-Eventyr* onwards, become main elements in Blixen's rhetorical strategy:

"Skibsdrengens Fortælling" er således det første sted, hvor forfatterskabets to strukturerende grundelementer: *gentagelsen* og *gensynet*, bringes systematisk og klart reflekteret i anvendelse som narrativ praksis. Gjentagelsen ikke forstået som repetition, men som en udfoldelse ved det *andet* møde af noget, der lå skjult i det *første*, uden dog at kunne udledes heraf, før det uventet indfinder sig. Mellem det første og det andet møde ligger historien, og der ville, som det hedder i den efterladte fortælling "Second Meeting", ingen historie have været, hvis ikke det havde været for det andet møde. (Behrendt 2011, 170)

Here Poul Behrendt seems to allude to the observations he made about "gentagelsen and gensynet" in his book about Danish writer Thorkild Hansen, *Djævelpagten*, where the third section in the second volume is titled "Gentagelsen" (Behrendt 1995, 425-575). The observation has, however, also striking similarities to the ideas presented in this quote

⁷⁷ The tale in English "Babette's Feast" was first published in *The Ladies Home Journal* in June 1950. Selborn points out that Blixen made an effort to redevelop the Danish version that was published in *Skæbneanedotter* (1958), which is also the version I will be using here: "Efter at *Babettes Gæstebud* først havde været oversat til radioen af Jørgen Claudi, nyoversatte Karen Blixen den til dens optagelse i samlingen, og hun udvidede beskrivelsen af rusens virkninger på de fromme brødre og søstre. Hun sagde, det skulle være "noget vildere" (Selborn 2006, 130). It would be a very interesting task to make a detailed comparison between the English and the Danish version following in the path of Behrendt with regard to *Vinter-Eventyr* (Behrendt 2010a), which I unfortunately, due to lack of time and space, am not able to do in this thesis.

from *Gjentagelsen* where Constantin Constantius lectures us about the dialectics of repetition:

Gjentagelsens Dialektik er let; thi det, der gjentages, har været, ellers kunde det ikke gjentages, men netop det, at det har været, gjør Gjentagelsen til det Nye. Naar Grækerne sagde, at al Erkjenden er Erindren, saa sagde de, hele Tilværelsen, som er til, har været til, naar man siger, at Livet er en Gjentagelse, saa siger man: Tilværelsen, som har været til, bliver nu til. Naar man ikke har Erindringens eller Gjentagelsens Kategori, saa opløser hele livet sig i en tom og indholdsløs Larmen. (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag.)

One passage in the quote fits especially well with Blixen's idea of the second meeting and the story: "naar man siger, at Livet er en Gjentagelse, saa siger man: *Tilværelsen, som har været til, bliver nu til*" (author's italics). This is exactly what happens in Blixen's tales when the second meeting occur, since it becomes the point in the tale from where the story emerges—where the story becomes a story, where actuality now comes into existence and "Tilværelsen som har været til, bliver nu til." Blixen lets Pipistrello articulate the poetics of repetition in the tale "Second Meeting" (1961, published posthumously in Danish in 1975 and in the original English version in 1977) when he lectures Lord Byron using the story of Ali Baba as an example: "between this first and second meeting the story lies, and if the second meeting had not been there, there would have been no story" (Blixen 1979c, 335). Blixen even makes a playful meta-commentary with regard to repetition in the tale: "'You know,' said Pipistrello, 'the story of Ali Baba, a fine story, the very model and precept of a tale. I shall *repeat* it to you in case you have forgotten it'" (Ibid., author's italics). A few sentences before we also find another Kierkegaard-allusion to *Frygt og Bæven* (*Fear and Trembling*): "There are few persons," said Lord Byron, "whom I long to meet a second time, a good deal more of whom I think with fear and trembling, and others that I should much dislike to see again" (Ibid.). This passage tells us something about Lord Byron and how he interprets and understands his own life in light of these possible second meetings. We also discover that the interpretation of the story and the life of the characters and the choices they have made (or the things they have rejected) are to be found in between these two meetings. It is in this gap between the two meetings that the story exists. It is here that interpretation and understanding emerge. Again Blixen seems to draw on a—now very famous—observation Kierkegaard made in his journal in 1843:

Det er ganske sandt, hvad Philosophien siger, at Livet maa forstaaes baglænds. Men derover glemmer man den anden Sætning, at det maa *laves forlænds*. Hvilken Sætning, jo meer den gjennemtænkes, netop ender med, at Livet i Timeligheden aldrig ret bliver forstaaeligt, netop fordi jeg intet Øieblik kan faae fuldelig Ro til at indtage Stillingen: baglænds. (Kierkegaard 1843d, "Journalen," n. pag.)⁷⁸

The quote is true with regard to an individual's life that is still going on, but when an artist is creating a story, he or she is able to develop the characters and look back on the plot with "fuldelig Ro" and get the whole picture in it's entirety so it "bliver forstaaeligt." This is the important advantage stories have over lived life and why artists like to use them as devices and readers like to read them in order to become wiser. The story about the stork that Blixen re-tells in the paragraph "Livets Veje" in *Den afrikanske Farm* (Blixen 2007, 208-10) is another way of illustrating this and can be regarded as a paraphrase of Kierkegaard's famous quote.

"Babettes Gæstebud": Repetition and Nemesis of the Aesthetical

"Babettes Gæstebud" is a perfect tale, when it comes to illustrating Blixen's composition principle of "gentagelsen" and "gensynet" that Behrendt outlined in the previous paragraph.⁷⁹ The tale can also be regarded as (another) literary comment on Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*, to certain ideas about the aesthetic and the ethical put forward by Assessor Wilhelm in *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* and to Kierkegaard's ideas about the three "Stages on Life's way": the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. On a biographical note the tale can also be interpreted as a paraphrase of Kierkegaard's rejection of a relationship *in the flesh* with Regine and how this rejection haunted him for the rest of his life. This I will elaborate on below.

Löwenhielm's main reason to go to Berlevaag is basically the same as Constantin Constantius's in *Gjentagelsen*, when he decides to go on a second journey to Berlin in order to experience repetition. As a character Löwenhielm does, however, not look like the bachelor aesthete Constantin at all, but has, on the contrary, striking similarities with

⁷⁸ This quote is also in Rohde's book (Kierkegaard 1953, 76) that Blixen had in her library, but she could also have become aware of the idea already in the summer of 1923 from reading Høffding's article about Pascal and Kierkegaard: "Han [Kierkegaard] lægger særlig vægt paa, at vi lever i Tiden. Vi lever forlænds, men vi forstaar baglænds. En Afslutning kan derfor ikke naas" (Høffding 1923, 422).

⁷⁹ This has also been pointed out by Selboe (Selboe 1996, 112-4).

Assessor Wilhelm—the propagator of marriage and the ethical—from *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel*.

After Löwenhielm's rejection of Martine in Berlevaag, when he was a young man, he, out of duty and convenience, married a beautiful woman from a wealthy family and made a brilliant public career in the military. Löwenhielm, who is now in his early fifties, has been plagued by discontent and doubts with regard to the way his life has unfolded:

General Löwenhielm havde til Overmaal naaet alt hvad han her i Livet havde stræbt efter, han stod i en fuldkommen sikker, anerkendt og misundt Position. Kun han selv kendte til et forunderligt, et uforklarligt Forhold, der slet ikke svarede til hans haandgribelige Kaar: han var ikke fuldkommen lykkelig. Noget var galt et eller andet Sted, og han befølte sin Løbebane og sit Selv, saaledes som man beføler en Finger for at afgøre hvor en usynlig, plagsom Torn⁸⁰ sidder (...) Han var begyndt at nære Bekymring for sin udødelige Sjæl. Han kunde have spurgt hele Verden om han vel havde rimelig Aarsag dertil, og den maatte have frikendt ham. Han var moralsk uangribelig, en samvittighedsfuld Embedsmand, en trofast Ægtemand, ren og redelig i al sin Færd. (Blixen 1958, 58-9)

Löwenhielm wants to use the second meeting in Berlevaag to get rid of the doubt and once and for all convince himself that he made *the right choice* thirty years earlier, when he left Berlevaag and rejected the love of his life, Martine. He believes that he needs this confirmation in order to prove to himself that he is indeed living a happy, splendid life and has nothing to regret:

Han vilde nu gøre Regnskabet op med den unge Lorens Löwenhielm, som havde sørget og døjet Tort i Provstens Hus, og som tilslut havde rystet dets Støv af sine Ridestøvler. Han vilde i Aften lade Ynglingen bevise, *at han dengang havde truffet det rette Valg*. De laver Stuer, Klipfisken og Vandkaraflen paa Bordet skulde hjælpe med til een Gang for alle at slaa fast, at Lorens Löwenhielms Liv i deres Verden vilde have været forspildt. (Blixen 1958, 60, author's italics)

But the super-abundant and lavish dinner and the behavior of the Berlevaagians give him the impression that this is just the way life is normally in Berlevaag and has been so ever since he left: "Han saa næsten som en Druknende rundt paa sine Bordfæller. De sad alle med glade, rolige Ansigter og spiste deres *Blinis Demidoff* uden Tegn paa hverken Overraskelse eller særligt Behag, som om de havde gjort det hver dag i tredive Aar"

⁸⁰ A rephrasing of one of Kierkegaard's preferred metaphors "Pælen i Kjødet" that we also find in the crucial diary entry (Kierkegaard 1846b, n. pag.), which I have already quoted in the chapter "Kierkegaard's Secret Note." According to www.sks.dk the phrase occurs thirty times in Kierkegaard's works, journals and letters. Accessed August 20, 2013.

