Guard Always Your Honor: “Ehrengard,” Karen Blixen’s Last Tale

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Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.¹
—Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (c. 345–402)

Introduction
Karen Blixen’s (Isak Dinesen’s) “Ehrengard” was published posthumously in June 1963, the year after the author’s death. It appears to be the very last manuscript that she handed in for publication—after having rewritten and revised it several times.² The long and complicated history of its composition and the great pains that Blixen took to complete it despite her fragile state imply that this text had ranked high in Blixen’s own textual hierarchy. It can be thus assumed that it may not only be her last tale, but also her “last will”—a literary testament of a kind, the master’s farewell message to her readers and fellow writers. The present paper aims at explicating this message and formulating the ethics of interpretation, which we find both implied and practiced in “Ehrengard” and which in our view has special relevance for the scholarly reader. This is done by tracing its references to Blixen’s other texts and by exploring the topos of seduction in the light of the text’s explicit and implicit allusions to “Forførerens Dagbog” (The Seducer’s Diary) by Søren Kierkegaard, a short novel, embedded in his Enten-Eller. Første Deel (1843; Either/Or. Part I). The paper will also challenge, metacritically, some aspects of the reading of “Ehrengard” by Mads Bunch (2013; 2017), who likewise focuses on the tale’s relation to Kierkegaard’s text.

¹ “Not by one avenue only can we arrive at so tremendous a secret.”
² Blixen started working on the tale in the 1950s, and it exists in no less than seven manuscripts. Its shortened version, entitled “The Secret of Rosenbad,” was published in Ladies’ Home Journal in 1962. In 1963, both the entire final English manuscript of “Ehrengard” and the Danish translation by Clara Selborn were published. For the textual history of the tale, see Lasson (1994, 470); Bunch (2013, 489–92; 2017, 89–91).
“Ehrengard” and “The Monkey,” “The Cardinal’s First Tale” and “The Poet”

Intertextuality in Blixen’s oeuvre is so intense and extravagant that Dag Heede has named it an “et orgie af referancer” (2001, 245) [an orgy of references]. Blixen does not only wander, baldly and broadly, through literature and art of different times, countries, and genres, but also repeatedly “recycles” characters and situations that she herself has created. Exploring instances of Blixen’s auto-intertextuality is a handy strategy, which may help one fill in some empty spaces, interpret ambiguities, or see a certain pattern in one of Blixen’s texts with the help of another. “Ehrengard” seems to be quite a special case in this respect, because it evokes not just one, but several of Blixen’s stories, and these allusions are particularly subtle. They provide a background for better understanding the mode of the tale and foreground some relevant details with regard to its two protagonists—Ehrengard and Cazotte.

The family name of Ehrengard, the young woman in the tale after whom it is titled, is von Schreckenstein. This is also the name of the person who has presented the prioress of “The Monkey” (Seven Gothic Tales) with the monkey of the title. We are informed that the solicitor of the old Count at Hopballehus, father of Athena, has a similar animal. This is significant because there are obvious parallels between Athena Hopballehus and Ehrengard von Schreckenstein. Both girls have been brought up by a father in an old castle of huge proportions, and both are physically strong and have tomboy traits. Athena is described in a more grotesque manner, though. And while there is no love left between Athena and Boris in “The Monkey,” Ehrengard and her fiancé Kurt von Blittersdorf end up genuinely loving each other. However, earlier in the story, the princess gives Ehrengard a piece of advice on how to make Kurt love her, which is precisely what unites Boris and Athena in “The Monkey” against all odds: “Try to have a secret with him. 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 1993, 236–7). In “The Monkey,” Boris and Athena first fight in a manner that he is she and she is he: “the balance of the one so dependent upon and amalgamated with that of the other that neither knew clearly where his

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3 To mention just a few examples: August von Schimmelman, the main character of “The Roads Round Pisa,” reappears in “The Poet” (both from Seven Gothic Tales), and the former story explicitly refers to the marionette comedy “Sandhedens Hævn” (1926; “The Revenge of Truth”) that Blixen had written in her youth; Pellegrina Leoni, the pursued woman and the heroine of “The Dreamers” (Seven Gothic Tales) is also the protagonist of “Echoes” (Last Tales); “The Diver” (Anecdotes of Destiny) is presented as a tale told by Mira Jama, the storyteller who is part of the frame narrative of “The Dreamers.”

4 It may or may not be the same person. Ehrengard’s father is a general, while the donator of the monkey in “The Monkey” is an admiral. As Johnny Kondrup suggests in Bjergtaget (2019), Karen Blixen might have stolen the name from an 1878 novel by Henry James, The Europeans.
own body ended and that of his adversary began” (Dinesen 1991, 153). This paradoxical union is reinforced the next morning, when they witness the metamorphosis between the monkey and the prioress with the following effect:

This time Athena’s luciferous eyes within their deep dark sockets did not exactly take Boris into possession. She was aware of him as a being outside herself; even the memory of their fight was clearly to be found in her clear limpid gaze. But she was, in this look, laying down another law, a command which was not to be broken: from now, between, on the one side, her and him, who had been present together at the happenings of the last minutes, and, on the other side, the rest of the world, which had not been there, an insurmountable line would forever be drawn. (Dinesen 1991, 162–3)

Athena and Boris now have a secret together; they know something no one else in the world knows (and it is worthwhile keeping this in mind, for the idea that secrets should be treated with respect will be an important part of Blixen’s message). Moreover, the formulation “he is you and you are he” is a chiasm. This will also prove to be significant when we come to Kierkegaard. For now, however, it will suffice to conclude that Ehrengard and Kurt are a lighter and happier version of perhaps the most grotesque couple in Blixen’s oeuvre, Athena and Boris—if indeed the latter do become a couple as a consequence of being cut off from the rest of the world.

