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Ieva Steponavičiūtė

# Texts at Play

## The Ludic Aspect of Karen Blixen's Writings

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Designer
Tomas Mrazauskas



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Vilnius University, Universiteto g. 3, LT-01513 Vilnius
Tel. +370 5 268 7260 · www.leidykla.eu

Centre of Scandinavian Studies · Faculty of Philology · Vilnius University
Universiteto g. 5, LT-01513 Vilnius
Tel. +370 5 268 7235 · www.skandinavistika.flf.vu.lt

To my family

Much is demanded of those who are to be really proficient at play. Courage and imagination, humor and intelligence, but in particular that blend of unselfishness, generosity, self-control and courtesy that is called *gentilezza*.

— from Isak Dinesen's (Karen Blixen's) "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations"

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# Introduction

# Chapter One
# Dealing with Blixen

A literary scholar who sets out to study a particular writer's *oeuvre* will often dream of finding the key – some final 'truth' or 'essence' – that could unlock the writer's texts and even enable her to mediate them to others.[1] In her pursuit, she will be likely to reduce the multifaceted artistic universe to a system of dominant themes, images, narrative patterns, generic or ideological schemes that can be accessed and processed by her own mind. Even being aware of the pitfalls of logocentric thinking, such scholar will certainly not stop looking for the meaning of things and organising her experience of the texts into an orderly and conceivable shape; for, to quote Catherine Bates, "[t]here's no escape from the mind, from its wheedlingly pleasing cogitations, its promises to understand and control."[2]

The Danish author Karen Blixen (1885–1962), known to an English reading audience by her pseudonym Isak Dinesen, is an author in whose respect the natural human drive 'to understand and control' is far from easily fulfilled, as her writing seems to defy generalisation. It is already problematic (and maybe not really necessary) to locate Blixen within the framework of a single cultural tradition or geographic space. Although a Dane by birth, she spent 17 years in East Africa – an experience recorded in her letters from Africa[3] and reflected in her autofiction – the books *Out of Africa / Den afrikanske Farm* (1937) and *Shadows on the Grass / Skygger paa Græsset* (1960). Blixen's African 'background' has often been referred to both by herself and by others when explaining her certain peculiarities as an author: her independence of the mainstream Danish literature of her time,[4] and especially her *Weltanshauung* as a result of her encounter with Islam.[5] Yet Islam and the culture related to it, as anyone reading Blixen's texts will agree, is only part of the writer's multicultural frame of reference which draws on a diverse range of sources of the world's philosophical, literary and artistic enterprise.

The linguistic situation of Blixen's authorship enhances the ambiguity even further. Blixen wrote most of her texts first in English and then in Danish, and at times she was working on two manuscripts simultaneously, as in the case of *Out of Africa* and *Winter Tales / Vinter-Eventyr* (1942).[6]

This was no translation: according to Susan Brantly, "she allowed herself much more creative liberty than a translator would claim. Occasionally, she inserted new phrases and paragraphs into the Danish version."[7] This situation raises the issue of originality: should we call the original the text written first – which is usually the English one – or the later one, composed in the writer's mother tongue and the more nuanced stylistically and semantically?[8]

No less ambiguous is Blixen's relation to the Danish literary tradition, which is reflected in the practice of introducing her in histories of literature by way of contrasting her writing to her contemporaries.[9] Mogens Brøndsted felicitously sums up this situation by the metaphor he borrows from their fellow countryman Hans Christian Andersen: "Belonging to far-away times and countries, she appeared as a foreign bird in the Danish duck-yard, exceptional and fine, and was right away met with due reverence and fascination."[10] When Blixen's first book *Seven Gothic Tales* (1935) appeared in Danish as *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* a year after its publication and great success in the USA, the dominating literary form in Denmark was the long novel of social and psychological realism, often containing a political agenda and concentrating on the conflict between man and his social environment. Blixen had chosen a shorter narrative form, which she called the tale or the story, thus stressing her affinity with the ancient tradition of oral storytelling. These stories were set about 100 years in the past, the action taking place in old monasteries ("The Monkey") or deserted mansions ("Supper at Elsinore"), and portraying decadent aristocrats who advocated such outdated romantic values as the power of imagination, chivalry, or reconciliation with destiny.

The obvious incompatibility of Blixen's first book with the Danish literary and social climate of the time evoked a great deal of negative reception in the writer's homeland – quite the opposite of what Brøndsted affirms in the second part of the above quote. There were critics who 'prophesied' that Blixen would never come to occupy a prominent place in Danish literature.[11] One of the first reviewers, now a 'classic' in Blixen's criticism – Frederik Schyberg – called the book "A piece of dazzling artistic simile by a talented but hysterical writer" who "creates effect but produces no point."[12] Ironically, Schyberg's words are now often quoted as a proof of the provocative and challenging nature of Blixen's texts, which Blixen's readers have come to appreciate.[13]

For the sake of fairness, however, it should be noted that the attitude of the Danes towards Blixen's authorship changed quickly. The book *Out of Africa* which followed *Seven Gothic Tales* was considered to be more realistic in style and was well received in Denmark.[14] Blixen was already a celebrated national author when her later collections *Winter Tales*, *Last Tales / Sidste Fortællinger* (1957) and *Anecdotes of Destiny / Skæbne-Anekdoter* (1958) were published.[15] Nevertheless, the question of Blixen's place within the history of Danish literature has remained open.

The theatre director and critic Erling Schrøder doubted, for example, the very attribution of this authorship to Danish literature. Pointing towards its creative treatment of the world's classical literature and mythology, Schrøder calls Blixen a cosmopolitan modernist artist:

> Her literary placing was doubtful, namely in Denmark. I myself have always preferred to see her in the European context. In a tradition where the old motifs are being broken up and used to create new patterns, for me she has always been one of the corners of a triangle, where the other two are Stravinsky and Picasso.[16]

Philip M. Mitchell goes even further and considers her "an aristocratic member of the republic of letters and a citizen of the world."[17]

On the other hand, one will find in Blixen's texts ample references to Scandinavian authors, such as Hans Christian Andersen, Adam Oehlenschläger, Johannes Ewald, Henrik Ibsen, Meïr Aron Goldschmidt or Sigrid Undset[18] and can trace in them motifs borrowed from Danish legends, Nordic mythology and folklore, or Old Norse literature.[19] She not only revitalises the Scandinavian narrative tradition dating back to the Icelandic sagas, but even takes on some of their means of expression.[20] Blixen has, no doubt, made a significant impact on the future development of Danish literature, especially on the genre of the fantastic tale[21] – thus her writing, although standing in contrast to its contemporary literary situation, can said to be deeply rooted in the tradition of Scandinavian literature as such.

It is no easier to define Blixen's *oeuvre* with regard to a particular literary trend or style, and all attempts to place her firmly within the frame of one particular literary school have been without success. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,[22] Mogens Brøndsted[23] and also Merete Klenow With[24] introduce the writer as the pursuer of the Romantic tradition,

Philip M. Mitchell[25] and Thomas Whissen[26] treat Blixen's writing within the paradigm of aestheticism, while Bo Hakon Jørgensen[27] characterises her work as symbolist. Blixen seems to surpass the boundaries of specific literary trends by playfully and ironically reinterpreting traditions of different times and producing her own very peculiar style. This is quite unexpected having in mind that most of her texts were written in the first part of the 20th century, and, indeed, a number of critics have ventured to read Blixen through the lens of later – late-modernist (Ellen Rees[28]), postmodernist (Grethe F. Rostbøll,[29] Morten Kyndrup[30]) or neo-baroque (Charlotte Engberg[31]) fiction.