(Blixen 1958, 63). This fools him into believing that he made the wrong choice thirty years ago and the preserved beauty of Martine adds to his initial impression: “Det gyldne Haar var sribet med Sølv, den blomsterskære Pande var langsomt stivnet til Alabast, Men hvor klar og ædel var ikke denne Pande, Øjnene saa roligt tillidsfulde og Munden saa sød og ren som havde aldrig et ubetænkt Ord trængt sig over dens Læber (Blixen 1958, 61). In a moment of epiphany, he delivers a speech (here both the English and Danish version, so that we also see the allusions to Kierkegaard in the English text):

“We *tremble* before making our choice in life, and after having made it again tremble in *fear* of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace, brothers, makes no conditions and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes us all to its bosom and proclaims general amnesty. See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly. (Dinesen 1993b, 52, author’s italics)

“vi *bæver*⁸¹ da, inden vi her i Livet træffer vort Valg. Og vi gruer, efter at have truffet det, for ikke at have valgt det rette. Men det Øjeblik kommer, hvori vore Øjne aabnes, og vi forstaar at Naaden er uendelig. Den forlanger intet andet af os, end at vi skal forvente den i Tillid og erkende den i Taknemmelighed. Den stiller ingen Betingelser og udvælger ikke nogen enkelt iblandt os; den deklarerer almindelig Amnesti. Se! det som vi har valgt skænkes os, og det som vi har afslaaet bliver os, tillige og paa samme Tid, tildel. Ja, det som vi har forkastet, rækkes os indtil Overflod. (Blixen 1958, 66-7, author’s italics)

When the evening is over and Löwenhielm is about to depart, he asks Martine to confirm that she has known that she has been in his thoughts every day since he left Berlevaag:

“Jeg har,” sagde han, “været hos Dem hver eneste Dag i mit Liv! Svar mig, at De ogsaa har vidst at det var saaledes.” “Ja, kære Broder,” sagde Martine. “Det var saaledes.” “Og sig da ogsaa,” fortsatte han, “at De ved og forstaar at jeg i Fremtiden, saa længe jeg lever, bestandig vil være hos Dem. Hver Aften vil jeg – om ikke i det Kød, som intet betyder, saa i Aanden – sætte mig til Middagsbordet med Dem, ganske som i Aften. For jeg har i Aften lært, kære Søster, at i denne vor skønne Verden er alt muligt.” ”Ja, kære Broder,” sagde Martine. ”Det er saaledes. I denne vor skønne Verden er alt muligt.” Med disse ord skiltes de. (Blixen 1958, 68)

Here Löwenhielm seems to reject the marriage and military career that resulted from the choices he made thirty years ago and placed him solidly within the realm of the “ethical.” Instead, he now seems to subscribe to the idea that “Gjentagelsens kærlighed,” love in

⁸¹ An allusion to the title of Kierkegaard’s *Frygt og Bæven* (*Fear and Trembling*). We find both of the English words from the English translation of the title *Fear and Trembling* in the English quote above.

spirit, is the most valuable, which seems to be the only way of looking at the world that offers him the infinite grace he so badly needs in order to find peace with his decision of abandoning the love of his life. He does so by following the strategy that Constantin outlines in *Gjentagelsen*:

Erindringens Kjærlighed er den ene lykkelige, har en Forfatter sagt [Johannes Forførelsen]. Deri har han ogsaa fuldkommen Ret, naar man blot erindrer, at den først gjør et Menneske ulykkeligt. Gjentagelsens Kjærlighed er i Sandhed den ene lykkelige. Den har ligesom Erindringens ikke Haabets Uro, ikke Opdagelsens ængstende Eventyrlighed, men heller ei Erindringens Vemod, den har Øieblikkets salige Sikkerhed. (Kierkegaard 1843b, n. pag.)

But here Löwenhielm seems to fall victim to another illusion. The way that he rather aggressively encourages Martine to confirm his love and the way she responds, indicate that she might just sweet-talk him in order to be kind and get him out of the house quickly. They might even have very different interpretations of what the sentence “i denne vor skønne Verden er alt muligt,” which they both refer to, actually means. After Löwenhielm’s departure, Martine seems more occupied with evaluating the congregations’ success with regard to keeping up appearances during the luxurious dinner (note the irony in the passage, also with regard to the turtle):

Deres Hjerter fyldtes med det samme med den inderligste Taknemmelighed. This det gik nu med stor Klarhed op for dem at ingen af Gæsterne havde sagt et Ord om hvad de havde faaet at spise. Ja, skønt de tænkte sig om, kunde de end ikke selv huske blot een eneste Ting som var blevet sat paa Bordet foran dem. Langt borte fra, som fra en helt svunden Tid, dukkede Skildpadden op i Martines Erindring. Men den havde jo ikke vist sig siden, det var muligt, det var troligt, at den ikke havde været andet end en ond Drøm. (Blixen 1958, 70)

In the end both Löwenhielm and the Berlevaagians are fooled. Just as the Berlevaagians wrongly believe that: “Denne Jords Gølebilleder havde for deres Øjne opløst sig som Røg, og de havde set Verden som den virkelig var. Der var blevet skænket dem en enkelt Time af Tusindaarsriget” (Blixen 1958, 68) when it was in fact just the effect of the alcohol and the exquisite food that made full of forgiveness and friends (“In vino veritas” here taken literally), so is Löwenhielm fooled to believe that the life in Berlevaag has been one, long abundant feast since his departure thirty years earlier and wrongly concludes that he should never have left Martine. But that night the real world is in fact an (aesthetic) illusion created by Babette (the artist) and the deep irony is that the Berlevaagians and Löwenhielm each in their own way think it to be the highest truth.

The tale ultimately sees repetition as a sort of reversed nemesis: “that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly” (Dinesen 1993b, 58), which means that the nemesis of the choices we make in life is what we have rejected, which will eventually come back to haunt us often in the shape of repetition, a second meeting. The profound and original recognition of the tale is that what we have rejected in life has just as much influence on our lives as the (positive) choices we’ve made, which is a significant departure from Kierkegaard’s Assessor Wilhelm and his ideas about choices and the ethical. Blixen here seems to suggest that what we reject in life will have just as much impact (if not more) on our lives than the (positive) choices we have made (that also might very well turn out to be wrong and often do!), which is her way of turning Kierkegaard’s ideas about choosing upside down. Thus, our rejections become the nemesis of our choices whether we want it or not. This way of thinking we also find in *Sandhedens Hævn* where the nemesis of the lie is the truth. It is just reversed.

The secret note, “teksten i konteksten” (to quote Behrendt again), in “Babettes Gæstebud” is Kierkegaard’s relationship to Regine, whom he, as we know, rejected just as Löwenhielm rejected Martine. Kierkegaard too experienced on a daily basis “that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly” with regard to his unrealized marriage with Regine: “Jeg reiste til Berlin. Jeg leed saare meget. Hende mindedes jeg hver Dag. Jeg har ubetinget indtil Dato holdt det: hver Dag i det mindste een Gang at bede for hende, ofte to Gange, foruden hvad jeg ellers har tænkt paa hende” (Kierkegaard 1953, 31, Rohde’s version in Blixen’s library). As I also mention in the article about “The Poet,” Kierkegaard produced three narratives that deal with his rejection of Regine that he in an almost neurotic-compulsory way repeats over and over again in different variations in “Forførerens Dagbog” from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* (1843), *Gjentagelsen* (1843) and “Skyldig-Ikke Skyldig?” from *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (1845). These narratives can be understood as spiritual second meetings of what he rejected in the flesh.

Kierkegaard’s nemesis was that he thought that Regine would never marry and the two of them would have a spiritual love relationship for the rest of their lives, but that she instead married rather quickly after Kierkegaard’s second journey to Berlin (which also made him alter his *Gjentagelsen* manuscript). In “Babettes Gæstebud” Blixen, however,

turns the roles upside down. Martine never married, whereas Löwenhielm married after he returned from his first visit to Berlevaag. Martine and Philippa's fundamentalist, pietistic and ascetic father, "Provsten" ("the Dean") also ends up getting on his 100 years birthday, what he had rejected in his earthly life: a lavish, luxurious and super-abundant dinner equaling an entire year's salary, spent and consumed in just one evening (he would for sure have turned in his grave, had he known), which is another one of Blixen's ironic blows to Christianity and in this tale one of its most radical forms: Pietism. On a biographical note Kierkegaard's father, who was both a Pietist (as "Provsten" in the tale) and a capitalist (which of course caused him many problems, since it is an equation that is impossible to solve in a satisfactory way) also got what he didn't asked for with regard to Kierkegaard's own lifestyle in which he made a special effort to spend absolutely every penny that his father had collected with austere stinginess, so that there was absolutely no money left when Kierkegaard died. It is indeed true that life sometimes turns out the complete opposite than we assumed. To paraphrase Elishama from "The Immortal Story" (*Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958): "'Yes,' said Elishama. 'Reversed. In this pattern the road runs the other way. And runs on'" (Dinesen 1993c, 166).

And the road for sure runs the other way that evening in "Babettes Gæstebud" when Kierkegaard's stages: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious are reversed. Here the aesthetic (Babette, the artist) triumphs over the ethical (Löwenhielm) and the religious (the Dean and the Berlevaagians). In the tale, the religious (the Berlevaagians) is regarded as the lowest stage, the ethical (Löwenhielm) as the middle stage and the aesthetic as the highest stage (Babette). This is an inversion of Kierkegaard's stage theory, thus another significant ironic, meta-literary comment to Kierkegaard.

As Selboe has correctly observed, the meal can also be regarded as parodic repetition of "In vino veritas" (Selboe 1996, 110) since it is the wine and champagne that make the Berlevaagians speak the truth and subsequently forgive each other, which is a real (ethical) effect of the wine compared to the lofty, theoretical ideas presented by the five wine-influenced male speakers and aesthetes in Kierkegaard's "In vino veritas." As has also been pointed out by numerous scholars "Babettes Gæstebud" can also be interpreted as a paraphrase of the last supper. In my view Blixen's narrative also has a poignant point to deliver with regard to gender and art: Here we find the female artist, Babette to be the

materialistic flesh and blood incarnation of the (mythical) Jesus with the Pietist and the poor Berlevaagians in the role of the disciples at the last supper, who do not understand Babette's sublime gourmet creations (analog to Blixen's own readers), which is one of the crosses she as an artist had to bear. At the same time it is literally Babette's "Last Supper" since this is her last and final chance of making an exquisite dinner in the manner she did it at Café D'Anglais, when she was a celebrated chef before the revolution. With my analysis, I hope to have answered and clarified what Selboe notes about "Babettes Gæstebud" with regard to the aesthetic, ethical and Kierkegaard:

Fortellingen kan sies å kritisere en viss type livsfornektende kristendom, men samtidig framviser den påstander av samme type som den synes å kritisere. Det kunstige i motsetningen estetisk-etisk blir demonstrert (nok med et implisitt spark til Kierkegaard), og det vises samtidig at dette ikke er stabile kategorier. Det er – som nevnt – en ironisk modus i teksten som flytter om på betydninger og forskyver begrepens konnotasjoner. (Selboe 1996, 118)

Conclusion: Blixen and Repetition

In a passage in "Ekko"⁸² from *Sidste Fortællinger* (1957) Pellegrina very clearly articulates Blixen's rhetorical strategy with regard to repetition, which seems to have clear ties to Høffding's notion about "kunstnerisk ironi": "Der gives en kunstnerisk Ironi, som hænger nøje sammen med Kunstens store Opgave, den at give konkrete og individuelle Billeder af Karakterer og Skæbner, ikke Abstraktioner og Utopier" (Høffding 1916, 67):

"Ak Nicolo," sagde hun, "Livet er haardt, og sørgelige Ting hænder omkring os i Verden. Dog kan jeg sige Dig, at Gud elsker en Spøg, og at et *da capo* – hvilket vil sige "at gøre en Ting om Igen" – er en Spøg som især er ham dyrebar. Han har maaske – om igen – villet se en Søfarende strandet paa Toppen af et Bjærg, saadan som han engang saa Noah, hvis Navn begynder med det samme Bogstav som Dit eget." (Blixen 1957, 143)

When we substitute God with Karen Blixen, we understand her rhetorical strategy with regard to repetition. Her narratives are concrete, materialistic counter narratives to biblical stories, and as the thesis has also shown, to Kierkegaard's theoretical-idealistic works, which she at the same time, when she as a poet takes on the role of God, subjects to irony since we in the "*da capo*" (repetition) of Kierkegaard's works also find a (hidden) "Spøg" behind the seemingly serious surface. What emerges from Blixen's

⁸² Notice the title "Ekko" and the notion of repetition.

second meetings with Kierkegaard's works and the characters always turns out to be subversive, ironic and polemical. This way of dealing with most of her predecessors⁸³ (and Kierkegaard in particular) is also a way of dealing with the "Anxiety of Influence," to quote the title of Harold Bloom's book. Through inversion of characters, plots and major ideas from the great works of world literature, Blixen wants to prove a point. She wants to show that she has read and understood these authors and their works and has another view on the topics and characters than what is suggested in them. To repeat the words of Høffding:

Medens Satiren støder Genstanden bort, eller kun fastholder den for atter og atter at støde den bort, kan Ironien være en Vej, ad hvilken det bliver muligt at trænge ind i Genstanden og oprette et Fællesskab med den. Selv hvor Ironien tjener Selvhævdelsen, er den ikke en Frastøden, men en Unddragen, en Vej til at holde Sindets Helligdom fri for Omverdenens Indtrængen. (Høffding 1916, 61)

Thus, the counter-narratives also become Blixen's way of joining the pedigree of world literature, when she through repetition and reversals of plots and ideas from it, becomes one of the independent columns in the long line of immortal writers within world literature, to repeat the Acropolis analogy from the closing lines of my article about "The Poet."