The one attempting to seduce in “Ehrengard” is a painter, Johann Wolfgang Cazotte. In the beginning of the tale, he is in Italy painting a portrait of Cardinal Salviati. This must, of course, be the same person as the one who is the teller of “The Cardinal’s First Tale” and “The Cardinal’s Third Tale” in Last Tales and who also briefly appears in “The Cloak” of the same collection.5 “The Cardinal’s First Tale” seems to be the most relevant of these tales in relation to “Ehrengard.” It is a story that is very much concerned with the poetics of narrative art, especially the principle of “cadenza d’inganno,”6 and it also portrays taking residence in a countryside idyll because of issues related to childbirth.7 But whereas in “The Cardinal’s First

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6 “The deceptive cadenza,” a musical term that characterizes the paradoxical structure of Blixen’s own texts, based on the principle of unexpected turnings and unresolved intrigue; see, for example, Selboe (2008, 18); Sørensen (2017, 1); Engberg (2019, 32).
7 The connection between “Ehrengard” and “The Cardinal’s First Tale” is created through yet another subtle link: the old lady who tells the story in “Ehrengard”—a kind of framed frame narrator—presents it like a piece of music in several parts and introduces the final, and hectic, part as being in the mode “con furore” (Dinesen 1993, 257). In the story from Last Tales, “The Cardinal’s First Tale,” the mysterious lady in black declares that she is calm even though she is well aware that she is “in for a furioso” (Dinesen 1986, 4).
Tale,” the firstborn child is feeble and one-eyed, and one of the later-born twins later dies as an effect of a fire, the child in “Ehrengard” is born perfectly healthy and unharmed. The only thing special about it is that it is born too soon after the parents’ marriage, and part of the tale’s intrigue consists of attempts to avoid the scandal of this becoming publicly known. Again, “Ehrengard” appears to be a lighter and happier version of an earlier published tale.

Association with yet another of Blixen’s earlier stories, although in a somewhat indirect way, is evoked by Cazotte’s first and middle names, Johann Wolfgang, and also his title: Geheimrat. This is an obvious allusion to Goethe, and it does not reflect too favorably on the German prince of poets—or more precisely, it reflects a skeptical distance to this prince on Blixen’s part, of which she has been explicit (as discussed by Blixen’s scholars before, see, e.g., Brantly 2002, 65). This allusion brings us to “The Poet” from Seven Gothic Tales, where Goethe is a central point of reference. And although no Johann Wolfgang acts in that story, Goethe is present in it as a kind of obsession for the protagonist, Councillor Mathiesen, who once met Geheimrat Goethe in Weimar, slavishly adores him, and “copies” his art. Both Cazotte and Mathiesen are seducers (or parodies thereof) in their own right. Mathiesen marries the young widow Fransine in order to make a tragic poet out of Anders Kube, a young man with literary ambitions. What Mathiesen’s plan brings about, however, is his own bitter end: after being first shot by Anders, he is finished off by Fransine, who crushes his head with a stone in an almost biblical gesture. Set against this background, Cazotte’s blush (to be discussed later) appears, no doubt, to be a much milder punishment for his manipulations. Several aspects are important to point out here: first, this connection (through Goethe) between “Ehrengard” and “The Poet” compels the reader to treat Cazotte’s character with suspicion; second, it reminds us that manipulation is punishable in Blixen (one could also refer here to “Roads Round Pisa” and Aage Henriksen’s (1952) classical interpretation of Blixen’s metaphor of life as a marionette comedy); and third, here we see once again that “Ehrengard” is played “on a lighter instrument”8 than an earlier tale to which it refers.

In the beginning of “Ehrengard,” it is stated that what follows is a comedy or tragedy (Dinesen 1993, 216). Judged from the allusions to earlier Blixen’s tales and the comparisons

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8 This is Blixen’s own characterization of Anecdotes of Destiny, and “Ehrengard” was meant to be part of that collection: “This is played on a lighter instrument. . . . You might say it was played on a flute, where the others were played on a violin or cello” (quoted in Brantly 2002, 181). Blixen seems to be referring here to the tone and outcome of events in these stories, but this, of course, does not mean that they do not have significant things to say.
they motivate, “Ehrengard” appears to be more of a comedy than a tragedy. However, the lighter key of the story, with its “charming” rococo setting, may also be a sugar coating in order to seduce the reader into swallowing a quite bitter pill: Blixen’s last tale, as will be demonstrated, may be read as a provocation of our, the readers (some of whom are also writers), self-critical reflection over our own ways of dealing with literary texts.

Situating the Reader

It is not unusual that Blixen’s tales explicitly encourage and even request the reader’s active engagement by somehow situating the reader in relation to them. This is often achieved by means of characters who are artists or storytellers and who declare the reception to be a vital part of the creative act. The protagonist of “The Young Man with the Carnation” and “A Consolatory Tale” (*Winter’s Tales*), the writer Charlie Despard, despairs over his dependence on the reader:

> The relation of the artist to the public … is as terrible as marriage.

> … Where there is no work of art to look at, or to listen to, there can be no public. … And as to the work of art … does a painting exist at which no one looks?—does a book exist which is never read? (Dinesen 1983, 203)

Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag, the storytelling heroine of “Deluge at Norderney” from *Seven Gothic Tales*, seems to be more enthusiastic. Through the typical-for-Blixen double coding of discourse, to be elaborated on later, she declares the appreciation of art to be no lesser art than art itself: “Where, my lord is music bred—upon the instrument or within the ear that listens? The loveliness of woman is created in the eye of man” (Dinesen 1991, 45). In both “A Consolatory Tale” and “Deluge at Norderney,” reception is even staged as part of the action and becomes the initial phase of new creation. Miss Malin rubs her hands together after hearing Jonathan’s tale, “as pleased as a child with a new toy” (Dinesen 1991, 40), and immediately produces a counter-tale to it. “A Consolatory Tale,” which implies that the author and the public are another pair of dialectically related opposites, ends with Charlie’s critical yet productive response to the story told by his friend Aneas: “‘Yes, a good tale,’ … . ‘No, … not very good,
really, you know. But it has moments in it that might be worked up, and from which one might construct a fine tale” (Dinesen 1983, 218).9

Blixen’s writings provide more examples that reflect, often metaphorically, on the nature and laws of art, including the reader’s role in it. Ansgar Nünning has noticed that the act of narration is often expressed in fiction through metaphors of traveling, filmmaking, and cooking (Nünning 2004, 25). The latter can be easily proven in Blixen’s “Babette’s Feast” (1950); however, she appears to pursue yet another, more consistent, way of double-coding her self-reflexive discourse: by expressing aesthetic ideas through the theme of love and eros. To quote Tone Selboe, “erotics and poetics are two sides of the same coin in Blixen’s highly artificial world” (2008, 18). Already in one of her earlier texts, the essay “Moderne ægteskab og andre betragtninger” (first published in 1977; “On Modern Marriage and Other Observations”), the concept of love as play functions as a mask for the concept of art as play, which positions the reader as the author’s partner in a reciprocal game.10 A movement in the opposite direction can be noticed in “The Dreamers” (Seven Gothic Tales), where Pellegrina, who metaphorically embodies the idea of the text (Engberg 1995; 2000), is killed by her suitors’ (the readers’) insistent demand to reveal her unambiguous identity, to answer the question: “Who are you?” This very much mirrors the case of “Ehrengard” despite its much “lighter” outcome of the events.