There seems to be only one label – Blixen's talent as a storyteller – which all critics accept without reservation, and the issue of placing Blixen in Danish and the world's literature can be best summarised in Poul Borum's words:

> She was a story-teller first and last, she always stressed that herself – she was a sister of Scheherazade /…/. But she has never been placed – as if that is so important! – in Danish literature, although she often showed her indebtedness to classic story-tellers like Blicher and Goldschmidt, and was eagerly accepted by the new generation of the forties as an ally in the fight for imagination. She has not been placed in English or American literature either, and is an outsider like that other bi-lingual mythmaker, Vladimir Nabokov.[32]

The more one gets involved with Blixen's authorship, the stronger one realises how difficult it is to define it in general terms, since ambiguity seems to be its most stable quality. Every 'truth' you have discovered very soon turns out to be volatile. Attempts to bring it to light usually lead you into some kind of labyrinth: as soon as you believe to have found the right path, you discover a tempting side passage, which often drives you in the opposite direction. You believe to have traced an important aspect in Blixen's work and then suddenly you see that there are other things that contradict your observations. Of course, you can close your eyes to the contradicting evidence and preserve the theory you were about to conclude formulating. Yet, if you want to be honest, you have to take into consideration these newly discovered things, and then you suddenly find yourself on a new path, realising that the newly discovered 'truth' is no less intriguing. The idea that any 'truth' about Blixen's work

is unstable does not mean, however, that earlier discoveries should be rejected outright. The earlier path is by no means a dead end that should be forgotten as a result of the one just found: the things which had been observed earlier do not lose their validity but rather coexist alongside the new discoveries, at the same time questioning their absoluteness, just as the later discoveries did.

It must be some protective mechanism of our minds that makes us search for an explanation to such a confusing state of things. Indeed, the ambiguity of Blixen's authorship pertaining to its different aspects (the linguistic situation, the concept of sexuality, the concept of faith and others) has already received a great deal of attention in Blixen criticism. Attempts have been made to explain the ambiguity of her work with the help of different theories: psychoanalysis,[33] feminist critique,[34] biographical reading,[35] and queer theory.[36] Different issues of ambiguity have even become the special theme of one Blixen conference.[37]

Hopefully, there are still other possibilities left for approaching the issue of ambiguity in Blixen, and the perspective of play seems to be a relevant option, since there is hardly another phenomenon in the world than play which so naturally embraces ambiguity as its constituent feature. Although play is a complex matter and different theoreticians offer different definitions of it,[38] few of them, if any, argue over its ambiguous and ambivalent nature. Play is said to be always under development and capable of change through the playing out of the playing process itself.[39] It is defined as a constant "to-and-fro movement,"[40] as an activity, the outcome of which is impossible to tell beforehand,[41] it is something which never repeats itself in exactly the same way and which always outgrows its own boundaries. Play is often considered to be not serious, yet it absorbs those who play "intensely and utterly."[42] Play is both "a constructive and deconstructive activity; it is purposeful and random, pointed in opposite ways yet interbound."[43] Ontologically, play is perceived as "a mixture of reality and irreality, of truth and illusion."[44] It seems to possess the paradoxical power to relate differences precisely by opposing them.[45]

A number of Blixen scholars (whose studies have been of great help in writing this book) have touched upon different aspects of playfulness in Blixen's writings. Else Cederborg has written about Blixen's use of play with pseudonyms and their symbolism.[46] Susan Hardy Aiken has discussed subversion of traditional (male) modes of writing, and

the parody of misogynic cultural stereotypes that she observes in Karen Blixen's texts.[47] Dag Heede has analysed Blixen's untraditional and playful treatment of heterosexual relationships.[48] Tone Selboe has pointed out playful synthesis of different genres and conventions, as well as the continuous deception of the reader's expectations in her texts.[49] Charlotte Engberg relates the playfulness of Blixen's art to the technique of collage: according to her, the visual quality of Blixen's texts is achieved through combination of fragments of different artistic traditions (still-lives of the Baroque, landscapes of the Renaissance, portrait art, etc.).[50] Playful intermediality and intertextuality, as important elements of Blixen's work, have been discussed by Ivan Ž. Sørensen and Ole Togeby.[51] Susan Brantly relates Blixen's playfulness to the postmodern use of the term, stressing the element of fun, as well as the complexity and artistry of her work.[52] A number of Blixen scholars, for example, Peter Hjort S. Bjerring,[53] Donald Hannah,[54] and Ivan Ž. Sørensen[55] have also written on the significance in Blixen's texts of humour and irony – concepts that, no doubt, are very much related to the concept of play, especially its indispensable element of fun.

This book, however, seems to be the first complex attempt to treat Blixen's work in the light of play and game theory, leading to the conclusion that play is one of its governing principles. As the present study aims to demonstrate, Blixen's texts do not only play with literary conventions and traditions, but also discuss play explicitly and suggest playful strategies for their reader – inviting her to experiment with interpretations, but also teaching her to be open and tolerant towards the interpretations offered by others. The dominance of the play principle in Blixen's writings deconstructs the image of Blixen as a high brow, elitist author and rather positions her as a highly social one.[56] Her texts open up as playgrounds of challenging and generous interaction for us, which one can enter from many unexpected angles – in the true spirit of play.

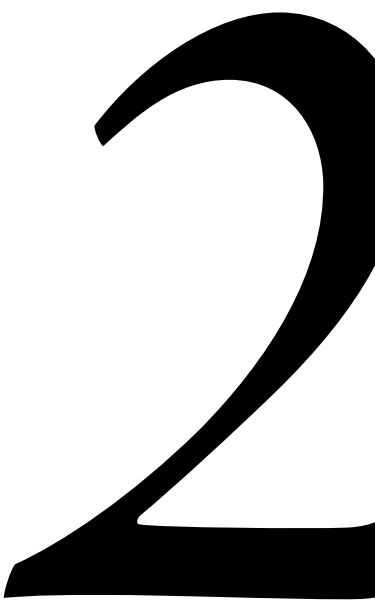
The book first of all addresses those who set out on their way to approach Blixen, especially students of Scandinavian and English-language literature in Lithuania where Blixen's name still deserves better introduction.[57] It contains therefore a great deal of basic information on Blixen's writings and refers extensively to previous scholarship. At the same time, I dare to hope that due to its focus on the phenomenon of play and some new interpretations of Blixen's texts, the book will be of interest to Blixen specialists as well.

The research behind the present book has been conducted across the *oeuvre*, and is based on a corpus of selected Karen Blixen's stories from different collections. The book also includes an analysis of the essay "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations" which is claimed to be Blixen's implicit manifesto of art as play, and refers to some other works by the author, such as the marionette comedy *The Revenge of Truth*, the review of H. C. Branner's *The Rider*, as well as Blixen's autofiction book *Out of Africa*. For the sake of economy, indications of the collections to which individual stories belong are often omitted in the text, however, this information can be found at the end of the book. The list contains all the titles (both in Danish and English) that are mentioned in the present publication. Quotations from Blixen's texts are presented throughout this book solely in English, both in cases where the English version has been originally composed by Blixen and those where the translation has been made by someone else, and are taken from published sources, except in the very few cases when the differences between the English and Danish versions are of particular importance and then, in such cases, both are quoted. The same applies to critical and theoretical literature: in the case of available published translations into English, no original quote is provided, but when the translation is my own, the original is quoted in the endnotes.