7. GENDER: BLIXEN AND KIERKEGAARD

Blixen seems to have been annoyed with the total absence of female voices in Kierkegaard's production⁸⁴ as I also mention in the articles about "Carnival" and "Ehregard." Thus, in the early tale "Carnival" she decides to implement some gender quality and invite the same amount of women to take part in the Symposium and thirty years later she lets the young maiden "Ehregard" outsmart and seduce the great artist, J.

⁸³ Bjørnvig recalls Blixen characterizing Goethe in this less flattering way compared to Heine: "Da hun ønskede at høre digtet, som hun ikke kendte, spurgte jeg, hvor Goethes værker stod. Hun svarede, at dem havde hun ikke, fordi hun ikke forstod og ikke kunne læse tysk. Det passede ikke ganske, for hun kunne citere adskilleligt på tysk, f.eks. hele passager af Heine, som hun elskede og satte langt over Goethe, mens jeg havde det omvendt. "Deres Goethe," som hun drillede mig med at sige, "denne petit maitre" (Bjørnvig 1974, 56).

⁸⁴It is indeed curious, as Brandes also notices in his critical Kierkegaard study, that Kierkegaard's mother is not mentioned with one single word in his prolific diary: "Moderen, hvem han først mistede i sit 22de Aar, nævner han mærkeligt nok aldrig med et Ord" (Brandes 1877, 7).

W. Cazotte. These tales also deal with the theme of seduction and we find both male (Councilor Mathiesen, J. W. Cazotte) and female seducers (Annelise, Polly and Ehrengard) in Blixen's tales, but with her usual affinity for gender reversals, it seems to be the female seducers, who are the most successful. As Langbaum and Nilsson have pointed out (see the research survey), "Drømmerne" can be regarded as a tale that also deals with the Don Juan motive described in A's essay "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske" from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel* (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.). This tale, I will argue, follows in Blixen's trail of gender reversals from "Carnival" and "Ehrengard" with regard to seduction and Kierkegaard since it inverts some of the major ideas about Don Juan and seduction that we find in A's essay. I will analyze the Don Juan motive in "Drømmerne" as a starting point for a more general discussion about Blixen, Kierkegaard and gender.

"Drømmerne": Don Juan, Pellegrina and Seduction

Even though Langbaum, as I will show in the following, was not entirely aware of how Blixen used and inverted some of the ideas from A's Don Juan essay in "Drømmerne," he was the first to suggest that Pellegrina could be understood as a sort of female Don Juan:

Marcus, who carries the memory, leaves Pellegrina free to be an amoral natural force—to be Don Juan as Kierkegaard, from whom Isak Dinesen seems to derive her ideas of Don Juan, conceives him [Footnote: "In 'The immediate Stages of the Erotic, or The Musical Erotic,' *Either/Or*, Vol. I. Isak Dinesen expressed to me her admiration for this essay."] Kierkegaard considers the Don Juan legend specifically Christian, for only Christianity abstracts sensuousness as a principle opposed to spirit. He connects Don Juan and Faust as related medieval ideas, since Faust is the part of intellect and spirit that Christianity excludes. Don Juan and Faust are the sensuous and spiritual demonic. Pellegrina combines Don Juan and Faust; for she overcomes not only like Don Juan through the power of the physical desire, but through the power of the erotic idea as a force that takes hold of the imagination. It is significant that she is a singer; for music, especially music with words, is, according to Kierkegaard, the art of the demonic. Kierkegaard wrote his essay to show that Mozart had in *Don Giovanni* the perfect subject for music, and that music is the only medium which could adequately express the legend of Don Juan as the life force that exists in immediacy, that is always on the point of becoming an individual but which never finally does, for if it did it would disappear in reflection and rationalization. Pellegrina, after she loses her voice, is the spirit of music let loose into life. She is demonic not only in her metamorphoses as whore and artist-revolutionary, but even in her metamorphosis as a saint. For she is a saint in the manner of Mary Magdalen, which is why every one is so attracted to her. If we consider that the three metamorphoses correspond to Dante's three realms of being, we might say that the saint is the demonic force in the realm of orthodoxy-theology-Paradise; the whore, in the realm of

biology-Hell; and the artist-revolutionary, in the realm of intellect-Purgatory. (Langbaum 1964, 100-1)

Starting where Langbaum left off, Nilsson also singles out “Drømmerne” as another Blixen tale deeply influenced by the Don Juan story and A’s essay (Nilsson 2004), but just as Langbaum, Nilsson also seems to have a hard time understanding how the two texts are connected and none of them seem to pick up on the irony in Blixen’s tale.

Baron Gyldenstierne as a Comical Don Juan

Som bekjendt har nemlig *Don Juan* existeret langt tilbage i Tiden som et Fjellebodsstykke, ja dette er vel egentlig dets første Existens. Men her er Ideen bleven opfattet comisk, som det overhovedet er mærkeligt, at saa dygtig Middelalderen var i at udruste Idealer, ligesaa sikker var den i at see det Comiske, der laae i Idealets overnaturlige Størrelse. At gjøre *Don Juan* til en Pralhans, der bildte sig ind at have forført alle Piger, at lade *Leporello* troe hans Løgne, var vel ikke et aldeles uheldigt comisk Anlæg. (Kierkegaard 1843a, ”De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier,” n. pag.)

It is obvious from the passage above that Blixen has picked up the idea of Don Juan and his helper Leporello as a comical device with regard to her depiction of Baron Gyldenstierne and Pilot in “Drømmerne.” Here they are depicted as comical and materialistic embodiments of Don Juan and Leporello in the shape of a spiritless, envious and narcissistic man and his superficial, insecure and depressed admirer:

Han forestillede sin Ven for mig som Baron Gyldenstierne fra Sverig [*sic*]. Jeg havde ikke i ti Minutter haft Fornøjelsen af deres Selskab, før de begge havde forklaret for mig, at Baronen i sit Hjemland gik for at være en stor Kvindeforfører. Dette fik mig,—skønt Samtalen hele Tiden kun fortsattes overfladisk fra min Side,—til at gruble over hvad Slags Kvinder, de vel kan have i Sverig [*sic*]. De Damer, som har gjort mig den Ære at lade sig forføre af mig, har alle bestemt holdt paa selv at afgøre, hvad [*sic*]der skulde være Midtpunktet i Forestillingen. Jeg havde været dem taknemmelig derfor, thi deri laa jo dog, hvad der for mig blev den eneste Variation over en ellers ensformig Komædie. Men i Baronens Tilfælde var det tydeligt nok altid ham selv, som lagde det afgørende Lod i Vægtskaalen. Man maatte holde ham for at være et Menneske uden nogensomhelst Evne til at begejstres saalænge Samtalen drejede sig om de Skønheder, han havde efterstræbt. Men man fik snart at vide, at han ikke savnede Enthusiasme, naar han fik sine Tilhøreres Opmærksomhed henledt paa det, som han vilde have, at man skulde beundre. Efter hans Tale at dømme maa alle hans Kvinder have været af nøjagtig en og samme Type, og det er en Type, som jeg aldrig selv er stødt paa. Jeg kunde ikke blive klog paa, hvorfor han, naar han paa denne Maade altid selv var Helten, skulde have gjort sig saa megen Møje for, den ene Gang efter den anden, at opleve præcis den samme Historie. For det var klart, at der ikke var nogen Grænse for den Ulejlighed, som han jo her med Glæde paatog sig. Men da jeg selv var en ung Mand, var jeg dog til at begynde med ikke saa lidt imponeret af denne vældige Appetit. Efterhaanden som jeg nu sad og hørte paa hans

Konversation, som var livlig nok, og blev endnu livligere efter at vi havde tømt et Par Flasker sammen, kom jeg efter, at Nøglen til den unge Svenskers Eksistens var at finde i det ene Ord: Kappestrid (...) Jeg kunde forstaa af hans Beretninger, at han saa sit Liv indtil dette Øjeblik som en lang Række Triumfer over en lang Række Rivaler, og ikke i nogetsomhelst andet Lys,—og dog var han et Par Aaar ældre end jeg og havde altsaa tilbragt noget mere Tid her i Verden. Hverken for sine Rivaler eller sine Ofre havde han iøvrigt nogen Interesse, han var ude af Stand til at føle Beundring og Medlidenhed,—ja jeg tror, til nogen anden Følelse end enten Misundelse eller Foragt (...) Mine to Bekendte kom udmærket godt ud af det sammen, for Pilot fik sig ved den raske, unge Barons indsmigrende Venskabelighed tildelt en ny Slags Eksistens,—jeg har, tænkte han, en Ven, som er en stor Kvindeforfører, altsaa eksisterer jeg,—og Baronen selv var godt tilfreds ved i Øjeblikket at have slaaet alle den rige, og i et godt Lag ret spendable unge Pilots tidligere Venner af Brædtet, og at blive saa inderligt beundret af ham. (Blixen 2012, 280-2)

Blixen here seems to support the medieval variation of the Don Juan figure from Kierkegaard's essay as a narcissist "Pralhans" (Baron Gyldenstierne), who only seduces in order to outshine his male rivals, so he can feel better about himself (and Pilot in the role of Leporello as his naïve admirer). In a passage *Pellegrina*, in the shape of Madame Rosalba (the Saint), makes a clear connection between Baron Arwid Gyldenstierne and Don Juan:

"Arwid," fortsatte hun, "har Du nogensinde hørt Historien om Don Juan?" Hun saa mig saa indtrængende i Øjnene, at jeg maatte svare, at jeg endogsaa engang havde set Operaen om ham. "Husker Du da den Scene," sagde hun, "hvor Kommandantens Statue kommer og henter ham? En saadan Statue staar der paa General Zumalas Grav i Spanien. "Jeg sagde: "Ja, gid den maa holde ham nede i den." "Vent," sagde hun, "Rosalba tilhørte General Zumala Carregui. Naar hun forraader ham, maa den stakkels Rosalba forsvinde. Men en Opera maa jo før eller senere have en femte Akt (...) Du giver hende den store tragiske Afslutning, som hun nu behøver (...) "jeg er bedrøvet til Døden for Din Skyld, Arwid. En skrækkelig Fremtid venter Dig, Tilintetgørelse, en Ørken, ak—en saa forfærdelig Skæbne (...) Thi snart (...) "er det for sent, og vi faar de skæbnesvangre Skridt at høre paa Trappen, Marmor imod Marmor." (Blixen 2012, 296-7)