The idea that the story of erotic seduction can also be double-coded in “Ehrengard” is already prompted by the bizarreness and complexity of that seduction. Cazotte is presented as a “conqueror and seducer, the irresistible Don Juan of his age” (Dinesen 1993, 218), who at the end of the story is referred to as Casanova (277). However, despite these explicit associations with his archetypal precursors, he is shown as developing a highly original, even eccentric, plan: in a self-confident manner, Cazotte seeks to seduce the young girl Ehrengard, but instead of physical seduction, he insists on “obtaining a full surrender without any physical touch whatever” (244). This surrender is to be crowned by the victim’s epiphanic blush, when she recognizes herself in the Diana-like heroine of the picture, which Cazotte believes to be painting unnoticed during the girl’s morning baths. This blush is supposed to reveal Ehrengard’s “inmost substance” (234) and to become Cazotte’s greatest artistic achievement. However, all his plans

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9 A detailed discussion of Charlie’s development as a literary author toward the ideal of lighter or floating (in Blixen’s very special terms) art can be found in Steponavičiūtė (2011, 80–2).
fall flat, when the “victim” takes the initiative into her own hands. In the end, it is the artist himself who blushes, and it is Ehrengard who has provoked that blush. A brief summary of the plot shows the conflation of erotic and aesthetic concepts in this tale, which gives us a reason to read it as meta-story, where the man-woman relationship is used metaphorically as a way to reflect on the nature of art. Such an approach is explicitly encouraged by the text itself when Cazotte claims seduction to be the key principle and aim of artistic creation:

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 1993, 219)

This is hardly the attitude of an artist in the mold of Blixen herself, who lets her other characters repeatedly exclaim that the half is more than the whole (“The Poet” and “The Invincible Slave Owners,” the latter from Winter’s Tales) and famously declare, as Lincoln Forsner from “The Dreamers” does: “It is not a bad thing in a tale that you understand only half of it” (Dinesen 1991, 279). Cazotte’s ambition to deprive the object of his attention of her “inmost substance” echoes the three suitors’ chase after Pellegrina, which, as one should keep in mind, has been a murderous affair.

Roads Round “Ehrengard”

“Ehrengard” has been interpreted in many different ways; however, some tendencies can be discerned. The tale is often regarded as a female rewriting of the masculine plot, and questions of gender play a significant role in numerous readings. For instance, Kristine J. Anderson (1992) reads “Ehrengard” as a comedy—precisely, about the fight for immortality, which can be achieved in two ways: by creating art, traditionally reserved for men, and by giving birth, the privilege of women. For Tone Selboe, “Ehrengard” is an ironic story, in which the heroine’s unconventional character embodies the revenge of the body, reality, and the female sex for being confined within the lower pole of the hierarchical oppositions: men/women, art/life, spirit/body, the seducer/the seduced (see Selboe 1996).

Secondly, since the theme of art is no less important than that of love, and the text is rich in self-referential comments, it has also been analyzed in terms of its complex and competitive
relationship between life and art. This perspective is, for example, integrated into Selboe’s interpretation mentioned above, and dominates Ivan Ž. Sørensen’s reading, according to which the artist Cazotte represents Blixen’s ironic and inverse self-portrait, and the text tells a tale of its own insufficiency and the superiority of real life (Sørensen 2002, 149).

Intensive intertextuality is the third interpretative “anchor” of this story (and we have already explored its allusions to some of Blixen’s earlier tales). It keeps engendering ever new readings, since different scholars pick up and analyze a different set of the tale’s references to other works of literature and artistic phenomena (including the details of Blixen’s as well as other artists’ personal lives). However, one intertext occupies a special place in the reception of the tale, and that is Søren Kierkegaard’s “The Seducer’s Diary” from Either/Or. It is generally agreed that “Ehrengard” is a counter-narrative, an ironic and witty rewriting of Kierkegaard’s short novel (Sørensen 2002, 112; Brantly 2002, 200). The polemical tension between the hypertext and the hypotext seems to be an inexorable intrigue, which hopefully will keep Blixen scholars occupied for generations to come.

The present interpretation will consider all three aspects mentioned above, but instead of the artist (author), it is going to be the figure and situatedness of the reader—already touched upon—which will be brought into the spotlight, mainly by investigating the specifics of the narrative design of the story. The underlying presumption of the analysis is the idea that throughout Blixen’s tale, there is an ongoing tension between two categories: the aesthetical and the ethical, in respect to which the reader is positioned. Two narratological concepts will be applied to tackle this conflict. The first one is Peter Brooks’s concept of narrative desire, which combines narratology and psychoanalysis and which has proved to be a helpful tool to analyze Blixen’s texts (see Engberg 1995; 2000). According to Brooks, this desire is both the governing theme and technique in most narratives (1984, 37). It arises from the reader’s curiosity to know how the story will be resolved and drives them forward throughout the text. This concept is directly related to the pleasure of reading and belongs to the domain of the aesthetical, even in its dialectical co-existence with the death drive, as will be illustrated later in this analysis.