The analyses in this book rest mostly on close reading of texts with focus on their narrative structure, often in combination with intertextual perspectives. As to the theory applied, I have made use of the theories of play as developed, for example, by Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Hans Georg Gadamer, Gregory Bateson, Brian Edwards, R. Rawdon Wilson, Erik Zillén and some others. The basic theoretical concepts and a short selective history of introducing them into the literary discourse will be outlined in the chapter that follows.

Finally, it must be noted that some parts of the book have already been published with small adjustments as articles.[58]

# Chapter Two
# Some Aspects of Play Theory



# 1. 'Game' vs. 'play': The problem of distinction

Whilst some languages have only one name for ludic[1] phenomena (*jeu* in French, *juego* in Spanish, *Spiel* in German, *игра* in Russian[2]), in English, one can distinguish between the two related and yet different concepts of 'play' and 'game'.

In play theory, the more general concept of *play* is usually related to such notions as freedom, illusion, open-endedness, innovation, risk, change and even anarchy.[3] Play is perceived as a free and recurrent movement "to-and-fro,"[4] as an activity without rules or purpose, but also as an inherent human quality and a special attitude of mind, as noted in Brian Edwards' definition:

> [I]n its most general sense, play is an attitude of mind, a perspective on life or on being in the world, together with actions manifesting this attitude. It affirms possibility against restriction, resignation and closure, thus blurring distinctions between observation and participation, and between the spectators and collaborators.[5]

Game, on the contrary, is usually defined as play that has acquired structure. This structure is determined by rules, moves, aims, stakes and spatial and temporary limits,[6] although theorists have also expressed doubts that one definition could cover all of the different games which exist in their diversity.[7] Neither is the distinction between game and play as problem-free as it might appear at first sight, with the two concepts pointing in opposite directions (game towards regularity and finiteness, and play towards transgression and openness).

Obviously, play and game are not only opposed to each other, but are also related, and most games, although regulated and finite, leave space for certain elements of play – innovation, creativity and fun. Usually, it is claimed that play is a broader concept and that "games involve play, but play is not bound to games."[8] However, there are scholars like Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman who argue that play can also be a narrower concept than game, and that the relationship between these two concepts depends on the way in which we frame them:

1. Games are a subset of play: Games constitute a formalized [sic] part of everything we might consider to be play. Playing catch or playing doctor are play activities that fall outside our definition of games (a contest of powers with a quantifiable outcome, etc.). However, although not all play fits the category of games, those things we define as games fit within a larger category of play activities.
2. Play is an element of games: in addition to rules and culture, play is an essential component of games, a facet of a larger phenomenon of games, and a primary schema for understanding them.[9]

The ambiguity of the play / game distinction is implied in the Dutch historian and anthropologist Johan Huizinga's definition, which he formulated in his seminal *Homo Ludens* (1938)[10] – a study of human culture "sub specie ludi":[11]

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.[12]

In his book, Huizinga investigates play as one of the bases of civilisation, discussing its manifestations in the most diverse spheres of human activity – from law and war to art and philosophy. Huizinga was criticised for providing a definition which was too broad and yet too narrow.[13] Play in its most general sense seems to be the primary subject of Huizinga's study, and this is indicated by, among other things, his emphasis on the element of fun and his reflections on the loss of "the pure play-quality" in professional sport: "the spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness."[14] On the other hand, Huizinga's description of play as something which is defined by fixed rules and spatial and temporal boundaries points towards an attempt to formulate the morphology of game which, in the long run,

has become the point of departure for nearly all theoretical discussions of the game concept, modern ludology included.[15]

The French anthropologist Roger Caillois, in his book *Les Jeux et les Hommes* (1958; *Man, Play and Games*), further develops the definition of play put forward by Huizinga. He points towards its other aspects, such as uncertainty (the course and outcome of each individual game are not known beforehand, and games leave room for innovation), and make-believe (play is concerned with "a second reality" or "free unreality" which stands in opposition to "real life").[16] Caillois appears to have been even more aware of the impossibility of drawing a distinct boundary between play and game, as he divides the entire concept of play into four major categories:

1. *Mimicry* – simulation, the creation of an imaginary (fictitious) universe, role-playing;
2. *Ilinx* – this category encompasses everything that can induce vertigo (from children's activities that involve being swung around to Dionysian cults);
3. *Alea* – games of chance, in which winning is determined by fate or accident, independently of the player;
4. *Agôn* – competition, confrontation of adversaries.

According to Caillois' model, within each of these categories, games are distributed along a continuum between two opposite poles: *paideia* (childish, spontaneous and involving carefree self-expression) and *ludus* (regulated, systematic activity which requires patience, skill or ingenuity),[17] which suggests that playfulness and gamefulness are gradable qualities.

The problematic relationship between the concepts of game and play remains an issue for discussion in modern game and play studies, and theoreticians have attempted to define what exactly turns play into game. The American scholar R. Rawdon Wilson put forward an illustrative example: the activity of a boy who hangs from a branch of a tree "because it is fun" is "mere play," corresponding to the type Caillois calls *ilinx*. However, hanging there for as long as possible is a game, which is constituted by "the rule of hanging until it is necessary to let go."[18] This understanding of constitutive rules and their function in games is based on Bernard Suits' theory, which is presented in his book *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (1978), one of the wittiest in the

field. It is composed, for the most part, of a Platonic dialogue between the Grasshopper, "the shiftless but thoughtful practitioner of applied entomology" and a theoretician of game-playing, and his disciple Scepticus. According to Suits (or the Grasshopper), constitutive rules are not the most efficient means of achieving the desired state of affairs in a game: using a golf club is probably less efficient than other ways of getting a ball into some holes, but if one wants to play golf, one simply must do so in this way. Constitutive rules are thus inseparable from the "lusory attitude" of the players; their willingness to accept these "unnecessary obstacles" without which there would be no game:

> To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. I also offer the following simpler and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.[19]

Although most theoreticians agree that rules are the most important component that transforms play into game,[20] some hold a different view. Gonzalo Frasca points out (with reference to the Uruguayan anthropologist Daniel Vidart) that play can also have strict rules: a child who plays at being a pilot adheres to the rule that he or she must "behave like a pilot, and not like a doctor, or a car driver." Frasca claims (with reference to the French philosopher Andre Lalande) that games, in contrast to play, have a result.[21] One can argue, however, that the rule explained above is of a different kind from those that, according to Suits, must be present in order for an activity to qualify as a game. The rule that one must "behave like a pilot" facilitates or simply enables the play rather than creating obstacles which would make it more difficult for the player to achieve the goal. Indeed, there is no real goal in this kind of play other than continuing to play a pilot and to have fun by doing so (and who would consider behaving like a doctor to be a more efficient means of continuing to play a pilot?).[22] Wilson's example can be questioned as well: does "hanging as long as possible" constitute a rule or a goal? I find it more correct to consider it to be a goal, while the constitutive rule

(the "less efficient means") in such a game could, for example, be hanging onto the tree with the help of only one's hands. However, any answers would not significantly affect Wilson's point that it makes sense to separate the concepts of game and play in literary studies, as his emphasis lies on the factor of structure,[23] and as a goal or identifiable outcome is often considered to be no less important than the rules in defining game as a structure.[24]

As one can already gather from this short introduction, the field of play and game studies is not devoid of controversy. Theoreticians criticise their precursors, claiming that their definitions are too broad or too narrow, and propose their own conceptions, which again are considered to be unsatisfactory by others. However, despite all of the arguments, one thing seems to be clear: play is a more dynamic, more pervasive phenomenon, representing both an activity and a spirit which can penetrate not only a game, but any other, even the most rigorous structure and any sphere of human existence.