As we understand from the above passage, Madame Rosalba (in the role as the Saint in the tradition of Maria Magdalen), feels pity for Arwid (Gyldenstierne) because she is convinced that their one-night stand (which will enable Gyldenstierne to win the competition in front of his two fellow rivals and get the award; the fine Andalusian horses) will lead to his demise just like Donna Anna's dead father, the Commandatore, became Don Juan's nemesis in the opera. Here Rosalba clearly overestimates her own powers with regard to Gyldenstierne. Seven years had passed when they finally meet again for the last showdown in the mountains and the Baron has not been judged by any

Commandatore (conscience) but is in great shape and has not changed in the least. His reaction is very different from Pilot and Lincoln's love-struck, desperate outcries:

“Hallo,” sagde han. “Jagten er tilende, og Englænderen har vundet. Han har straks benyttet sig af Lejligheden, og det i tyve Graders Kulde [!]. Vi burde ikke have beskrevet ham saa mange Yndigheder, for han har indtil nu kun set sit Lands Kvinder, og det har gjort ham forrykt lige med det samme. Lad os nu selv se paa Damen Fritz.” (...) Baronen stirrede paa hende. Det gjorde Pilot ogsaa. “Saa er det virkelig Dem, min hellige Rosalba,” sagde den første, “der gør Holdt her, halvvejs paa Vej til Himlen. Jeg ønsker Dem Held i Deres nuværende, noget behageligere Karriere.” Jeg kunde se, at det ved hans Ord var vanskeligt for Ollala at lade være at le. Hver Gang hun saa paa Svenskeren, var hun lige ved at briste ud i Latter. Men hun var meget bleg, og med hvert Minut bleg hun blegere.” (Blixen 2012, 308-9)

Pellegrina, now in the shape of Hofraad Hersbrandt's wife can't help laughing at Gyldenstierne, the comical, compulsory Don Juan, even though she is herself mortally wounded. To conclude: In Blixen's version Don Juan is not the embodiment of a natural force, who has an abstract, sensuous relationship to the opposite sex, but a real, simple—yet cunning—narcissistic man, Baron Gyldenstierne, who, driven by a desire for competition, uses his countless love affairs as a means to outshine his male rivals and give himself bragging rights.

The Male Characters as Parodies of the three “umiddelbare erotiske Stadier”

In his Don Juan essay A insists on treating the three characters from Mozart's opera's (the Page from *Figaro*, Papageno from *Tryllefløjten* and Don Juan from *Don Juan*) as abstract mythical figures in order to fit the purpose of his essay:

Dette Stadium er betegnet ved Papageno i Tryllefløjten. Her gjælder det naturligvis atter om at adskille det Væsentlige fra det Tilfældige, *at fremmane den mythiske Papageno og glemme den i Stykket virkelige Person*, og det i Særdeleshed her, da denne Person i Stykket er kommen i Forbindelse med allehaande betænkteligt Galimathias. (Kierkegaard 1843a, “De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier,” n. pag., author's italics)

One might even argue that the three gentlemen in “Drømmerne” as “virkelige personer” within the story-world of the narrative can be regarded as concrete, materialistic parodies of the character's from Mozart's operas that A in the essay claims to be mythical representatives of the three musical-erotic stages. Firstly, Pilot in the role as the Page from “Første Stadium,” about whom A concludes:

Skulde jeg nu vove et Forsøg paa, med et enkelt Prædikat at betegne det Eiendommelige ved *Mozarts* Musik med Hensyn til Pagen i *Figaro*, saa villde jeg sige: den er elskovsdrukken, men som al Beruselse saa kan en Beruselse i Elskov ogsaa virke paa tvende Maader, enten forhøiet gjennemsigtig Livsglæde, eller til *fortættet uklart Tungsind* (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag., author's italics).

Secondly, Lincoln in the role as Papageno from "Andet Stadium":

En Undtagelse kunde man gjøre med de Ord i Texten til den første Arie, at han sætter de Piger, han fanger, ind i sit Buur. Hvis man nemlig vil lægge lidt mere i dem end hvad formodentlig Forfatteren selv har lagt i dem, saa betegne de netop det Uskadelige i Papagenos Virksomhed, saaledes som vi ovenfor have antydnet det. Vi forlade nu den mythiske *Papageno*. Den virkelige Papagenos Skjæbne kan ikke beskæftige os, vi ønske ham til Lykke med hans lille *Papagena*, og vi tillade ham gjerne at søge sin Glæde i at befolke en Urskog eller en heel Verdensdeel med lutter Papagenoer. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)

And, thirdly, Baron Gyldenstierne in the role of Don Juan from "Tredje Stadium":

Med Don Juan er dette ikke Tilfælde, han gjør kort Proces og maa altid tænkes absolut seierrig. Dette kunde synes en Fordeel for ham, men er dog egentlig en Fattigdom. Paa den anden Side har den sjælelige Elskov ogsaa en anden Dialektik, den er nemlig en forskjellig ogsaa i Forhold til ethvert enkelt Individ, der er Elskovens Gjenstand. Deri ligger dens Rigdom, dens fyldige Indhold. Saaledes er dette ikke Tilfældet med *Don Juan*. Dertil har han nemlig ikke Tid. Alt er for ham blot Momentets Sag. (...) At see hende og elske hende er Eet, dette er i Momentet, i samme Moment er Alt forbi, og det Samme gjentager sig i det Uendelige (...) Den sandselige Elskov kan derimod slaae Alt i Hartkorn. Det Væsentlige for den er Qvindeligheden ganske abstract. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)

Nilsson on the other hand suggests that these three male characters should be interpreted as gender inversions of the three female antagonists in *Don Juan*:

For mig at se imødekommer Pellegrina efter branden sine elskeres maskuline forventninger, de oplever med hende en enestående livsintensitet, men efter hendes løftelse af dem til højder hinsides hvad de før kendte til, forlader hun dem pludselig uden forklaring, hvorpå de falder tilbage til dagliglivets sfinxforladte realiteter. Og efter dette tab og tilbagefald har de det mildt sagt ikke godt. De føler sig snydt og reagerer nøjagtigt som operaens tre forurettede kvinder i forhold til Don Juan, som de enten vil fastholde eller omvende, skønt en fastholdelse og omvendelse af ham ville udelukke den løftelsens entusiasme de ønsker tilbage, eller de vil som Donna Anna og Baronen have hævn. (Nilsson 204, 212)

Returning to Kierkegaard's original text, we can see that the three male characters in "Drømmerne" do seem to fit the three spiteful women and their relation to Don Juan after they have been seduced by him as we find it described by A:

Med undtagelse af Commandanten staar alle Personer i en Art erotisk forhold til Don Juan. Over Commandanten kan han ingen Magt udøve, han er Bevidsthed; de Andre ere i hans Magt. *Elvire* [Lincoln] elsker ham [hende], derved er hun i hans magt, *Anna* [Baron Gyldenstjerne] hader ham [hende], derved er hun i hans Magt, *Zerline* [Pilot] frygter ham [hende], derved er hun i hans [hendes] Magt. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag., author's insertions in brackets)

When taking in the gender inversions that occur on more levels in "Drømmerne" one interpretation might not exclude the other.

Don Juan Seduced

According to A in Kierkegaard's essay, Mozart's Don Juan is not really a seducer, or rather: he is only a seducer insofar as his adornments enchant and spellbind the women to a degree, so that they are eventually seduced by his compliments, effort and enthusiasm:

Til at være Forfører hører der altid en vis Reflexion og Bevidsthed, og saasnart denne er tilstede, da kan det være paa sit Sted at tale om List og Rænker og snedige Anløb. Denne Bevidsthed mangler *Don Juan*. Han forfører derfor ikke. Han attraar, denne Attraa virker forførende; forsaavidt forfører han. Han nyder Attraaens Tilfredsstillelse; saasnart han har nydt den, da søger han en ny Gjenstand og saaledes i det Uendelige. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)

One could argue that it is actually Don Juan who is seduced by the sheer appearance of women that he just can't resist. This also means that women seduce without effort and without necessarily wanting it (like Pellegrina and her alter egos).⁸⁵ Woman automatically seduces because she is *woman*, thus, *eo ipso*, the object of male adornment ("attraa"). And what are the three most seductive archetypical female characters that have always had the most power to seduce and enchant men? The answer in "Drømmerne" is: *the Whore* (Olalla), *the Saint* (Rosalba) and the *Artist-Revolutionary* Jeanne d'Arc-type (Madame Lola). This makes Don Juan even more comical since he is not the one, who is in charge, even though he himself believes so, but is instead pulled around by the nose of a bigger force (woman) that seduces *him* over and over again, while his assistant is

⁸⁵ Other example of women who seduce by their sheer appearance and without wanting are the two beautiful but virtuous virgin sisters Martine and Phillippa in "Babettes Gæstebud": "Man saa dem ikke til Fester eller hvor der blev danset, men Folk vendte sig om efter dem paa Gaden, og de unge Mænd i Berlevaag gik i Kirke for at se dem komme op ad Kirkegulvet" (Blixen 1958, 32-3).

keeping count of the numbers. This comical element is ignored by Langbaum and misunderstood by Nilsson.⁸⁶

Pellegrina as the Materialistic, Female Embodiment of Music

In the essay A also claims that “denne sandselige erotiske Genialitet” can only be expressed by music and that *Don Juan* is the embodiment of music and the demonic:

Den abstrakteste Idee, der lader sig tænke, er den sandselige Genialitet (...) Fordrer nu denne sandselige erotiske Genialitet i al sin Umiddelbarhed et Udtryk, saa spørges, hvilket Medium egner sig hertil. Det, her især maa fastholdes, er, at den fordres udtrykt og fremstillet i sin Umiddelbarhed. I sin Middelbarhed og Reflekterethed i Andet falder den ind under Sproget og kommer til at ligge under ethiske Bestemmelser. I sin Umiddelbarhed kan den kun udtrykkes i Musik (...) Udtrykket for denne Idee er *Don Juan*, og Udtrykket for *Don Juan* er igjen ene og alene Musik. (Kierkegaard, 1843a, ”De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier,” n. pag.)

In “Drømmerne” Pellegrina instead becomes the concrete embodiment of music in her shape as a female prima donna, *who is music in the flesh* so to speak, thus Blixen’s materialistic embodiment of “denne sandselige erotiske Genialitet.” Even though Pellegrina is represented in language (“Sproget”) she in no way falls under the category of “ethiske Bestemmelser,” but, on the other hand, completely evades them. Blixen must have had a hard time seeing the embodiment of music and the demonic in the shape of the compulsive, spiritless male seducer Don Juan. Again she seems to be inspired by Brandes’ critique of A’s Don Juan essay in his book about Kierkegaard:

Han formaaer at give det Værk, han forherliger og forklarer, en overordentlig Værdi for Læseren, men han bærer sig ad som en Kong Midas, der forvandler Alt hvad hans Haand berører til Guld, saa Værket straalere i en Gyldenglorie for Læserens Øie; men han formaaer ikke det fuldt saa Vanskelige at give Alt deri dets rette, dets naturlige Farve (...) løvrigt er Afhandlingen om «Don Juan» bygget paa en nu rent forældet metafysisk Æsthetik af Hegelsk Tilsnit. Operaens Fortrinlighed forklares ved Sammentræffet og Overensstemmelsen mellem de to Abstractioner Stof og Form, hvilken Overensstemmelse efter Forfatterens Definition udfordres til Classiciteten, der ikke føres tilbage til nogen Evne hos Mozart. Det bedste musikalske Værk siges at maatte opstaa, hvor den abstracteste Idee traf Musikens abstracte Medium, og gennem det besynderlige Postulat at «den sandselige Genialitet» er den abstracteste Idee, der lader sig tænke, naaes der saa til Hovedpostulatet, at vi i Mozarts «Don Juan» have den fuldendte Enhed af denne Idee og den dertil svarende Form. (Brandes 1877, 131 and 135-6).