11 For example, Anderson (1992) concentrates on the intertextual relationship between Blixen’s tale and Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly’s “Chevalier des Touches,” which also employs the motive of blush. Sørensen (2002) does not only link the tale with Blixen’s own life-story, but also includes into his intertextual reading, as an important interpretative factor, other artists’ biographies, for example, that of the French author and occultist Jacques Cazotte and, among other works, his “Le Diable amoureux.”
No matter how strong the text’s aesthetic dimension is, the theme of seduction makes the ethical perspective inevitable, and this is where ethical narratology, and James Phelan’s concept of *ethical positioning* in particular, can be brought to work (Phelan and Martin 1999, 88; Phelan 2005, 22). Phelan claims that the reader is always placed in an ethical location by the text and forced to make ethical choices, or judgments. We do it with regard to the characters, whom we perceive mimesically, that is, as possible persons; thematically, that is, as representations of certain ideas; and synthetically, that is, as agents in the narrative design (Phelan 1989, 9–10; Phelan and Martin 1999, 88, 100–4). We do it also with regard to the “tellers (both narrators and authors)” and the values expressed in the text, and all these judgments are “crucial to our experience—and understanding—of narrative form” (Phelan 2007, 3; see also Skov Nielsen 2013, 144). Each text challenges us and invites our response with the help of narrative techniques it employs (Phelan 2005, 22; Phelan and Martin 1999, 88–9). However, our ethical positions differ, and it is only natural that our interpretations of what is happening in the text can easily lead in different directions.12

The Traps of “Secret Notes”

As mentioned, Mads Bunch is one of the latest scholars who explores the connection between “Ehrengard” and “The Seducer’s Diary.” His is an interesting study in many respects: it contains valuable information about the manuscripts and different versions of the tale, provides a wider picture of Blixen’s engagement with Kierkegaard, draws some convincing parallels between Blixen’s Johan and Kierkegaard’s Johannes, and brings forward some witty explanations of the homophonic puns with regard to the proper names. The main originality of Bunch’s investigations, however, seems to lie in the discovery of “the secret note” to “Ehrengard”—“that no scholar has so far discovered” (Bunch 2013, 512).13 The concept employed here has been theorized by Poul Behrendt, who in his own turn had borrowed it from Kierkegaard, and is to be understood as “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” (Bunch 2013, 510; 2017, 105). Bunch finds this “secret note” in other scholars’

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12 Phelan explains how he and his colleague have differently interpreted Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* and how this difference has been a consequence of the challenging position into which the readers of the text are placed. However, he also admits that these disagreements have enriched his own ethical encounter with the novel (see Phelan 2005, 31; Phelan and Martin 1999, 89).

13 The argument can also be found in Bunch (2017, 106).
presumptions about Goethe’s and Kierkegaard’s sexuality and in the earlier drafts of Blixen’s tale and uses it as “the key to the final interpretation” (Bunch 2013, 508; 2017, 104) of Cazotte’s blush, which occurs when Ehrengard declares him to be the father of the little prince:

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. (Bunch 2013, 508; 2017, 103)

Such conclusion may sound intriguing (especially if one is interested in a possible [re]construction of the fabula, which can be great fun with Blixen14), although in our view, it is based solely on “imported” information and lacks support in the text itself.15 However, what we want to contest here is not so much the validity of Bunch’s explanation of the text’s “factual” puzzle, but rather the scholar’s belief in “final interpretations” and in the possibility of finding “the key,” which would allow its keeper to unlock the secrets of a complex text … in order to close it for good. A mandate to such critique, we claim, can be found in “Ehrengard” itself, and now it is time to take a closer look at Blixen’s “testament” and its relation to its precursor.

“Ehrengard” and “The Seducer’s Diary”: Subversive Mimicry
There is no doubt, and this has been numerous times demonstrated by other scholars, that “Ehrengard” subverts “The Seducer’s Diary.” The relationship between the two texts appears, however, to be much more ambivalent if one takes their narrative specifics into account. Blixen

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14 See especially Sørensen and Togeby (2001, 13).
15 There are several aspects that are problematic here. When Cazotte, as mentioned, is presented as having a reputation of a renowned and notorious seducer, he must indeed be a master of deception to a very unlikely degree if he is impotent or a virgin for other reasons. And Blixen would normally give subtle hints to the reader in a case like this one, as it, for example, happens with regard to the impotence of the old nobleman in “Sorrow-Acre” (Winter’s Tales) and, more overtly, with regard to the same condition in Prince Potenziani [sic] from “The Roads Round Pisa” (Seven Gothic Tales). Finding support for one’s interpretation in the text itself becomes especially important when one is basing one’s assumptions on material that is found in the text’s earlier version but has been removed by the author in the version one is analyzing. In his chapter on “Ehrengard” in Bjørgtage, Johnny Kondrup comes to the same conclusion that the final version of the tale does not support the thesis of Bunch (Kondrup 2019, 273). Kondrup’s point of departure is also the connection to “The Diary of the Seducer,” but he does not take into account the aspect of metafiction.
mimics quite faithfully the intricate narrative design of *Either/Or* and borrows its techniques to engage her reader. Similarly to Kierkegaard’s text, “Ehrengard” is constructed according to the principle of a Chinese Box, where stories by various narrators are nested in one another. The difference is that while in Kierkegaard’s text, we have a line of men, in Blixen’s tale, the privilege of telling the story is given to a woman. The importance of this move is highlighted by the fact that it is the very first piece of information we as readers get. The tale’s opening sentence, “An old lady told this story” (Dinesen 1993, 215), draws our attention toward its narrator and signals that in order to understand and interpret this story, we need to know who is telling it and how.

The old lady’s recount incorporates another important narrative layer—the supposedly “real” letters written by Herr Cazotte to the old lady’s great-grandmother, Countess von Gassner. They echo Johannes’s diary with regard to the theme, style, chronology, and the illusion of authenticity. In these letters, the painter informs the countess about the plans and course of his seduction of Ehrengard, and the reader witnesses how Cazotte’s desire gradually takes shape: from simple fascination, it develops into an obsession, and the painter’s artistic ambitions grow in parallel to that. The character’s excitement infects the reader and drives us forward throughout the text. His desire is thus mirrored by our own desire to know how the story will end. At one point, Cazotte even concludes that he has started to believe it has been his vision (the idea to create a masterpiece out of Ehrengard), which “has caused our entire course of events” (Dinesen 1993, 233), and thus stresses once again that desire is the core of this story both with regard to its theme and its principles of construction.