## 2. Literature as play and game: A short history of the long way towards confluence

Today, the concepts of play and game are being successfully employed in a diverse range of fields of academic discourse: philosophy, anthropology, psychology, economics, cultural studies, mathematics and even physics.[25] The field of literary studies is no exception, as writings in this vein, both theoretical and dealing with particular texts and authors, are fairly numerous.[26] However, it has taken many years and a great deal of change in human thinking to establish a fairly firm generic parallel between literature and play. This process dates back to Classical Antiquity and has developed up to this day together with the evolution of aesthetic and literary thought.

### *Play and game in the philosophical discourse – the concept of Weltspiel*

The beginnings of play theory are usually associated with the philosophical idea of the "Play / game of the world" (*Weltspiel*), the echoes of which also sound in Blixen's texts.[27] Its history goes back to the fragment by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, which is quoted in nearly every modern study of play: "Lifetime [aion] is a child at play, moving pieces in a game, the kingship belongs to the child."[28] This fragment is considered to be one of the most puzzling of Heraclitus' statements, both with regard to the meaning of the word *aion* (lifetime or eternity) and the implications of the image ("whether the emphasis is on the game's rules, or the arbitrariness of the rules"[29]). The latter ambiguity might be connected with the lack of consensus among scholars and translators regarding the particular type of game that Heraclitus could have been referring to. Most English and German translations of the fragment use the image of a board game (or draughts, more specifically).[30] Mantas Adomėnas, by contrast, in his translation into Lithuanian uses the word "dice" (*kauliukai*), pointing out in his commentary that the Heraclitian child's game could have incorporated both elements (a board and dice) and that both of them imply the same dialectic of chance and necessity: "what happens as an accidental cast of dice, seen in retrospect, becomes unavoidable and

fatal for the chain of consequences it produces; out of chaos, cosmos is born."[31] Such an interpretation, which avoids setting the generic differences between the two types of game against each other, foregrounds the Heraclitian conception of the ever-changing world in which each thing becomes its opposite, and corresponds to the common tendency to view the notion of play in Heraclitus' work as the "arbitrary, exuberant, and spontaneous movement of the cosmos."[32] However, regardless of the game Heraclitus had in mind, seen from today's perspective and in the light of our understanding of the difference between games of pure chance (dice) and games of strategy (draughts), it can be claimed that the implications of the two images differ. The metaphor of the cosmic board game appears to be both a more optimistic and a more dramatic one, as it both gives us hope and leaves us in a constant state of doubt. Although we can never be sure, we can still imagine that there might be a plan or purpose behind the cosmic game of draughts, even if we are not allowed to grasp it, but only to believe that it exists.

The Heraclitian image of the child at play was later taken up by Friedrich Nietzsche. According to his conception, the world definitely does not appear to be ordered as a game or as a totality of (albeit indiscernible) rules. The world, according to Nietzsche, exists in a state of play – an elemental state devoid of rules and hierarchies. In his book *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (1876; *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of Greeks*), Nietzsche speaks of the world as the play of a powerful cosmic force – the eternal fire that is "beyond good and evil"; which creates, but also destroys, forever remaining innocent:

> In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence. And as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself. Transforming itself into water and earth, it builds towers of sand like a child at the sea-shore, piles them up and tramples them down. From time to time it starts the game anew. /…/ Not hybris but the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being. The child throws its toys away from time to time – and starts again, in innocent caprice.[33]

In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger returned to the idea of the play of the world, claiming the play of Being to be a purposeless mystery; the play of "the great child" who "plays because it plays."[34] As explained by Mihai I. Spariosu, "the play of the world must be understood, with Heidegger, as a play of presence and absence, in which all beings emerge into presence, are for a while lit up, and then disappear again into the groundless abyss of absence /…/."[35] Heidegger's idea of the cosmic play was further developed by his disciple Eugene Fink,[36] who, in his onto-phenomenological theory of play, both opposes and relates the play of the world to human play. Human play can, according to Fink, be used as a symbol of the world, but only if one relinquishes the idea of the subjectivity of the player. In contrast to human play, cosmic play has no player, no structure, no ground or value, subsuming everything, even the reasons, goals and grounds of all intra-worldly beings.[37]

### *Play and game in the aesthetic discourse: The transformation of the hierarchy*

The concepts of play and game had already found their way into the aesthetic discourse in ancient times, although the hierarchy between the two has changed gradually over the course of time. Plato clearly favours controlled play when in his *Republic* he discusses art and play together as forms of imitation: boys play at being soldiers, children play at being their elders, the epic bard imitates the speech and action of heroes and the poet imitates his muse. Plato justifies only play (entertainment, art) that is motivated and, by imitating the existing model, pursues an educational aim. Although he admits that play has a certain attraction, he warns that it should be subject to Truth.[38]

It was the German idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant who first drew a direct parallel between play and art. In his book *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790; *Critique of Judgement*), he separates art (as it is perceived as free play of imagination) from nature, science and craft, at the same time liberating it from the necessity of representing something. However, although claiming that the foundation of all art is the freedom of imagination, Kant perceives as superior those works of art in which order and balance prevail (which, in modern terms, are gameful in that they respect formal restrictions), rejecting those that are "mere play":

> It is not amiss, however, to remind the reader of this: that in all free arts something of a *compulsory* character is still required, or, as it is called, a *mechanism*, without which the spirit, which in art must be free, and which alone gives life to the work, would be bodyless and evanescent (e.g., in the poetic art there must be *correctness* and *wealth of language*, likewise *prosody* and *metre*). For not a few leaders of a newer school believe that the best way to promote a free art is to sweep away all restraint and convert it from *labour* into mere play.[39]

The concept of play as an aesthetic phenomenon is fully rehabilitated at the hands of yet another German idealist philosopher and writer, Friedrich Schiller. In his *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795; *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*), Schiller claims that play is the expression of a person's surplus energy and the foundation of all art. According to him, the instinct to play (*Spieltrieb*) is a force that can unite two basic and yet conflictive human instincts – the formal or rational (*Formtrieb*) and the material or sensual drive (*Stofftrieb*), as their union is necessary for the production of art (Letters 15, 16 and 27[40]). Nevertheless, although he claims that play is what makes man truly human, Schiller, like Kant, believes that play should be controlled and thus subordinates it to reason.[41]

The concept of unrestricted play triumphs in Nietzsche's aesthetics, in which it is finally freed from the grip of rationality. Nietzsche perceives play in art as irrational, absurd and capable of surpassing limits, developing this idea in his *Ecce Homo* (1888), *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872; *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*) and *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85; *Thus Spake Zarathustra*). For Nietzsche, play in art is a power that can destroy stagnated values, reinforce the rebellious Dionysian spirit and teach the audience to perceive reality anew.[42]

In modern aesthetics, Hans Georg Gadamer sees play as the fundamental mode of being in art, and investigates it further in his phenomenological works, including *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960; *Truth and Method*) and *Die Aktualität des Schönen: Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest* (1977; *The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival*). Like Kant and Schiller before him, he touches upon the issues of freedom and regularity in play, claiming that play, which is purposeless movement "to-and-fro," is organised into structures – those of a game and

a work of art – by the human mind, which tends to impose rules upon itself.[43] However, in terms of the ontology of art, his theory is a critique of Schiller, "for whom the autonomy of the aesthetic was grounded on this free play of the subject within himself."[44] According to Gadamer, the essence of play in art is exactly the opposite: in an encounter with a work of art, the subject is drawn out of the confinements of his or her own subjectivity and into the more perfect reality of the work of art. It is a process that the subject cannot control, being no longer able, in Jean Grondin's words, to "dispose of his normal horizons of experience and expectations"[45] and being made to play along.[46]

### *Play and game in literary studies*

Discussions of the ontological status of play are, without a doubt, interesting in themselves, and relevant to our understanding of the nature of literature and the mechanisms of its reception. However, very little help can be found in the general analogies between life and play and between art and play if one wishes to apply the concepts of play and game as analytical tools in order to approach an individual text. These concepts are relevant only if they can help us to open up an idiosyncratic fictional world, or to reveal ways in which a particular text deserves our attention by being more playful or gameful than another text. Bearing in mind what has previously been said about the difficulty of theoretically distinguishing the two general concepts of play and game, one can be sure that no consensus exists with regard to their variants which have been adopted in literary studies.