Pellegrina as a Tragic Female Don Juan

⁸⁶ Nilsson 2004, 198.

Pellegrina's life and identity *is* music to a degree, so that when she loses her voice and can't perform, she perceives it as her death. With regard to gender this is opposite of what A claims about woman in the essay "Skyggerids" from *Enten. Eller. Første Deel*: "Ulykkelig Kjærlighed er vel i og for sig den dybeste Sorg for en Quinde" (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.) since this does not account for the female artist, Pellegrina, whose "dybeste Sorg" is when she loses her ability to perform, her ability to create art. As a stunningly beautiful and talented female artist, Pellegrina is a seducer in the sense that she seduces the world, the audience, with her voice, beauty and magnetic personality. When she loses her voice and status as a prima donna her life changes in a rather radical way, even though it still follows some of its previous paths. When she can't perform on the stage any more, she has *to live her life* as if she was still an actor and singer, which means that she constantly has to change roles in real life. She is, however, still dedicated to helping the "sinners" of the world (the poor people in the galleries), but now in a very hands on, practical way; the male brothel goers (when she is a whore), the revolutionaries (when she is their leader) and all the dead children and people, who are poor and have no hope left in the world (when she is the Saint in the spirit of Maria Magdalen). When being Pellegrina she seduced her audience in an abstract way through her art. When she loses her voice, she seduces with her personality and actions and, in the case of Lincoln, her extraordinary skills in bed (not to forget the humorous aspect of the tale).

But the major point is that she does not seduce deliberately and that she has not asked the men, who encounter her, to fall in love with her. It just happens, because she is what she is. Contrary to the Baron, the Don Juan parody of the tale, Pellegrina seduces without effort, but with such an irresistible effect that her lovers desperately chase her across Europe and it in the end kills her. We are here dealing with a woman, Pellegrina, who is not able to escape her own seductiveness, thus we are dealing with a tragic figure, a tragic female Don Juan, who attracts and seduces without effort and at the same time is forced to flee the relationship after a few years to cover up her identity and keep her roles in flux.

I, however, see no reason to characterize Pellegrina as "demonic" as Langbaum does. She maybe *appear* that way in the mind of Langbaum and she might very well look like Kierkegaard's Don Juan with regard to how she transforms herself and disappears in

front of her lover's eyes like music: "Her viser det sig ret, hvad det vil sige, at Don Juans Væsen er Musik. Han opløser sig ligesom for os i Musik, han udfolder sig til en Verden af Toner" (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.) but here the similarities end. Pellegrina is, on the contrary, described as an extraordinary woman, who, in the words of Lincoln, is "fuld a Liv og med saa mægtig Styrke" (Blixen 2012, 270) with "intet sort eller trist i hendes Nærhed" (Blixen 2012, 274), whom he recollects as "Jeg skylder den Kvinde, at jeg nogensinde har forstaaet, og endnu husker Meningen af, saadanne Ord som Taarer, Hjerte, Længsel, Stjerner" (Blixen 2012, 270). In her post opera-singer life Pellegrina is not demonic but "et skikkeligt Menneske" as Blixen also calls Lady Flora in "Kardinalens tredje Historie" as a response to Bjørn Poulsen's characterization of her as being demonic in the Kierkegaardian sense (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 13).⁸⁷

"Drømmerne" and Don Juan: Tradition and Repetition

In "Drømmerne" Blixen picks up and repeats the Don Juan motive that was one of the preferred motives in literature during Romanticism, which Brandes points out in the passage below humorously hinting at Kierkegaard:

— Saa bliver han [Kierkegaard] da selv i Forholdet Don Juan. Som den hele Generation af unge Digtere i Frankrig, Tydskland og Rusland havde han med sin Tanke bestandig kredset om dette Ideal. Mussets berømte Stanzer, Gautiers Ungdomspoesier, Grabbes Drama, Lenau's Fragment, Lermontow's «Vor Tids Helt» fremstillede i Byrons Spor Typen i moderne Skikkelse. I vor egen Literatur havde Heiberg og Paludan-Müller syslet med denne Opgave. Poeterne drømte dengang om Don Juan som Politikerne nutildags beskjæftige sig med Bismarck. (Brandes 1877, 85)

⁸⁷ In a letter from February 7th 1951, Bjørn Poulsen uses Kierkegaard's notion of the demonic in his analysis of "Kardinalens Tredje Historie" to claim Lady Flora is a demonic character (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 10). In a letter to Thorkild Bjørnvig sent the following day, Karen Blixen strongly disagreed with this interpretation: "Men Lady Flora var ikke dæmonisk, hun var et skikkeligt menneske" (Ibid.). Bjørnvig's answer came back on February 10th. Here he agreed with Blixen and tried to explain how Poulsen has misunderstood Kierkegaard's notion of the demonic in connection to his understanding of Lady Flora, which, I would argue, could account for Pellegrina as well: "Kierkegaard definerer ganske rigtigt det dæmoniske som Angsten for det gode – men paa ingen Maade som Angsten for menneskelig berøring. Det er en lovlig haatrucken Parallel for at faa det Regnestykke til at gaa op, at Lady Flora skulde være dæmonisk. Yderligere definerer Kierkegaard det dæmoniske som Angsten for det sande og skønne – og intet kunde jo passe daarligere paa Lady Flora, som just *elskede*, mener jeg, det sande og det skønne." (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 13).

Heiberg's marionette comedy *Don Juan* (1814) is also mentioned in A's essay together with Moliere's play as two examples of epic narratives that treat the Don Juan character from a comical perspective:

En fuldent Opfattelse, der har ført ham ind under det Interessante, har jeg ikke seet; derimod gjælder det om de fleste Opfattelser af *Don Juan*, at de nærme sig til det Comiske. Dette lader sig let forklare deraf, at de knytte sig til *Moliere*, i hvis Opfattelse det Comiske slumrer, og det er *Heibergs* Fortjeneste, at han er bleven sig dette tydeligt bevidst og derfor ikke blot kalder sit Stykke Et Marionetspil, men paa saa mange andre Maader lader det Comiske skinne frem. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)

Blixen's "Drømmerne" obviously belongs to this literary tradition of depicting Don Juan as a comical figure with regard to Baron Gyldenstjerne, but the way she treats the Pellegrina-character as a female Don Juan and how she inverts ideas about gender and seduction and the comical and the tragic are completely original. One could even claim that Pellegrina as a female Don Juan does indeed belong to the category of "det Interessante," which means that Blixen is here giving us the example that A's claims he has never seen: "En fuldent Opfattelse, der har ført ham ind under det Interessante, har jeg ikke seet" (Kierkegaard 1843a, "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier," n. pag.)—maybe because A never thought of the Don Juan character as a female prima donna.

Woman: God(dess) of Man

In Blixen's materialistic parody of the genesis flood narrative of Noah "Syndfloden over Norderney" from *Syv fantastiske fortællinger*, Frøken Malin tells a story about her beautiful young friend Calypso, who is a part of the small group in the hayloft in the final scene. In her youth Calypso never perceived herself as beautiful but as a hideous, mistaken being because she was brought up as a boy at "Angelshorn"⁸⁸ where "man" and the arts and sciences were the ideals for her (presumably homosexual, or at least asexual) misogynist uncle "Grev Serafina":

⁸⁸ Note the irony of this name. It is not the Venusberg but "Slottet Angelshorn" (Blixen 2012, 180) as a sort of (homosexual or misogynist) fortress for the arts and sciences. This again is connected to the irony of the impotent Prince Potenziani and "The Leaning Tower" in Pisa. And a story of men, who do not (or are not able to) desire and celebrate women as sexual beings, which on the part of these powerful men is comical, but on the part of women a deceit of her womanliness. In "Ehrengard," on the other hand, Schloss Rosenbad is described as a Venusberg, which is indeed the frame of a passionate and audacious love affair between Ludmilla and Prince Lothar that has resulted in a child that will be brought into the world three months too early according to the wedding date.

Han lærte den lille Pige Græsk og Latin. Han bestræbte sig for at bibringe hende et Indtryk af den højere Matematiks Harmoni. Men naar han docerede Cirkelns ubeskrivelige Skønhed for hende, spurgte hun ham om, hvis den virkelig var saa dejlig, hvilken Farve den da havde, var den ikke blaa? Vist ikke, sagde han, den har ingen Farve. Fra dette Øjeblik begyndte han at frygte, at hun aldrig blev en Dreng.” (Blixen 2012, 178)

Again we detect the irony with regard to Grev Serafina’s fruitless attempts to trump gender with culture (science and academics), but he *does* succeed in ruining Calypso’s self-confidence as a female human being:

I dette mørke Slot vandrede den tilintetgjorte Pige omkring. Hun var den yndigste Skabning paa Hele Borgen. Hun ville have prydet Kærlighedsgudindens Hof og der været sat til at passe Duerne, selv en ung Due. Men her forstod hun, at hun ikke var til, for ingen saa nogensinde paa hende (...) Ligesom De, Timon [Jonathan], ikke i Længden kunde udholde Tilværelsen, men vilde springe i Vandet fra Langebro, kunde hun til Slut ikke bære sin Ikke-Tilværelse og levende Død paa Angelshorn. (Blixen 2012, 179-80)

After Frøken Malin has finished her story about Calypso’s sufferings at Angelshorn the young Dane Jonathan Mærsk makes a startling conclusion:

”Gud i Himlen, Deres Naade,” sagde Jonathan, ”det ville maaske forundre Dem, men aldrig i mine Dage, før De nu fortæller mig det, er det faldet mig ind, at skønne Kvinder kunde lide eller have det ondt. Jeg tænkte mig, at de var Jordens dejligste Blomster, som hele verden maatte værne om. ”Og nu, da jeg har fortalt Dem det, hvad føler De nu?” spurgte Frøken Malin. ”Deres Naade,” sagde den unge Mand efter at tænkt sig lidt om, ”*jeg føler det opbyggelige, som ligger i den Tanke, at overfor Kvinderne har vi altid Uret.*” ”De er en honnet ung Mand,” sagde Frøken Malin, ”nu gør det ondt i Siden paa Dem, der hvor man har taget Deres Ribben ud.” (Blixen 2012, 184, author’s italics)

The sentence from Jonathan’s passage: ”jeg føler det opbyggelige, som ligger i den Tanke, at overfor Kvinderne har vi altid Uret” (Blixen 2012, 184) is, as has been pointed out by Glienke (Glienke 1986, 111), a poignant allusion to the title of Assessor Wilhelm’s concluding paragraph in the third part ”Ultimatum” in Kierkegaard’s *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel*: ”Det Opbyggelige, der ligger i den Tanke, at mod Gud have vi altid Uret” (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.). The big question here is of course what Jonathan Mærsk’s enigmatic conclusion means in relation to Kierkegaard and what implications it has for our understanding of Blixen’s notion of gender. This I will try to answer below.