The countess, who is the explicit addressee of Cazotte’s letters, can be said to represent the situated reader per se. Similarly to ours, her voice is absent from the text: not a single word from her own letters appears in it. Nevertheless, she also contributes to the mediation of the events, since she is the narrator’s (Cazzote’s) secret audience and is made present in the tale through his references to her questions and comments. We know from the tale that the painter writes to entertain and please her, and this pleasure is mutual because the countess inspires the

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16 Victor Eremita, the fictional compiler and editor of the whole book, who claims to have found the texts in an antique secretary desk, the mysterious A and B—fictional authors who, respectively, represent the aesthetical and the ethical view on life, and finally Johannes, who is the fictional author of “The Diary of a Seducer,” the last installment in the first part of *Either/Or*, which A allegedly has copied in great haste.

17 It may be relevant to point out that the second, ethical, part of *Either/Or* primarily consists of fictive letters.
artist, and the two are “dear to one another’s heart” (Dinesen 1993, 219). Moreover, the letters have a flirtatious undertone, and Cazotte addresses the countess “as a woman who might still be desired” (219). Thus, Ehrengard is not the only object of the painter’s desire; he also aspires to get his reader’s—that is, the old countess’s—admiration and approval. Through her, his desire extends onto the empirical reader outside the text: her appreciation of Cazzote’s “art” positions us as his supporters and accomplices. Obviously, the text would have had a different effect if this correspondence had not been included.

All the same, the dominant voice belongs to the old lady, Countess von Gassner’s great-granddaughter. We know practically nothing about her except that she is old. Nevertheless, she appears to be an important agency in engaging the reader: she sweetly, and perhaps viciously, addresses her audience as “my dearest” (Dinesen 1993, 215), and before each new installment, briefly informs us about what we are going to witness. In this way, new expectations are created, and at the same time, we are reminded of our own participation in the story. On top of addressing the reader as a friend, the old lady is almost unnoticeably shifting from such pronouns like “I” (216) and “my” (230) to “we” (216, 230) and “our” (216).

What happens in this case is that we as readers are granted both the privilege and responsibility for the story’s meaning, and even for its mode, since the events the old lady is about to relate, as mentioned, are presented as “our little comedy or tragedy” (Dinesen 1993, 216; emphasis added). Furthermore, we are once again placed on Cazotte’s side, for by reading and enjoying the tale (which the lady hopes we will), and by anticipating what is going to happen, we indirectly approve of the seduction. Sooner or later, an ethical dilemma arises. From the moral standpoint, and considering the mimetic dimension of the characters, the painter’s “project” aimed at manipulating another person is wrong, but it is such fun to follow it. The old lady seems to legitimate this pleasure and even encourage it by excitedly saying “and so we begin” (216), echoing the narrator of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Snow Queen.”

However, above the friendly voice of the old lady, there is yet another voice—that of the narrator of the framing narrative. It has neither gender nor personal features, and it is even possible not to notice it at all, since it is present solely in the opening sentence of the tale. Despite its invisibility, the overall narrator effects our interpretation, for it makes us see the old

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18 She implies it in her coquettish remark that she fears the first installment may seem to us “a bit too lengthy” (Dinesen 1993, 216).
lady as an important player on the stage of the text, who, nevertheless, is controlled by a higher authority. In other words, a watchful reader might get a suspicion that her sweet voice is a narrative trap.

The complex, multi-layered narrative structure seems to be, to borrow Victor Eremita’s expression, “et gammelt Novellist-Kneb” (Kierkegaard 1997, 16) [“an old literary device” (Kierkegaard 1987, 9)], used to intrigue and confuse the reader. However, although Blixen is setting traps, she also provides us with “Ariadne’s threads,” which help us wander through and out of the labyrinthine structures of the tale. According to Elizabeth W. Bruss’s theory of gameful literature, the tale can be attributed to the category of the literary “mixed motive games,” namely, the type of interaction between the implied author and the reader, who are not pure antagonists but have a shared interest. The text must be challenging, but in order to be effective, it is also supposed to be rewarding for the reader, because only by being able to engage productively with a text can the reader “appreciate the skill or even recognize the triumph of an author” (Bruss 1977, 154).

In the case of Blixen, the text often points itself to the nature of the tricks it employs and suggests strategies for tackling them. The reader might be, for example, puzzled by the old lady’s statement about the authenticity of her story when she teasingly confesses to have changed all the names in it, because they are “well known, most of them appearing and reappearing in the history of their country” (Dinesen 1993, 215). She thus simultaneously creates the illusion of reality and dispels it in a self-reflexive move; however, one should not search far for a possible way to approach this “metafictional paradox.”19 Not only it is encoded in the earlier mentioned double generic label (“tragedy or comedy,” 216), but also implied by Cazotte’s words of consolation to the Grand Duchess of Babenhaus,20 who fears a royal scandal and its tragic outcome, which would put her family’s hereditary right at risk:

“The Lord God, that great artist, at times paints his pictures in such a manner as to be best appreciated at a long distance. A hundred and fifty years hence your present predicament will

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19 This is a concept discussed by Linda Hutcheon, which can also be productively used when dealing with the double coding of self-reflexive discourses that “belong to the processes of ‘life’ as much as they do to those of ‘art’” (Hutcheon 1980, 5).
20 She is the grandmother of the little prince, the secret of whose premature birth Ehrengard is appointed to protect.
There is a lesson to be learned from this quote, although it originates in the controversial protagonist of the story: when dealing with Blixen’s text, one must be ready to adopt a double vision, to accept the possibility that the same events can be telling at least two different stories, and the way these events are understood changes with time and distance. The double exposition of the events told, their bifurcation into the story of the present or reality on one hand, and into the story of the past and fiction, on the other, is expressed both narratologically and grammatically. The urging present tense, which dominates Cazotte’s letters, is juxtaposed with the relaxed and confident past tense of the old lady. The first perspective demands a moral stance, while the second one invites us to enjoy the show and emphasizes the entertaining character of the story. In other words, it is bad to seduce, but it is so interesting to read about a seduction! The ethical thus collides with the aesthetical, and the reader is forced to choose one of them. The choice made in this paper is to suspend the reading of characters as true to life representations of human beings and instead explore them as metaphors of more abstract artistic ideas.