## GAMES IN LITERATURE

The ways in which literature can be viewed as a game seem to depend on what one considers to be performing the functions of players, rules and goals. In one of the earliest extensive studies of its kind, the book *Games Authors Play* (1983) by Peter Hutchinson, literary games are attributed to the conscious activities of the author and defined as:

> [P]layful, self-conscious and extended means by which an author stimulates his reader to deduce or to speculate, by which he encourages him to see a relationship between different parts of the text, or between the text and something extraneous to it.[47]

Hutchinson's book is a discussion of the literary means, such as allusions, misleading references, paradoxes, enigmas, puns etc., "which present a specific form of challenge to the intellect."[48] According to Eric Zillén's critique of the book, Hutchinson, by claiming that playfulness in literature functions in ways which are both broader and narrower than those proposed in theories of play, is aiming to remodel the concepts of play and game for the purposes of literary studies. Zillén views it as a major flaw in Hutchinson's theory that it concentrates on purely literary means, which reduces it to "a catalogue of literary devices and techniques which have long been investigated, although sometimes under different concepts, in the study of literature."[49] It is a good point; however, one can argue that Hutchinson does not discuss just *any* literary devices, but focuses on those that trigger the reader's active and creative involvement with the text. Therefore, he identifies some mechanisms that enable the "play-pact" between the reader and the text, which is an important component of Zillén's own model of play, which will also be presented shortly. What can be considered as a vulnerable point in Hutchinson's theory is his identification of the effect produced by these mechanisms (the stimulation of the reader's intellectual activity) with the author's goal or intention, the reconstruction of which is a doubtful enterprise in itself: authors may have different reasons for writing a text as it is, and a great deal of its play may even be unintentional.

Matei Calinescu takes the opposite view from that of Hutchinson, anchoring the subject of play to the reader and concentrating on the playful activity of rereading, which he defines both in terms of play – as a creative attitude towards the text – and game, as rereading requires certain rule-governed procedures.[50] Despite being more a theory of playful / gameful reception than a theory of the playfulness / gamefulness of the text, it nevertheless is highly relevant when discussing the latter qualities, as it demonstrates that the greatest potential for playing the game of rereading lies in the analysis of the intertextual relations of the text. Intertextuality, Calinescu argues, can make rereading into an endless game that "posits a reader /…/ with an infinity of available time to explore an infinite text or textual network."[51] Thus, similarly to Hutchinson, Calinescu points towards a quality which stems from the text and which facilitates playful communication between the text and its reader.

Wolfgang Iser is another theorist who speaks of the reading process in terms of game in his book *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven Literarischer Anthropologie* (1991; *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*) and classifies different possibilities with regard to reading by borrowing terms proposed by Caillois: (1) *agon* denotes a reading game which is oriented towards the search for meaning, when a reader imposes his or her own code upon the text, and this game ends "when meaning has been found"; (2) *alea* is reading in pursuit of experience, when the reader suspends and puts at stake his or her own norms and values; (3) *mimicry* is reading for the sake of pleasure which arises from the activation of the reader's faculties, especially when the reader attempts to discover the rules of the textual game; and (4) *ilinx* is the complete "dissolution" of the reader into the text, when we extinguish "ourselves as a reference" and do not care about finding meaning, gaining experience or activating our faculties.[52]

Different games of reading reflect, according to Iser, the reader's ability to respond to the games (or rather their combinations) that the text itself plays. Iser, as befits a theoretician engaging with games, operates with the notion of rules, which he divides into *regulatory* and *aleatory*. Whereas regulatory rules, which determine the form of a text game by prescribing what is to be observed in it and thus impose restrictions upon it, are stable, aleatory rules are constantly changing and have to be discovered by the reader. Iser stresses the importance of aleatory rules in works of art, because through them the viewer may experience that which makes a work of art unique.[53] Aleatory rules are also what, according to Iser (who quotes Bateson), causes reading to resemble "life – a game whose purpose is to discover the rules which are always changing and always undiscoverable."[54] Iser's use of the game concept is by no means metaphorical, and it helps to capture the complex ontology of the text, which is both finite and endless. However, his theory also indirectly shows the vast difference between text games and traditional ones, in which regulatory rules have a much more determinative and binding role.

The scholar who addresses this problem directly is R. Rawdon Wilson. In his book *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory* (1993), he points to different ways in which narratives can be gameful:

> Literary texts may be games in several ways: that they may incorporate empirical games, that they may mark off the playground of the author's personal gamefulness, that they may engage the reader in textual games as well as wordplay, that they may be constituted as games /…/ by the reader's own game playing, and even that they may be transformed into games by the rulelike [sic] procedures of interpretive criticism.[55]

Wilson warns, however, against the paralleling of game and text as a structure on the basis of the tempting analogy between literary conventions and rules.[56] This assumption has often been made, especially in relation to literary forms of greater conventionality, such as detective stories or some forms of poetry (such as the sonnet). Wilson claims that the equalling of conventions and rules is a fallacy, as conventions are, in their essence, different from rules in that they do not possess the regulatory status of the latter:

> [C]onventions are looser, less abstract, more resistant to formulation, and altogether more flexible than rules. /…/ Unlike rules, other assumptions (call them conventions) cannot be broken; they can only be ignored or neglected.[57]

Wilson takes the pastoral as an example, and claims that the rejection of one or more traditional conventions of the genre does not mean that the text can no longer be called an example of the pastoral genre.[58] He also pinpoints a number of paradoxes that emerge as a result of identifying literary conventions with game rules:

> On the basis of an equation between game and text, it will be necessary to take literary conventions as rules, and this will entail that they must be learned as rules, as preconditions of the activity. /…/ if literature is game, then its rules will be acquired in an inverse order, after rather than before the activity of playing the game.[59]

There is one more important point that develops from Wilson's argument: if literary conventions are rules, then the most gameful text will be that which submissively obeys the conventions and does not influence

tradition in any way. To put it bluntly, this would be a dull text of little originality and no fun at all to read. The problem with the analogy between literary conventions and game rules becomes especially problematic with regard to postmodern literature, in which the breaching of conventions can be said to constitute a norm.[60]

## LITERATURE AS PLAY

Whereas the concept of the text as a game seems to have been influenced by the 'structural' theories of Huizinga and Caillois, the concept of play is often related in literary studies to Bakhtin's theory of carnival as a celebration of the inversion and transgression of all of the norms of everyday life,[61] or grounded in post-structural and especially deconstructionist theories.[62] Play in works by Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida (via his concept of *jeu libre*) is reflected upon as the natural state of the text's existence; it is related to processes of signification, the idea of the openness of the text and the reader's role in the process of the construction of meaning. Derrida, in his *De la Grammatalogie* (1967; *Of Grammatology*), liberates writing from ontological necessity by unmasking as a construct everything that was previously considered to be a source of well-defined and stable meaning (history, language, God, reality) and proposes instead that the text should be viewed as the endless play of signifiers:

> One could call play the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence.[63]

Ihab Hasssan in his classical essay "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (*The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 1971) formed a theoretical relationship between play and postmodernism by naming "play" and "chance" as two of the constituent features of the postmodern paradigm, replacing "purpose" and "design" in the modernist equivalent.[64] Indeed, the concept of play has become a handy instrument for analysing postmodern texts which produce multiple interpretations because of their semantic opacity and self-reflexivity, subvert literary conventions and exist in dialogue with other texts.[65]

# 3. The concept of play in the present book

Bearing in mind the difficulty of accepting the analogy between rules and conventions, and as I do not believe in the possibility of determining the goals or the final outcome of a text's play in order that it may be qualified as a game, I consider the broader concept of play to be a handier tool with which to approach a text. This is not only because it is less problematic, but also because it better foregrounds the qualities that a post-Schillerian critic will find most important in a work of art: its potential for creative innovation and change, but also its social character and its ability to make the spirit of play infectious.