Initially Jonathan’s reversal of Assessor Wilhelm’s claim means that man basically does not know the ways of women, just like man does not know the ways of God (like Job), which means that man “overfor Kvinderne” is always in the wrong. “Det

opbyggelige” that Jonathan finds in this recognition ironically alludes to this passage from *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* (if we just substitute “Gud” med “Kvinderne”):

Naar det hedder, Du skal ikke gaae i Rette med Gud, da vil det sige, Du maa ikke ville have Ret mod Gud, kun saaledes maa Du gaae i Rette med ham, at du lærer, at Du har Uret. Ja, det er, hvad Du selv bør ville. Naar det da forbydes Dig at gaae i Rette med Gud, da betegnes derved Din Fuldkommenhed, og ingenlunde siges der, at Du er et ringe Væsen, der ingen Betydning har for ham (...) Denne Betragtning er saa naturlig, saa indlysende for Enhver. Der ligger da noget Opbyggeligt i at have Uret, forsaavidt vi nemlig, idet vi tilstaae det, opbygge os ved Udsigterne til, at det sjeldnere og sjeldnere skal blive Tilfældet. (Kierkegaard 1843a, “Det Opbyggelige,” n. pag.)

When Calypso in “Syndfloden over Norderney” finally discovers the painting at Angelshorn where woman is adorned and worshipped (as a God), we discover that Jonathan’s recognition has far bigger implications:

en Scene af det gamle Naturliv, Nymfer, Fauner, Satyrer og Kentaurer, der legede i Lunde og paa blomstergroede Sletter (...) hvad der især forbløffede og overvældede hende, det var, at disse stærke og skønne Væsener ganske tydeligt satte al deres Kraft ind paa at tilbede, forfølge og favne unge Piger paa hendes egen Alder og skabt ganske som hun selv, og at alt i hele Billedet øjensynligt skete til deres Ære og med deres Yndighed som Midtpunkt. (Blixen 2012, 181)

Here Calypso⁸⁹ discovers her power as a (beautiful) woman; she recognizes that men want women and will do whatever it takes to get them and that her uncle and the other young men at Angelshorn are *the exception*. She discovers that it is she, woman, who is the central figure in life, not God. This also ties into the notion from “Drømmerne” that women always seduce (the very beautiful ones in particular). Man, on the other hand, has to do everything in order to seduce women (like the Fauns and Satyrs in the painting). He is, as Blixen says in “En Baaltale med 14 Aars Forsinkelse” “inspireret” [inspired] (see quote below) by woman to do all sorts of things: create brilliant careers, fight wars, build houses, talk sweet, show admiration and dedication in order to get her. What men think they do for the sake of God or an ideal (science, arts, career, money, honor), they actually, and for the most part unknowingly, do for the sake of woman, or rather: in order to get women, which means that man “overfor Kvinderne altid har uret” (until he complies and does the right thing). Again we can illustrate this with a passage from

⁸⁹ Her name alludes to Kalypso, the nymph from Greek mythology, who lived on the island of Ogygia where she enchanted and attracted the sailors with her irressistable singing, most famously described in Homer’s *Odyssey* where she lures Odysseus to her island and detains him for several years.

Assessor Wilhelm's concluding chapter of *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* when substituting "Mennesket" with man and "Gud" with woman:

Du har vel ofte hørt, en Viisdom, der nemt nok veed at forklare Alt, uden hverken at gjøre Gud eller Mennesket Uret: Mennesket er et skrøbeligt Væsen, siger den, det vilde være urimeligt af Gud at forlange det Umulige af ham, man gjør hvad man kan, og er man en enkelt Gang noget efterladende, saa vil Gud aldrig glemme, at vi ere svage og ufuldkomne Væsner. Skal jeg mest beundre de ophøiede Forestillinger om Guddommens Væsen, denne Kløgt forraader, eller det dybe Indblik i det menneskelige Hjerte, den prøvende Bevidsthed, der randsager sig selv, og nu kommer til den magelige og bequemme Erkjendelse: man gjør hvad man kan? Var det saa let en Sag for Dig, min Tilhører, at afgjøre, hvor Meget det er: hvad man kan? Var Du aldrig i Fare, hvor Du næsten til Fortvivlelse anstrængede Dine Kræfter og dog saa uendelig gjerne ønskede at kunne Mere, og en Anden maaske med tvivlende og bedende Blikke saae paa Dig, om det ikke var muligt, at Du kunde gjøre Mere? (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.)

But after Calypso has discovered her own worth as a female sexual being through the painting, the narrator also goes on to state that a woman's beauty is one of her biggest assets (whether we find it fair or not), which also implies that a woman must do everything to achieve beauty in order to attract the male gaze, humorously described in this passage:

"Hvor, Deres Eminence, bliver Musikken til? Paa Instrumentet eller i Øret? Kvindens Skønhed bliver til i Mandens Øje. De er af den Mening, Timon [Jonathan Mærsk], at Lucifer krænkede Gud ved at betragte ham for at se, hvordan han virkelig saa ud. Dermed viser De da straks, at De tilbeder en mandlig Guddom. En Gudinde vilde først og fremmest spørge sin Tilbeder: Hvordan ser jeg ud? (Blixen 2012, 179)

All in all we can conclude from these analyses of Blixen's tales that the two genders create each other in their ideal image, since each gender caters to the ideal of the other gender to a degree so it is almost impossible to separate what is what. As Blixen points out, again hinting at Kierkegaard, it makes no sense to argue about who is the stronger or weaker sex. They are strong and weak each in their own way. In "En Baaltale med 14 Aars forsinkelse" from 1953 she concludes:

Og Søren Kierkegaard siger, at det kunne have sin interesse at lade et eller andet litterært udgangspunkt udarbejde et regnskab over, hvorvidt, i digtningen ned gennem tiderne, manden oftest har svigtet kvinden eller kvinden manden. Hun er svagere, og hun er stærkere, hun står de høje ånder fjernere, hun er nærmere englene. (Blixen 1997, 220)

The basic dynamic between the two genders is, however, sexual attraction, which is also what, according to Blixen, drives the world and what she, tongue in cheek, means by “den gensidige inspiration” in the following quote from “En Baaltale”:

Jeg selv anser *inspiration* for at være den højeste menneskelige lykke. Og inspiration kræver altid to elementer. Jeg tror at den gensidige inspiration mand og kvinde imellem har været den mægtigste drivkraft vor slægts historie, og fremfor andre har skabt, hvad der kendetegner vor adel: bedrift, poesi, kunst og smag. Jeg tænker mig, at et af de forhold, hvorved menneskene har hævet sig over dyrene, er dette: at menneskene har parringstid hele året,—et samfund, hvor de to køns tiltrækning for hinanden var indskrænket til en bestemt kort periode, måtte blive besynderlig afstumpet. Ja, jeg tror, at jo mægtigere denne gensidige inspiration virker, jo mere levende vil et samfund udvikle sig (...) Skal jeg fra mit eget personlige synspunkt definere denne dybe forskelligartethed hos menneskeheden to køn, da udtrykker jeg min opfattelse bedst, idet jeg siger: ”Mandens tyngdepunkt, hans væsens gehalt, ligger i, hvad han i livet udretter, kvindens i, hvad hun er.” (Blixen 1997, 217-8, 220)

The ideals of men and women created by the opposite gender is, however, different from culture to culture and is constantly altered as history progresses, which means that the contrast outlined in Blixen’s tales and in her essay above has many modifications and degrees. Things look different today, but I will, however (audaciously maybe), go on to agree with Blixen that a woman’s biggest asset is her beauty and what she is (“er”) and a man’s biggest asset is what he does (“udretter”) and that it still for the most part holds water today, whether we like it or find it unfair. This also means that Matteo in “To gamle Herrers Historier” (*Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957) is correct when he observes:

Og hvad Blodsudgydelse angaar, da er denne, i vor Hyrdindes – som i enhver Dames – Øjne et ophøjet Privilegium og uadskilleligt forbundet med Tilværelsens mest sublime Øjeblikke, og med Forfremmelse og Fuldkommengørelse. Hvilken lille Pige udgyder ikke gladelig sit Blod for at blive Jomfru? Hvilken Brud ikke sit Blod for at blive Hustru? Og hvilken ung Hustru ikke sit for at blive Moder? *Mennesket, Manden*, søger, dybt foruroliget og forvirret overfor Forholdet mellem Guddom og Menneske, bestandig – og bestandig forgæves – et Fodfæste i Erfaringer fra sit eget Menneskeliv. Han anlægger paa dette ophøjede Forhold en Maalestok hentet fra Forholdet mellem Lærer og Elev, eller mellem Befalingsmand og Soldat, og jo dybere han i sin Grublen trænger ned i Sagen, jo mere pinefuld bliver hans Uro. Vore Damer, hvis Natur, ligger Guddommens Natur nærmere, græmmer sig ikke over saadanne Uoverensstemmelser, men ser og erkender, ganske enkelt og som om det var en given Sag, Forholdet mellem Skaberen og Kosmos som et Kærlighedsforhold,—og i et Kærlighedsforhold er Forskning ørkesløs og Analyse usømmelig. (Blixen 1957, 61-2, author’s italics)

Here we, however, find the juxtaposition “Mennesket, Manden” to be an ironic comment to Kierkegaard, who consistently throughout his entire oeuvre refers to “Manden” as

“Mennesket” with meticulous consistency.⁹⁰ The young man is called “det unge Menneske” and we find countless examples in Kierkegaard’s works, so I will just mention a couple of examples to stress the point in this chapter: “Og hvilke Følger havde ikke denne Kjedsommelighed. Mennesket stod høit og faldt dybt, først ved Eva, saa fra det babyloniske Taarn” (Kierkegaard 1843a, “Vexeldriften,” n. pag.) and “Netop ved at arbeide frigjør Mennesket sig, ved at arbeide bliver han Herre over Naturen, ved at arbeide viser han, at han er høiere end Naturen” (Kierkegaard 1843a, “Ligevægten,” n. pag.). This clearly implies that a woman is not a “Menneske” but something else, “Væren for Andet,” as Johannes Forførereren suggests in this passage from “Forførerens Dagbog”:

Deraf lader det sig ogsaa forklare, hvorfor Gud, da han skabte Eva, lod en dyb Søvn falde paa Adam; thi Qvinden er Mandens Drøm. Ogsaa paa en anden Maade læres af hiin Fortælling, at Qvinden er Væren for Andet. Der siges nemlig, at Jehova tog et af Mandens Sidebeen. Havde han f. Ex. taget af Mandens Hjerne, saa var Qvinden vel vedbleven at være Væren for Andet, men Bestemmelsen var ikke, at hun skulde være et Hjerneskind, men noget ganske Andet. Hun blev Kjød og Blod, men falder netop derved ind under Bestemmelsen af Natur, der væsentlig er Væren for Andet. (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag.)