The Reader as Cordelia

“The Seducer’s Diary,” the central intertext of “Ehrengard,” provides Blixen’s reader with numerous additional clues with regard to the seductive but also rewarding nature of her text. Blixen’s tale not only mimics the narrative design of its hypotext, but also employs some of Johannes the Seducer’s tricks. Even so, instead of being directed at the “victim,” that is Ehrengard, they are aimed at Blixen’s reader in order to incite her narrative desire.

First of all, there are the letters. Letters to Cordelia are a powerful weapon, by which Johannes attempts to erotically awaken her. Cazotte also writes letters, but only to the countess and never to Ehrengard, whom he introduces to poetry and art through conversations and staged situations. Cazotte’s letters awake and feed our narrative desire by evoking our expectations.

21 Thus, this double sight also applies to the character of Cazotte, who in spite of being portrayed in an ironic light, nevertheless utters the words of “wisdom” that help us navigate within Blixen’s text. We can have more trust in these words than in other things he says or does, because they connect to Blixen’s own ideas about the importance of time and distance in the appreciation of art, which she expressed in her essay “Til fire Kultegninger” (“Of Four Charcoal Drawings”; see Blixen 1992, 172).
and guesses with regard to the development of the seduction plan, which later turn out to be wrong. Another trick borrowed from Johannes and used as a tool to create suspense is the length of the letters. The seducer writes in his diary: “Jo mere det Erotiske kommer frem, desto kortere blive de, men desto sikkre gribe de det erotiske Point” (Kierkegaard 1997, 384) [“The more the erotic emerges, the shorter they (the letters) become, but all the more unerringly they seize the erotic point” (Kierkegaard 1987, 397)]. Blixen’s reader witnesses a similar change in Cazotte’s letters, which start as long essays about art and seduction and finally shrink to the size of a hectic note. His last message, with the coquettish—but, in the fiction, probably also desperate, since Ehrengard has implied she is fully aware of his spying on her during her morning baths—reference to Kierkegaard, goes like this:

My dear good Friend,
The damnable, the dynamic, the demonic loyalty of this girl!
Yours in fear and trembling,
Cazotte (Dinesen 1993, 257)

Next, which is fatal in Johannes’s pursuit to seduce Cordelia, is the power of memory. When preparing the house for the final seduction, Johannes pays enormous attention to the details:22 the house must overwhelm Cordelia with memories about him and their love. In Blixen’s text, this seductive device manifests itself through repetition in language. When the tale reaches its climax and Cazotte blushes, we are not only surprised by such an unexpected turn of events, but also overwhelmed with memories of the earlier text. The old lady describes Cazotte’s blush by quoting the painter himself:

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. (Dinesen 1993, 276)

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22 And so does Cazotte when spending a whole month designing Schloss Rosenbad as an erotically charged idyll, of course.
The first sentence is a “memory” of an earlier episode in which Cazotte fantasized about Ehrengard’s blush (Dinesen 1993, 252), whereas the second one is a quote from his letter to the countess, in which he told her about the alpenglow, an optical phenomenon that fascinated him (234). The entire paragraph is thus a compilation of things we read earlier, and both the imagery and language create a narrative déjà vu. We get what we were promised—the ecstatic blush—but in such an unexpected way that, instead of being fulfilled, our narrative desire grows even bigger. We now crave to know why Cazotte blushed and what secret it is supposed to reveal, but right after this surprising twist, the old lady, faithful to the principle of “cadenza d’inganno,” pronounces the end of the story. There does not come “the moment of retrospection,” which, according to Brooks, would grant order and significance to the plot (Brooks 1984, 94). Our narrative desire thus transcends the boundaries of the plot and tempts us to seek the answer to the secret of the blush beyond the text.

The intertextual dialogue on seduction between Blixen’s and Kierkegaard’s texts becomes even more complex, if we include into it a meta-reading of “The Seducer’s Diary,” which can cast a new light on the metafictional aspects of Blixen’s story and clarify the relationship between Cazotte and Ehrengard. According to Daniel Berthold-Bond (2011, 72), Johannes functions as a metaphor of the manipulative author, who strives to “write” his reader and is shaping her through his narrative. Cordelia, in her turn, incarnates the reader, who is “a pure being-for-author, to be ambushed, seduced, ensnared, enthralled, and created in the image of the author’s secret designs” (Berthold-Bond 2011, 73). Such an approach might be confusing, since we see how seemingly separate categories—that of the text and that of the reader—come alarmingly close to each other. A similar conflation is evident in Blixen’s tale, where Cazotte simultaneously presents Ehrengard as both his creation (he wants to paint her) and his audience (it is her reaction to the picture that he is so occupied with). When the painter tells the countess about the girl for the first time, he—by comparing himself to Michelangelo—describes her as a “block of marble” in which his “greatest triumph hides” (Dinesen 1993, 233). 23 What fascinates Cazotte is (his belief) that the girl is a virgin not just in the physical sense, but also

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23 This is a clear reference to Ovid’s myth of Pygmalion. According to Susan Gubar, it is one of the many myths of “male primacy in theological, artistic and scientific creativity” in which our culture is steeped (1981, 244). Set in this light, Blixen’s story ironizes not only the traditional perception of gender roles, for instance, that a woman is a pure “being-for-other,” but also the long tradition of “identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation—a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality” (Gubar 1981, 247).
metaphorically: Ehrengard is a “chaste” reader, a blank page, on which he is free to imprint whatever he wants, for she was raised by warriors, “in whose universe art, or the artist, have never existed” (Dinesen 1993, 232–3).

Instead of seducing the girl “in the orthodox and old-fashioned manner” (Dinesen 1993, 244), Cazotte therefore acquaints Ehrengard with poetry and art and exposes her to the seductive power of beauty—the erotic landscape and interior of the country estate Schloss Rosenbad, which he has arranged under the guidance of “the Lady Venus herself” (231). Cazotte believes, in a somewhat arrogant (or naïve) way, to know his “reader” better than she does herself and emphasizes his victim’s passive nature and his own role as her spiritual mentor. He delights in “making her drink in by eye, ear, and nostril and by every pore of her clean skin the sweet poison of the Venusberg” (237) and in teaching her, as authors often aspire to do, “the nature and the necessity of moral principle” (237). Moreover, Cazotte claims that Ehrengard “knows very little about herself” (241), and the process of seduction goes in parallel with the project of nurturing her self-awareness.