Nevertheless, we can hardly speak of play as a free, transgressive activity or mode without organising its manifestations in a particular author's discourse into patterns, models and schemes, as generalisation seems to be unavoidable in any scholarly work. My way of tackling this dichotomy of transgression and regularity is, to a certain degree, influenced by the Swedish scholar Erik Zillén, the author of *Den Lekande Fröding: En författarskapsstudie* (2001; *Fröding at Play: An Authorship Study*), a pioneering and well-grounded study of the play of a Scandinavian author, to which I owe a great deal of my theoretical background. Although Zillén dissociates himself completely from the problem of the differentiation of play and game, which is a point of departure for my discussion,[66] he avoids the use of such concepts as 'rules' or 'outcomes' and applies instead the term 'strategy' as his major operational concept. This seems to be a smart choice, as in those cases in which the distinction is difficult to make, this term allows one to avoid making a definite choice between the concepts of play and game, as it can be applied to both of them. This is relevant for the present study, as I do not intend to abandon the concept of game completely: game will be discussed in this book both as a theme and as a metaphor, and even as an object of textual play. Moreover, the term 'strategy' can be said to represent patterns of play as they have been discerned by a scholar's analytic activity, without making it necessary to speculate regarding whether these patterns have been consciously predesigned as a set of constitutive rules to be followed in order to make the play more challenging.

Against the background of Hutchinson, Calinescu and Iser's theories, as well as George Bateson's conception of meta-communicative signals of play, Zillén develops his own interdisciplinary model of play. By redefining four categories which are well-established in play theory (language play, play with objects, role-play, metafictional play) into the four basic textual strategies of verbal, intertextual, pseudonymous and metaliterary play, he combines them with "the reader directed play-pact" (which corresponds to the category of social play), claiming that this pact may be both the cause and the effect of the four aforementioned strategies.[67] Zillén believes this model to be capable of capturing the central dynamism of Gustaf Fröding's play.[68] In the way in which Zillén formulates the aim of his study, I read an implication with which I absolutely agree: that every instance of playful authorship presupposes its own model of play. Nevertheless, all of the strategies which Zillén identifies are very likely to be relevant for any literary discourse that would be considered playful by a play-critic today. Zillén's model also shows that the division of play is always arbitrary, as different strategies tend to overlap or can be redefined in different terms. One can argue that all of these strategies can actually be discussed in terms of play with objects (texts play with language and authorial masks, in a similar way to the way in which they play with other texts) and that more objects can be identified as potential literary 'playthings': generic conventions, different art-media forms, conventions of character-construction, narrative techniques, representations of reality, spatial and temporary frames and much more, as, to borrow Wilson's phrasing, "[a]ny activity or object can be playful; anything, even a game, can be transformed into a plaything."[69]

On the other hand, to have and to use an object is not identical to playing with it. Continuously and monotonously bouncing a ball against a wall is an exercise, but it can be turned into play by choosing different ways of performing the activity, by bouncing the ball in an unusual or different way, by combining it with other movements or activities, or by inviting someone else to join in. In other words, play is creative, transformative and subject to constant change. By and large, play is a social act.

In this study, I have opted for a more detailed investigation of strategies of architextual[70] play. The discussion in Part II is therefore focused on Blixen's treatment of two generic paradigms – the oral story and the classical novella, the conventions of which are transformed in her texts

into playthings that are manipulated in different and interesting ways. At the same time, the discussion constantly touches upon other forms of play that architextual play develops into or provokes: role-playing, play with the narrative structure, metafictional play or play with other texts related to the same architext, with all of this play leading to or dependent upon the play with the reader and his or her expectations. My objective is not to formally separate different ludic strategies, but, on the contrary, to capture the dynamism of Blixen's *oeuvre* by tracing its ability to shift between them; to play with play, so to speak.

Another thing which I believe to be crucial for any discussion of play in a particular author's writings (besides the assumption that each playful *oeuvre* creates its own model of play and cannot be playful in just one way) is an invitation from the text to such a discussion. There simply must be some formal signs within the text that invite the use of the strategy of reading it from the ludic perspective. This point has its origin in the aforementioned theory of George Bateson, according to which (social) "play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of meta-communication, i. e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message "this is play"."[71] Zillén equates these signals with the meta-literary strategy; however, in doing so, he may have fallen into the trap of his own critique of Hutchinson: the signal that 'this is literature' is not necessarily the same as 'this is literature which plays', especially if one does not believe that all texts play, or at least not to the same degree.[72]

The least equivocal meta-communicational signs of play are, without a doubt, explicit mentions, representations or discussions of play and games in the texts themselves. There are texts by certain authors which are especially popular among play and game scholars: Vladimir Nabokov's works, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), as well as other stories by Jorge Luis Borges, *Hopscotch* (1963) by Julio Cortázar, *Letters* (1979) as well as other texts by John Barth, *Invisible Cities* (1972) by Italo Calvino, *Glass Bead Game* (1946) by Herman Hesse and *The Magus* (1966) by John Fowles. These texts point to their playful or / and gameful qualities by employing scenes and images of games and playing, and their ludic spirit is often reflected in different kinds of metatext by the same writer: their interviews, diaries, commentaries, etc. The following short and selective mosaic of quotations illustrates this point:

BORGES: "Literature is a game with tacit conventions; to violate them partially or totally is one of the many joys (one of the many obligations) of the game, whose limits are unknown."[73]

CORTÁZAR: "For me, literature is a form of play. /…/ When children play, though they're amusing themselves, they take it very seriously. It's important. It's just as serious for them now as love will be ten years from now. /…/ Literature is like that – it's a game, but it's a game one can put one's life into. One can do everything for that game."[74]

NABOKOV: "Art is Divine play. Both these elements are of equal value."[75]

"Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!"[76]

"Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. /…/ Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!"[77]

FOWLES: "I think literature is half imagination and half game."[78]

In order to justify Blixen's inclusion in this fine company of ludic classics, I will begin the investigation into the playful nature of her *oeuvre* with a discussion of the manifestations and functions of its most conspicuous meta-communicative signals – the *topoi* of play and game – as the focus of Part I, which follows immediately after this introduction.[79]

# Part I
# "This is Play"

# Chapter One
# Game as Model for Narrative Structure

Blixen's stories differ from the texts like *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) by Alexander Pope, *Through the Looking Glass* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, or *The Defense* (1930) by Vladimir Nabokov to which critics traditionally apply the ludic perspective. The latter classical texts show characters at play, depicting their games in technical detail. They are often treated as intellectual puzzles, inviting not only semantic interpretation, but also the reconstruction of the moves of these games.[1] The games that Blixen's stories refer to are not technically specified; nevertheless, such references are highly common and can be considered as meta-communicative signals of play (in Gregory Bateson's terms[2]) by which Blixen's discourse announces its playful character.