As we have seen above, Blixen, contrary to Johannes, clearly suggests *that both genders are “Væren for Andet”* and that woman is (of course) a human being on equal terms with the man. One could even go further and suggest that Blixen actually hints at the opposite: That it is man, who is “Væren for Andet” since, as she already showed us in *Sandhedens Hævn*, Blixen perceives “Natur” as the primary and culture and Christianity, the symbolic world of ideas (to where man belongs) as the secondary that derives from the primary: “Naturen.” These two spheres do, however, interact, which is eventually what drives the world forward. Blixen’s major critique is that “Natur,” “Sandselighed” and “Kvinderne” within the notion of Christianity have been looked down upon as “Væren for Andet” and suppressed, even associated with the Devil, when these categories in fact belong to the (organic) phenomena from where all life, thinking, arts and religion derive. This notion runs through her entire oeuvre from *Sandhedens Hævn* (1926) to *Skæbneankdøter* (1958) and here Kierkegaard as a male predecessor and philosopher within the frame of

⁹⁰ Ironically hinted at too in “Syndfloden over Norderney”: “Men de havde det nemmere, De higede blot efter at forsvinde, men hun, hun skulde skabe et Menneske, sig selv, og er det ikke meget forlangt af en ung Pige, at hun skal gøre det helt paa egen Haand?” (Blixen 2012, 180).

Christianity (and from the same historical time period that her tales take place) became a natural target.

Woman: Man's Paradise on Earth

As a continuation of these ideas expressed in “Syndfloden over Norderney,” Blixen develops the idea in “Dykkeren” from *Skæbneanedotter* (1958) that female beauty and sexuality is man's paradise on earth.⁹¹ With usual affinity for ironic, materialistic embodiments of religious ideas and gender reversals (this time from the Koran), the tale suggests that man's notion of angels in heaven derive from certain, materialistic flesh and blood embodiments on earth: extremely beautiful women. In “Dykkeren” (which is told by Mira Jama from “Drømmerne”), the young Softa Saufe is fooled to believe that he has met a real angel from Heaven, when Mirza Aghai sends the flaming hot dancer Thusmu to distract him from trying to build wings, so he can fly and meet the angels in Heaven. She, instead, manages to keep him grounded, so to speak:

“Vi Engle, Saufe,” sagde hun, “behøver i Virkeligheden sletikke Vinger for at komme fra Himlen til Jorden eller Jorden til Himlen, men, som Du nok vil komme til at forstaa, er vore egne Englelemmer os nok. Bliver Du og jeg virkelig gode Venner, bliver det ligesaadan for Dig, og Du kan kassere de Vinger som Du arbejder paa.” Skælvende af Henrykkelse fra Isse til Fod spurgte han hende, hvorledes det var muligt at en saadan Himmelrejse kunde foretages stik imod alle Naturlove. Hun lo ad hans Spørgsmaal, og ogsaa hendes Latter var som en lille klar Sølvklokke. “O Gud,” sagde hun, “hvor I Mænd dog altid vil have Love og Beviser! Og hvor I dog har en grulig stærk Tro paa de Ord, der kommer ud gennem jeres Skæg! Men jeg, Softa, jeg vil lære Dig, at vi Engle har Mund til sødere Meddelelser, og en sødere Mund at meddele os med. Jeg vil nu lige straks, hvis du bryder Dig om det, undervise Dig I, hvordan Engle og Mennesker kommer til fuldkommen Forstaaelse, uden Ord eller Beviser!” Og dette gjorde hun. I en Maaned var den unge Softa's [*sic*] Lykke saa overvældende, at hans Hjerte gav sig under den. Hans Opgave og hans Arbejde udslettedes af hans Erindring, mens han Gang paa Gang gav sig hen til den omtalte himmelske Forstaaelse. (Blixen 1958, 14)

Again, we detect the irony with regard to young Saufe and his delusional ideas about angels and the origin of Thusmu. When she finally reveals her true nature to him out of love, they are forced to depart and Saufe eventually gives up his project. Within Christian mythology angels⁹² are mostly perceived as asexual creatures (which is also Virgilus

⁹¹ This is a materialistic subversion of Islam's notion of Heaven as being inhabited by fifteen-year-old female virgins.

⁹² As Matthew 22:30 is interpreted: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (King James version).

Hafniensis' interpretation in *Begrebet Angest* as we saw in my analysis of "En Historie om en Perle") not belonging to either gender (which fits the personality of Grev Serafina at Angelshorn). All of their names are, however, masculine (for example Michael, Gabriel and Sataniel) and they are for the most part depicted in paintings and sculpture as male human beings. In iconoclastic Islam, we find no depictions of angels, but they too all have male names. There are many references in "Dykkeren" to the Koran and its notion of angels, but one of them seems of particular interest since the angels of Islam that guard the hellfire, Malik being one of them, is substituted by a woman, when Saufe discovers that it is Mirza Aghai, who has send Thusmu and that he is going to lose his beloved: "Englene, og ingen andre end dem, har Gud sat til at vogte Helvedes Ild" and in the last part of the story concludes: "en ung Kvinde lader en Elsker smage sviende Ild" (Blixen 1958, 16). Here we find the male angel substituted for by a beautiful female dancer as the guard of hellfire and *unhappy love as the earthly and materialistic version of Islam and Christianity's notions of Hell*. We also detect the authorial irony when Saufe states that: "ingen kan vente af en Danserinde, at hun skal være en Engel" (Blixen 1958, 16) and Thusmu did, subsequently, with the usual female sense for the practical (as Kierkegaard's Regine), marry a rich merchant just a year after her love affair with Saufe ended (Blixen 1958, 22). Saufe, on the other hand, never had a relationship with a woman again, but became an eremite and pearl diver.⁹³

Lucifer. Masculinity Internalized: Heksen and Jomfru Maria.

In a passage in *Daguerreotypier*⁹⁴ Blixen refers to the quote about "Væren for Andet" from "Forførerens Dagbog" that I mentioned in the previous chapter (even though she in the passage seems to ascribe it to Kierkegaard himself) with particular attention to the notion of "Heksen":

⁹³ I think that Langbaum is correct, when he notices that "The Diver" deals with the notions of "hope" and "infinite resignation" from Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven* and that Blixen turns the notions of air (the religious as the resort for this infinite resignation) and water (earthly existence as the resort for infinite resignation) upside down (Langbaum 1964, 247). This inversion of the elements we already find *Sandhedens Hævn* and I am convinced that it would be very rewarding to investigate "Dykkeren" in more detail with regard to Kierkegaard.

⁹⁴ *Daguerreotypier* was first given as two radio talk on Danish National Radio. The talks were written during the fall of 1950 and recorded at Rungstedlund on December 19th 1950 (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 9) half a year after the publication of "Babette's Feast" in *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1950.

Eva var blevet skabt af Adams ribben, det var for mandens skyld at kvinden var til, og Søren Kierkegaard definerer kvindens væsen som ”væren for andet”. Men der var en kvinde som, længe inden ordet ”kvindeemancipation” blev brugt, eksisterede uafhængig af manden og havde sit tyngdepunkt i sig selv. Det var heksen. Heksen har spillet en større eller mindre rolle i de forskellige tidsaldre, men hun er aldrig ganske forsvundet ud af tilværelsen. Man må tro at sagen for de fleste mænd står således, at en kvinde, som kan undvære manden, givetvis også kan undvære Gud, eller at en kvinde, som ikke vil besiddes af manden, ufravigelig måtte være besat af Djævlén. (Blixen 1997, 186-7)

Here Blixen juxtaposes “manden” and “Gud” and “kvinde” and “Djævlén.” In a letter to Aage Henriksen from July 29, 1953, where she discusses Kierkegaard (same year as she wrote the essay), Blixen elaborates on the above notion:

Ogsaa et andet Citat,—til Forklaring af, hvad jeg har sagt til Dem,—har Deres Afhandling (eller Brandts Bog som jeg læste for dennes Skyld) givet mig. Goldschmidt skriver, at ”naar Møller gik itu ved Stødet med S. K., saa hidrørte det i sin inderste Grund fra, at K stod i et skønnere, renere, højere Forhold til Kvinden”. Jeg maa have Lov at bruge det til at forklare, at naar Kvinder kan le ad Mændene, ”hidrører det i sin inderste Grund, - (se Goethes Faust & Mephisto, og Thomas Mann’s Dr. Faustus og hans Djævel) fra, at de staar i et elskværdigere, og værdigere, Forhold til Djævlén”. (I det hele taget: Hvor Lysets og Mørkets højeste Repræsentant gaar ind i Bevidstheden som *han*, dér giver selve Kvindeligheden Adgang til særligt inderlige Forhold, og vi faar Jomfru Maria, og Heksen. (Blixen 1996 Vol. II, 150-1)

Blixen here ironically uses Kierkegaard and his lack of sexual relationships with women ”K stod i et skønnere, renere, højere Forhold til Kvinden” to point out how he, as a sexually abstinent man (opposite of P. L. Møller, who indulged in extra-marital sexual relationships (Bruun Andersen 1950, 37-8)), came to be an ally of God (just like a catholic priest), while she, as a woman, who similarly did not have sexual relationships with men (upon her return to Denmark) or let herself be defined by them (”Heksen”), came to be an ally of the Devil. A woman who has internalized the male agency does not need a man, since she has a relationship with the entire male sex (just like Kierkegaard had it the other way around) and the sexual energy is transformed through sublimation into artistic and spiritual creativity and we get either “Heksen” (the artist) or “Jomfru Maria” (the nun). Lucifer, aside from being a revolutionary, who questions the established (God) and brings light and truth, which was Brandes’ notion that Blixen took over, Blixen also perceived Lucifer as the female male muse; the equivalent to the male female muse of the Madonna (which became Regine for Kierkegaard). It seems to me that Aage Henriksen misunderstood Blixen’s notion of the Devil, which resulted in his

perception of her as being a demonic person with a special esoteric female insight (belonging to the sphere of the moon) about men. Blixen did indeed have a very unique and special insight into male psychology (as this thesis has shown), but there is nothing demonic or supernatural about it as Henriksen seems to claim in the portrait film made by his son Morten Henriksen *Bag Blixens maske* (2011).