However, this calculated “education” is only a prelude to the final act of seduction: the most important thing for Cazotte is how the girl will react when she sees his painting: “more wonderful and glorious still would be the moment in which he was to set it [the picture] before the eyes of its model” (Dinesen 1993, 251). The artist is certain that Ehrengard will “become all aglow” (252) in an epiphanic blush; he wants his work to function as a mirror, in which his addressee will recognize her true self and become aware of the fact that she has been seduced. The paradox of Ehrengard’s ambiguous metafictional role (a work or recipient of art) is thus resolved if we interpret Cazotte’s seductive project as his pursuit to create a “model” reader, carefully designed to appreciate his art and carry his signature, which will not fade even after she, “intact but annihilated,” has been handed over to somebody else (another author?) who will be “drinking up my [Cazotte’s] remains” (246).

Strategies of De-Seduction
The controlling and manipulative figure of the author, which emerges from “The Seducer’s Diary,” should by no means be equated with its implied author or Kierkegaard himself. On the contrary, throughout his work, Kierkegaard has used the same method as Socrates—maieutics, or the art of midwifery, where instead of formulating your ideas directly, in the didactic and authoritative way, you stimulate your interlocutor to act as “the subject of the dialogue”
(Berthold-Bond 2011, 60). This technique is manifested in Kierkegaard’s work through indirect communication, pseudonymity, and masks, which make it virtually impossible for the reader to detect the author’s own view on the matters discussed. The reader is invited to work himself or herself through the maze of Kierkegaard’s text, in which the author is just “a mystery, a charade, a secret, a myth, sheer invisibility, and the author’s text becomes visible only as an answer to the question posed by the reader” (Berthold-Bond 2011, 75).

One who is looking for a way out of this maze may notice that Johannes formulates a seduction strategy that could also work as a strategy of de-seduction. The relationship between seduction and deseduction is expressed as a chiastic principle, as Johannes the Seducer formulates this dictum: “At digte sig ind i en Pige er en Kunst, at digte sig ud af hende er et Mesterstykke,” and adds as an afterthought: “Dog afhænger det Sidste væsentlig af det Første” (Kierkegaard 1997, 357) [“To poetize oneself into a girl is an art; to poetize oneself out of her is a masterstroke. But the latter depends essentially on the former” (Kierkegaard 1987, 368)]. This dictum emphasizes the absolute power and mastery of the (male) seducer. When the seduced (female) is to be discarded, the seducer will be able to manipulate himself out of her again in an even more masterful way than that in which the seduction was performed. This dictum is not formulated like a chiasm. But the added sentence makes it clear that we are talking about a chiastic principle. The movement of de-seduction depends on that of seduction while it moves in the opposite direction, out instead of in. It follows the same steps, we can gather, but in a reverse order. This implies that the person who is seduced can follow a similar strategy and thereby become master of the situation instead of being a victim (a liberating principle like the one that can lead a person out of a labyrinth or enable them to undo a spell that has been cast).

The letters of Cordelia, quoted by A as part of the introduction of the diary, testify to her being forever a victim of what has happened to her. In the strongest of them, she writes the following: “Du har formastet Dig til at bedrage et menneske saaledes, at Du er bleven Alt for mig, saa jeg vilde sætte al min Glæde i at være Din Slavinde, Din er jeg, Din, Din, Din Forbandelse” (Kierkegaard 1997, 301–2) [“You have had the audacity to deceive a person in such a way that you have become everything to me, so that I would rejoice solely in being your slave. Yours I am, yours, yours, your curse” (Kierkegaard 1987, 312)].

In one of his letters, Cazotte takes pleasure in imagining Ehrengard as a similar victim after the successful completion of his seduction of her:
Will she not then, in her turn, in sheer self-preservation, be dependent on me as the one and only
confirmor of her perdition, the unique guarantor of the loss, the blowing up of her virginity? Will
she not for the rest of her life be dragging herself after me, wringing her hands, crying out my name
incessantly, regularly, with the might of all the clocks of Babenhausen? (Dinesen 1993, 245)

The hubris of Cazotte is magnificent in this case. In the end, Ehrengard does exactly what
Cazotte has expected—as she unconditionally surrenders her past, present, and future to him—but
at the same time, she completely reverses the situation, and it is him who has to blush crimson.

The chiastic logic also strikes at Cazotte at an earlier instance. In another letter, he writes
that “I am in service, ‘Ich dien’” (Dinesen 1993, 231). This, of course, echoes the motto about
mottoes that Blixen has quoted in several instances: “The great emperor Otto / could never
decide on a motto / he hovered between: / l’etat c’est moi and Ich dien.” The logic of the chiasm
implies that Cazotte’s real “mental motto,” in his arrogance, might rather be l’etat c’est moi.24

The chiasm is a figure of dialectical tension and complexity in Kierkegaard.25 But in
mundane discourse, it can also be a figure of worldly wisdom of a very dubious kind, for
example, in clichés like “you can take the girl out of the ghetto, but you can’t take the ghetto
out of the girl.” It is therefore noteworthy that Cazotte formulates the most elaborate chiasm
(we have commented upon a less elaborate one earlier). He does this as he tries to soothe the
mother of Prince Lothar who has made his fiancée pregnant before the marriage can take place.
He states that the prince is one of those noble spirits about which it can be said that “idea and
action, too, are one, inasmuch as the idea is an action and the action an idea” (Dinesen 1993,
221). It sounds very deep and profound, while it is in fact not much less of a cliché than the one
about girls and ghettos. But it works (seduces)—like rhetoric often does.