The *topoi* of game and play perform a number of significant functions in Blixen's work. As will be demonstrated later in this book, they are important in order to understand Blixen's ambivalent philosophy of life, one that is subject to both chance and choice, severe necessity and humorous paradox. Different forms of play in Blixen's texts can also be treated as means of character construction and means of expressing aesthetic ideas that these characters represent. I would like, however, to start the discussion of the metasignals of Blixen's play with a little experiment, showing that play and game *topoi* can perform even a more peculiar function – that of transposing onto the narrative the internal logic of the games that are incorporated in it.

At least three of Blixen's stories can be analysed from this point of view. In "The Roads Round Pisa," the key metaphor of life as a mosaic, which God keeps filling in bit by bit,[3] is supported by the compositional pattern of the narrative: the text is woven from a number of stories and episodes that converge into a meaningful whole only when the story is completed. In "Tempests," the character of Malli is introduced with the help of the image of chess played in the mind of the theatre director Herr Soerensen.[4] The image adumbrates her floating identity as she shifts between different intertexts (Shakespeare's Arial, Miranda and Ophelia, Wagner's Senta, Jesus Christ and others), and these shifts seem to depend on her encounters with other characters – other 'chess

pieces' on the 'chessboard' of the story. A more detailed analysis of how a narrative can reflect the game it incorporates is provided in the present chapter, which directly concerns "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen" from the collection *Last Tales* (1957). Here, as will be demonstrated in the following, the image of the card game piquet both serves as a model for the narrative structure of the text and provides the reader with a strategy for its interpretation.

In the exposition of the story, two elderly gentlemen – Mateo and Tadeo – are introduced. They have just finished a game of piquet and are engaged in a conversation which in many ways appears to be a continuation of their play. Both their game and dialogue proceed in the same "small salon"[5] – a space which exists next to, and at the same time is separated from, the space of 'real life' – which in this text is represented by the ballroom occupied by young people dancing. This already implies an analogy between the conversation and game: spatial delimitation, separateness from "ordinary life"[6] or "the rest of life"[7] is claimed to be one of the essential elements in games. The dialogue resembles a game in other ways as well, and not just any game, but the game of piquet in particular. Piquet is an old aristocratic game that is played by two players and requires a great amount of intellect and skill. It can be quite long and is structurally heterogenic, as it usually consists of a set of six deals called a *partie*, and the deal is further divided into three parts: card replacement, declaration of combinations and trick-taking.[8] The dialogue between Mateo and Tadeo is heterogenic and lengthy (it almost coincides with the length of the entire text). At first, the two gentlemen talk about friends and "dynastic matters," until they approach the crucial part of their game – the discussion of "the complexity of the universe" [63–65], which in fact turns out to be a discussion of the nature of women. The heterogeneity of their dialogue is not limited to its thematic aspect, but pertains to its structure as well: the dialogue is carried forward by their questions and replies, and even tales that the two gentlemen exchange. All these components are moves and countermoves by which the two players demonstrate their experience and wit in an attempt to prove who is a better connoisseur of women. It is true, however, that Mateo is by far the dominant player. He dwells on his own thoughts, interrupts his own arguments and takes them up again, while Tadeo simply responds to Mateo's words with a short question, remark or simply a smile. Only at the end of the story, he comes up with his own

tale. This disproportion in dialogue does not contradict the specifics of piquet: in the trick-taking stage of this game, the initiative remains, as a rule, with the player who has successfully started it and who possesses a better combination of cards.

The *topos* of piquet helps to explain some other structural peculiarities of the text, for example, its formal incompleteness. Yet, in order to explicate this point, one has to take a closer look at the discussion between the two gentlemen. It has been already mentioned that the goal of Mateo's and Tadeo's verbal game is to find the truth about the nature of women. Both gentlemen seem to agree that a woman is a paradox.[9] This view has been proposed by Mateo who recounts his grandfather's theory. According to this theory life would be easier if man imagined God "as being of the female sex" [64], reconciling the unpredictability of things instead of trying to find a logical explanation for what is happening. Tadeo does not contradict this theory, he remembers Mateo's grandfather with respect, and he is not sure whether his own tale will support his theology or not [70]. Neither does he present a counter-story to the story which Mateo has told as an illustration to his grandfather's theory (it tells of the Sibylla of Babylon who mocks Alexander the Great's and man's general zest for final answers by making him pay a fortune for the most unexpected and worthless answer to his question). Thus, it is not paradoxical nature and love of paradox that is the axis of Mateo's and Tadeo's dispute. Their views seem to diverge in regard to the question 'what makes woman happy?' Their consecutive tales attempt to offer an answer to this question, although it is never posed directly. Mateo tells a story about a young bride into whose absolute disposition her young and deeply amorous husband transfers all his riches – horses, pictures, jewellery, on the condition that he keeps to himself the single one – and he points toward her own reflection in a mirror. Replying to Tadeo's mistrustful question as to whether she was happy, Mateo reassures him that the lady confessed to her husband after twenty years of marriage that without this last clause, she would have felt betrayed [69–70].

Tadeo's counter-story is less idyllic. His heroine is the daughter of a noble but impoverished family and is possessed by the ambition "to prove to the world that she exists."[10] She marries a wealthy aristocrat who sees in her beauty "an asset in his future career" [71] and adorns her with diamonds. However, the lady starts shunning him after some time, hurting him by "so much ingratitude" [71], and further she expounds,

"to an ambitious woman it comes hard, in entering a ballroom, to know that she is entering it on the arm of a cuckold" [72]. Her reply, as Grethe F. Rostbøll aptly notes, indicates that she has achieved considerable freedom from her husband,[11] although it also raises doubt as to whether she was really happy.

Despite the fact that the story started and developed as a frame story, it ends with this anecdote. The narrative is left without a concluding frame – the dispute of the two gentlemen remains unresolved. The narrator's commentary or own story could, for example, have helped the reader find whose story bears the message that is closest to the narrator's own, and could help decipher which of the two ladies is happier – she who puts up with her husband's demand to have her in his absolute possession, or the woman who aspires to have agency over her own existence. Leaving the question open seems, however, to be exactly the intention of the text: its formal and semantic incompleteness has been already prefigured in the *topos* of piquet which opened the text and which served as a symbolical parallel to Mateo and Tadeo's competition as 'experts in women's affairs'. We were told nothing of the outcome and hence do not know the winner of the two old gentlemen's game of cards, so from the reader's perspective, their game of cards remains unresolved. The Danish text has even stronger implications of the lack of resolution of this game: the narrator informs us that the gentlemen start their conversation after having finished their "*partie*"[12] which can mean that they have finished a round and that the conversation is a break before the next one. Likewise, the missing conclusion of Mateo and Tadeo's verbal game puts off its resolution for the future; and with the story being finished, this becomes the reader's prerogative.