8. CONCLUSION

Blixen. An Ethical Aesthete

As previously mentioned in the Blixen-Kierkegaard research survey Danish scholar Ernst Frandsen categorizes Blixen as belonging to the sphere of the esthetic back in 1951:

saadan finder den stolte Mand sin Lykke i Fuldbyrnelsen af sin Skæbne.” Ordene angaar hende selv, men de virker, som var de skrevet om Nis Petersen og Kaj Munk. Ikke mindst Kaj Munk! De tilhører alle tre disse stoltes Kompagni. Med Blikket vendt mod Bestemmelsen og de evige Magter, som raader for Bestemmelsen, har disse tre hvælv et Regnbue af Fantasi over Tredivernes graa Jævnhed. De har tildelt Perioden Storhed, Nis Petersen og Kaj Munk fra et religiøst Stadium, Karen Blixen fra et æstetisk. Det etiske som i Søren Kierkegaards Enten-Eller er det omstændeligste for ikke at sige det kedeligste, har de overlagt til Samtiden og især den nærmeste Eftertid. (Frandsen and Johansen 1951, 22)

In a letter to Aage Henriksen about her father⁹⁵ Blixen writes that she would not classify herself as an ”Æstetiker” (in the Kierkegaardian notion of the word), but that there are some similarities that she also has in common with her father. The difference that she points out seems to have something to do with the ethical. Her mode of existence does have an ethical system; it is just not the same as the Christian:

Den Egenskab, som tiest anerkendes hos ham er *esprit*, en anden er Lethed,—han er en Feinschmecker, en *élégant* i selve sit Væsen en Æstetiker. Det kan være, at noget af min Interesse for Emnet skyldes dette, at jeg mener, Faders Skæbne kuriøst nok i nogen Grad er blevet gentaget i min egen. Jeg tror ikke at Fader var ”Æstetiker” mere, end jeg selv er det. Jeg mener, at selv om han ikke var Alvorsmand, var der Ting som for ham, mulig paa en anden Maade end for andre Mennesker, var Alvor. (Blixen 1996, Vol. II, 320-1)

⁹⁵ Henriksen was thinking about writing a book about Blixen’s father at that time. An idea he quickly abandoned when Blixen started meddling and tried to guide and control the project.

Blixen's ethics are at their core Pagan and Greek. They celebrate the laws of virtue [arête], pride, honor and glory [doxa], which also fits the British gentleman ideals of her father (and her brother), and acknowledges fearlessness, sensuousness, audacity, creativity and humor as the true virtues that a human being should be judged by. This is an ethics that is similar to that we find in the Icelandic Sagas and within European Aristocracy (as the descendants of a long line of farmers and warriors) and is very different from the Christian-Bourgeois (and Kierkegaard's) notion of ethics and Kierkegaard's (according to Blixen) honorless aesthetes (Johannes, Constantin). As the quote above by Frandsen also indicates, Blixen could not disagree more, when Assessor Wilhelm in *Enten. Eller. Anden Deel* claims:

Naar et Menneske æsthetisk betragter sig selv, saa distingerer han maaskee saaledes. Han siger: jeg har Talent til at male, det anseer jeg for en Tilfældighed; men jeg har Vittighed og Skarpsindighed, det anseer jeg som det Væsentlige, som ikke kan tages fra mig, uden at jeg bliver en Anden. Hertil vilde jeg svare: denne hele Distinction er en Illusion; thi naar Du ikke overtager denne Vittighed og Skarpsindighed ethisk, som en Opgave, som Noget, Du er ansvarlig for, saa tilhører den Dig ikke væsentlig, og det fornemmelig af den Grund, at saalænge Du blot lever æsthetisk, saalænge er Dit Liv totalt uvæsentligt. (Kierkegaard 1843a, "Ligevægten," n. pag.)

This view is supported by my reading of "Babettes Gæstebud" where Blixen reorders Kierkegaard's three stages and places the aesthetic as the highest stage over the religious and the ethical, which, as she herself points out in the letter to Aage Henriksen, does not make her an "Æstetiker" in the Kierkegaardian sense of the word, but in the Pagan-Aristocratic sense I have outlined above.

Gender and Nemesis

There is no question that Blixen was annoyed with the one-sided depiction of women in Kierkegaard's works. Aside from two short letters from Cordelia in the foreword to "Forførerens Dagbog" (Kierkegaard 1843a, n. pag) all female characters are described and filtered through male characters and have otherwise no names. The notion of women as innocent, spiritually underdeveloped creatures with no knowledge about men, that most of Kierkegaard's male characters from his aesthetic-pseudonymous authorship seem to propagate, is ironically described in this passage from "Ib og Adelaide" in *Sidste Fortællinger* (1957):

Med Landadelens Invasion i Byen steg Kvindernes Verden, selve Kvindelighedens Princip i Tilværelsen, som en Flodbølge og oversvømmede København. Til daglig var Atmosfæren indenfor Voldene maskulint bestemt, og havde været det i hundrede Aar. Landets eneste Universitet og dets Kirkes højeste Sæde laa i Hovedstaden, og omkring disse højt agtede Institutioner forsamledes dets bedste Hoveder, Filosofer, Prælater og Æstetikere. Her blev aandfulde Diskussioner ført og evige Problemer behandlede. For mindre end tyve Aar siden havde den aandfulde Kreds haft mulighed for at skærpe sine Evner paa Eggen af Søren Kierkegaard's Vid, hans Meningsfæller og Modstandere diskuterede endnu. Aandens Verden var Adam underlagt. Eva var at finde ved sin Kniplepude og sine Husholdningsbøger eller hun vandede Urtepotterne i Vinduet. Hun var Hjemmets rene og bly Skytsengel, hendes aandelige og sjælelige Farve var hvid og hendes Dyder af mere passiv end aktiv Natur: Uskyld og Taalmod og et fuldkommet Ukendskab til de Dæmoner, som antoges at hjem søge hendes Bejlers og Ægtemands Indre. (Blixen 1957, 220)

Blixen proves this notion wrong with her female seducers Annelise and Ehrengard, who, on the contrary is very knowledgeable about men and have no problems with posing nude and engaging in sexual activity, contrary to their male counterparts Justitsraad Mathiesen and J. W. Cazotte that can be seen as ironic parodies of Kierkegaard's male seducer-aesthetes Johannes Forførereren and Constantin Constantius. Kierkegaard's "unge Menneske" is also subjected to parodic inversions in both "Carnival" and "The Poet" and in "Drømmerne" Blixen turns A's notion of the male seducer Don Juan from Mozart's opera upside down, so he becomes a comical, spiritless "Pralhans." In his place she instead puts the real embodiment of music: the stunningly talented and beautiful prima donna Pellegrina Leoni, who, on the other hand, as a naïve female seducer, is perceived as a tragic figure. Already in her first work *Sandhedens Hævn* we find the Pagan female witch Amiane in the role as the omnipotent Christian God and Abraham from Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven*, the founder of faith, as a simple murderer and villain. In "En Historie om en Perle" Christian ethics are subverted and deemed demonic, which we find embodied in the female character Jensine, whereas the male character Alexander, who gambles and owes money, is the innocent ideal of a human being before the fall, which is a subversion of the ideas propagated by Virgilius Hafniensis in *Begrebet Angest*. In "Syndfloden over Norderney" Blixen inverts Assessor Wilhelm's claim: "Det Opbyggelige, der ligger i den Tanke, at mod Gud have vi altid Uret" (Kierkegaard 1843a, "Ultimatum," n. pag.) and places "Kvinderne" in the position of "Gud" as the real, earthly and materialistic center that the world evolves around and life is created from (literally, one could say). In "Babettes Gæstebud" the notion of the mythological Jesus

who suffered for mankind and the Kierkegaardian notion of the religious as the highest of three stages is subverted and this subversion we find embodied in the shape of the female artist and aesthete Babette, who suffers for mankind. All in all, we can gather the contrasts with regard to gender and Christianity in relation to Kierkegaard in these pairs of opposites:

Woman – Man

Nature – Culture

Sensuousness – Spirituality

Pragmatic – Theoretical

Reality – Dream

Esthetic – Religious

Paganism – Christianity

Moon – Sun

Devil – God

Blixen - Kierkegaard

Thus, Blixen's oeuvre can be regarded as one long subversion of what has traditionally been valued as the highest within Christian Western Culture, which is the right component in the above list of pairs, belonging to the male sphere. She also shows how this sphere derives from the materialistic phenomenon's, from "Nature," which is the primary, not something that is secondary and has to be suppressed as "Væren for Andet." In Blixen's world it is: "Reversed. In this pattern the road runs the other way. And runs on" (Dinesen 1993c, 166). It is, however, the interaction between these pairs of opposites "den gensidige inspiration" (sexual attraction between the two genders being the root) that drives the world forward and they must be regarded as (at least) equal. Thus, Blixen can be regarded as the female correlative to her great male predecessor and fellow countryman Søren Kierkegaard, even his nemesis.

Danish Summary

Denne Ph.d. er en artikel-Ph.d. og består af tre artikler, der er integreret i en længere baggrundssektion, der indeholder 1) en forskningsoversigt over Blixen-Kierkegaard forskningen fra 1934 til i dag, 2) refleksioner over den teori og metode, der er anvendt i hver af artiklerne, 3) en række supplerende analyser af Blixenfortællinger, der i særlig grad beskæftiger sig med væsentlige ideer eller karakterer fra Kierkegaard's æstetisk-pseudonyme forfatterskab (1843-1846) samt 4) et afsluttende kapitel, der sammenstiller observationerne fra artiklerne og de supplerende analyser.

Den hovedtese, som Ph.d.en påviser, er, at Karen Blixen i vid udstrækning brugte sine fortællinger til at bedrive skjult polemik mod Kierkegaard (primært i forhold til kristendom og køn) i stedet for blot at overtage hans ideer, som det meste af forskningen tidligere har gået ud fra. Der er ingen tvivl om at Karen Blixen var misfornøjet med fraværet af kvindelige karakterer og synsvinkler i Kierkegaard's forfatterskab. Bortset fra to korte breve fra Cordelia i "Forførerens Dagbog" (1843) er kvinden gennem hele Kierkegaard's forfatterskab formidlet gennem mandens opfattelse - ofte ud fra et æstetisk-romantisk syn på hende som Madonna, der er helt uvidende om erotik og seksualitet, og om hvordan mænd fungerer.

I en række modfortællinger gør Blixen op med denne forestilling bl.a. gennem karakterne Annelise, Polly og Ehrengard, som er unge kvindelige forførelser med appetit på erotiske og som bestemt heller ikke mangler hverken ånd og snilde. Ph.d.en påviser også at Blixen allerede i 1920'erne havde indgående kendskab til det meste af Kierkegaard's æstetisk-pseudonyme forfatterskab og at *Sandhedens Hævn* (1926) er den allerførste Kierkegaard-modfortælling, der støttet af Georg Brandes Kritik af Kierkegaards kristendom, kan læses som en materialistisk parodi på Kierkegaard's *Frygt og Bæven* (1843). I "En Historie om en Perle" er det Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angst* (1844), der er målet for Blixen's kritik, og hun vender op og ned på begreberne, så det her er kristendommen, der fremstår som dæmonisk og som selve årsagen til angst – ikke midlet til at kurere den. I "Drømmerne" fra *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) vender Blixen op og ned på væsentlige ideer om Don Juan fra A's essay "De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske" fra Enten. Eller. Første Deel (1843). Her anskues Don Juan som en narcissistisk og komisk "Pralhans." I modsætning hertil fremstår Pellegrina Leoni som en tragisk, kvindelig Don Juan, der forfører uden at ville det, hvilket er hendes forbandelse.

Alt i alt konkluderes det at Blixen gør op med Kierkegaard's religiøse livssyn og i stedet indsætter et hedensk-materialistisk, der samtidig gør op med ideen om kvinden som "Væren for Andet," som vi finder i flere af Kierkegaard's tidlige værker, men at de to køn "inspirerer hinanden" gennem den seksuelle tiltrækning, at det er det biologiske, der er det åndeliges startpunkt og samtidig det, der får verden til at dreje rundt. I forhold til køn og kristendom spiller Blixen altså "Djævlens advokat" med sine skjulte modtællinger, der nu kommer frem i lyset, og hun kan således også opfattes som Kierkegaard's nemeses.

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