“The (Kierkegaardian) author’s love of the reader” is, according to Berthold-Bond, “a
love mediated through faithfulness to means of seduction, to deception and disguise” (2011,

24 “I am the state.” This clerihew by E. C. Bentley is quoted in the essays “Moderne ægteskab og andre
betrægtninger” (Blixen 1992, 22) [“On Modern Marriage and Other Observations’] and “On Mottoes of
My Life” (Dinesen 1984, 4). In the latter, Blixen refers by this quote to herself, and although it hardly
has negative implications there, the association of this motto with Cazotte in “Ehrengard” suggests
that this character may, be, at least to some extent, Blixen’s ironic self-portrait. If Blixen could be her
own critic, it could only be fair, if we, her readers, would also remember to check ourselves for
Cazotte’s “sins.”
25 See Bøggild (1997).
Such concepts would usually have negative meaning in the discourse of love, but with respect to the reading practice, they function as tools serving an ethical end: the reader’s liberation (Berthold-Bond 2011, 73). In other words, while Johannes is seducing Cordelia, the maieutical author is indirectly encouraging the reader to revolt and, by taking over the seducer’s role, to “court the text” (that is, interpret it) and “seduce the seducer” (Berthold-Bond 2011, 75). This is precisely the point we have made about the chiastic principle advocated by Johannes the Seducer. Even though Johannes succeeds in his “immoral” project, and Cordelia, as the metaphor of the reader, surrenders to the manipulative author, an alternative scenario is, as we have pointed out, suggested by the seducer himself. This project is also anticipated by Victor Eremita, who fears that by publishing the diary, he will only increase Johannes’s seductive powers, and there will appear “en ung, kraftfuld, genial Pige faae den ualmindelige Idee at ville hævne Kjønnet paa mig” (Kierkegaard 1997, 17) [“a young, energetic girl of genius having the extraordinary idea of wanting to avenge her sex” (Kierkegaard 1987, 9)]. Karen Blixen has often been claimed to be that girl, and our metafictional reading of her story only seems to reaffirm that.

The meta-reading of “The Seducer’s Diary,” which foregrounds the peculiar love triangle between the author, the reader, and the text, adds new semantic layers to Blixen’s tale and supports the claim made at the beginning of this analysis, that it is not only the process of creation, but also the reception of art, that is the subject of “Ehrengard.” The text, which ironizes the male view on seduction, also mocks a certain violent understanding of how art works or is to be interpreted, which is represented by Cazotte.

What is the problem with this artist, more exactly? To start with, he seems to lack a sense of humor and takes himself and his art too seriously. Even though he is just a court painter producing portraits of the nobility and clergy, and presumably conforming to the ruling taste, Cazotte does not spare big words explaining his art:

“I have seduced an old earthenware pot and two lemons into yielding their inmost being to me, to become mine, and at that same moment, to become phenomena of overwhelming loveliness and delight.” (Dinesen 1993, 220)

Not only does this quote ironize over the seducer’s ambitions, but also over his possessive relation to his work. However, whereas his “theory” does not limit the seduced lemons’ right
to be appreciated by others, Cazotte’s only and true masterpiece, Ehrengard’s blush, is reserved for the author’s pleasure alone:

He might show his masterpiece to Princes and Princesses, art critics and enraptured lookers-on, and to the girl herself at the same moment, and no one but he and she would know the truth. ... She would be, in the midst of the brilliant crowd, alone with him. ... No one in the world, and least of all she herself, would ever find words for the relation between her and him. (Dinesen 1993, 251; emphasis added)

The reluctance to relinquish the authorial or interpretative patent of truth is what lies at the core of his excitement and makes him selfish to the degree of absurdity. However, by believing in the idea of definite meaning and equating it with his own intention, Cazotte makes himself vulnerable. To remember Brooks, the moment when “the truth” (or “retrospection” in Brooks’s terms) reveals itself for the reader is also the moment of death—both with regard to the reader’s desire, which is quenched after being consummated, and the narrative itself (Brooks 1984, 104). “Ehrengard” appears to be Blixen’s other original literary parallel (in addition to the “Dreamers”) to Brooks’s theory. Ironically, Cazotte makes the same causal link between the moment of revelation and the death of what has been revealed, when he describes the alpenglow, his model for the art’s effect on the recipient:

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. (Dinesen 1993, 234; emphasis added)

The painter’s fatal mistake is the underestimation of his addressee: for him, Ehrengard is a passive receiver, whose reaction can be controlled and who will “annihilate” herself in the same instant, when the work of art exhorts its effect upon her. However, contrary to Cordelia, Ehrengard liberates herself from the author’s control, and by acting contrary to his expectations at the same time as she lives up to them, she proves to be “damnable,” “dynamic,” and “demonic” (Dinesen 1993, 257). First, she baffles Cazotte by revealing to him that she already knows some of his tricks (that he is secretly using her as a model for his painting), and she turns
his plans upside down by actively proposing to pose for him. Then the “author” finds himself in an even more comic situation, when the girl—in her determination to protect the honor of the house she serves for—comes up with her most outrageous and unexpected explanation to the tricky situation, to which the characters in the story are exposed. She takes upon herself the motherhood of the little prince, points to the painter as the father, and thus brings about the “transparent crimson” (276) to his perplexed face. Symbolically, Ehrengard, the reader, unites herself with Cazotte, the author, in this fictional act of parenting a common baby (a possible meaning of the text); however, she “avenges herself” and Cordelia as readers by taking the initiative.

Rounding Up
The reader seems to be the main character of this story in more than one way. First of all, it is Ehrengard, the heroine of the story, who functions as a metaphor of an active, creative reader. Second, it is Blixen herself who stands as a liberated reader par excellence; by reading Kierkegaard (and other authors), she allows herself much artistic freedom and audacity in respect to her powerful precursors. Finally, it is the empirical reader outside the text—who by narrative tricks and traps, but also helpful hints and Ehrengard’s example—is seduced to enter the text and is even encouraged to reverse the roles and take over the seducer’s role with respect to it, to explain the story and make it one’s own. Ironically, Blixen thus also makes us aware of the temptation an interpreter may easily fall victim to—the temptation to appropriate Cazotte’s belief in the possibility of possessing the exclusive insight into a secret truth. Throughout her legacy, devoid of explicit moralizing, up to the very last tale, Blixen keeps showing us, her readers and readers of fiction in general, that the claim for a definite meaning is dangerous to authors, readers, and texts alike. Her stories and the multiple reading they engender remind us that any interpretation cannot be final, and it can only be judged successful, if it enters into a productive dialogue with other readings of the same text—which, understood thus, will always guard its honor!
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