The reader, as a potential participant of this textual game, can choose from several roles: she may become an arbiter and take on the role of resolving the game in favour of one of the players. This seems to be the case in the analysis of the short story by the American critic Susan Brantly.[13] Although stressing the patriarchal attitude towards women in both gentlemen's stories, Brantly at the same time favours Tadeo's story as one which voices a woman's basic need to "exist in her own right and not merely submit to the dictates of the society."[14] Another feminist critic, the earlier quoted Grethe F. Rostbøll, discards both players as losers to the narrator. According to her, the gentlemen's 'wisdom' is undermined by the narrator's irony as well as their own stories, which

instead of supporting their theories about the intricate nature of the universe serve as an illustration of the intricate nature of woman – "superior to the male sex."[15]

One can imagine yet another possibility for the reader: he or she can become a player and join in the debate with the two fictional characters. She or he might, for example, produce another view on the issue by setting the two tales in relation to each other and claim that despite woman's ability to surprise by paradoxical solutions, there is at least one respect in which she demonstrates a great consistency: no matter whether she accepts simply being an object of man's desire (as it is the case in Mateo's story) or strives "to exist in her own right" (as does the heroine of Tadeo's story), she expects no less than to be the centre of her man's universe, where no other woman and no other subject or object has a right to outshine her. Whereas Mateo's heroine was pleased that her husband gave her all his fortunes and social position and made it clear that it was her he valued most in his life, the lady in Tadeo's tale should have felt betrayed by being reduced to the means to make her husband's life successful.[16] Moreover, she had been demanded to feel gratitude to her husband who could be such a fool as to insist that it was him to whom "she owes all" [71] – a blunder that a proud woman can never forgive. Such interpretation enables a formal and symmetrical completion of the text by inverting the theory of Mateo's grandfather – that God should be conceived of as a woman, which began the dialogue, into the conclusion that a woman demands from a man to be treated as a central figure, an absolute goddess in his life.

There is, however, something suspicious about such a conclusion since it sounds no less patriarchal. Also Tadeo's mistrustful question after hearing his friend's story, his counter-story about the ambitious woman, as well as their previous talk on the unpredictable nature of the universe and woman imply that there might be something hidden beneath the surface of the patriarchal family idyll in Mateo's story. We might therefore be lacking some information that could be important for relating the two stories properly.

Luckily, the reader can often find a way in and out of Blixen's elliptical narrative by making use of its intertextual character as intertextual analysis has already proven to be a productive instrument for filling in the gaps in Blixen's texts.[17] The ball in "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen," which serves as an occasion for men to discuss love and women

is, no doubt, a reference to the philosophical tradition set by Plato's *Symposium*, and, together with the image of the mirror in Mateo's story, to Søren Kierkegaard in particular. Through his *Stages On Life's Way* (*Stadier På Livets Vej*, 1845), which replays Plato's model, and the character of Johannes the Seducer who in this text is among the guests who exchange their views on women, we come to "The Diary of a Seducer" ("Forførerens Dagbog"). In this short novel, which is incorporated into *Either / Or* (*Enten – Eller*, 1843), Johannes finds himself in a situation which is echoed in Blixen's text, as he observes a mirror reflection of the woman he desires:

> As yet she has not seen me; I am standing at the other end of the counter, far off by myself. There is a mirror on the opposite wall; she is not contemplating it, but the mirror is contemplating her. How faithfully it has caught her image, like a humble slave who shows his devotion by his faithfulness, a slave for whom she certainly has significance but who has no significance for her, who indeed dares to capture her but not to hold her. Unhappy mirror, which assuredly can grasp her image but not her; unhappy mirror, which cannot secretly hide her image in itself, hide it from the whole world, but can only disclose it to others as it now does to me. What torture if a human being were fashioned that way. /…/ Poor mirror, it must be tormenting /…/.[18]

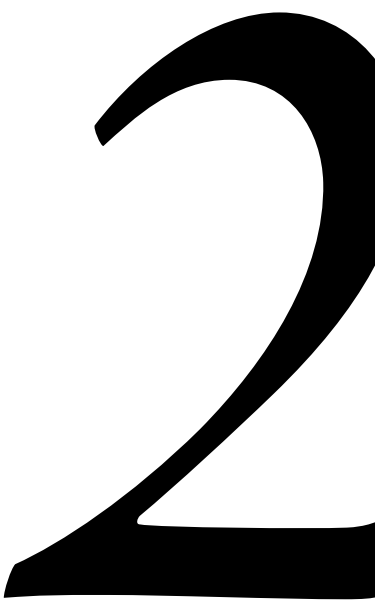
The differences between the concepts of erotic relationship in Kierkegaard and Blixen lie outside the scope of the present analysis and beyond the competence of its author, but the above quoted passage is enough to shed light on the possible state of affairs in the 'happy family' of Mateo's story. The husband who contemplates the reflection of his wife as his absolute property puts himself in the same position as Kierkegaard's "unhappy mirror" which can only "grasp her image but not her," only "capture her but not hold her." The allusion implies that the husband lives in an illusion and that his wife sooner or later will find her ways (whatever are available to her) to move beyond the field of his control. If this is true, then this lady is luckier than the heroine of the other story. Paradoxically she manages to have her cake and eat it too: she seems to be able to enjoy her freedom and at the same time to remain the centre of her husband's universe, as can be gathered from her answer twenty

years later. Even the most emancipated woman of today can envy her a little, for she can also sometimes dream of being revered in an old fashioned way, although there is too much at stake to admit it.

This interpretation can be said to resolve the game in Mateo's favour by relating the answer to the question 'what makes woman happy' to his story. Ironically, however, Mateo hardly appears to be aware of the implications of his own story and the 'real' state of things in the family he tells about. To make the above conclusion, one has to take into account Tadeo's tale, the allusion to Kierkegaard, as well as the design of the entire text. This does not mean, however, that the author of the present interpretation considers herself any kind of a winner – either against the two gentlemen, the text, or other interpreters for that matter. This particular text by Blixen teaches its reader one good lesson (it is not for nothing that play and games have been considered effective educational means since Plato[19]). The interpreter, confronted with a text that is composed as an unfinished game, one where the winner remains unclear and the arbiter is absent, will likely abstain from overestimating her own contribution into its semantic completion. It is good to remember that your own 'move', just like those of Mateo and Tadeo, cannot be final and that this text will remain open to other players and other interpretations.

One can summarise the analysis presented in this chapter by saying that the *topos* of piquet, although only mentioned in the initial sentence of the short story, has proven to perform a vital function in structuring the text and its interpretation. It transposed the structural model of the game to the text and helped to clarify certain peculiarities of the latter (the disproportional distribution of roles in the dialogue, the formal and semantic incompleteness of the text), it also served as a signal for the reader to become an active participant in the process of meaning construction, and at the same time did not allow her to forget that every interpretation is just one possible way, out of many, to approach the same text.

# Chapter Two
# Play and Game as Metaphysical Metaphors



The *topoi* of play and games – various meta-signals by which Blixen's discourse announces its playful nature – also function as metaphors that express or imply her metaphysical and aesthetic *Weltanshauung*. Among these, the best known is Blixen's metaphor of life as a marionette comedy, the discussion of which has a long history in the body of criticism of Blixen's work.

The generic kinship of theatre and play is already linguistically encoded: in English, the word *to play* is used in relation to both acting and game-playing; the same applies to *spiellen* in German, *jouer* in French, *играть* in Russian and *spille* in Danish. That theatre and role-play can be attributed to the vast continuum of play has also been demonstrated theoretically.[1] The relationship between these two semiotic activities can be established on the basis of their structural dynamics as well as their ontological implications. Both acting and playing can be confined within a particular space and time, such as the stage and the card table or a football field, and yet they have the ability to transgress the limits imposed upon them or to establish their own space within another one (as happens, for example, during a street performance, or when play 'intrudes' into our work and the other more 'serious' activities of human life). Both play and theatre create alternative, illusionary worlds, "absorbing those who play,"[2] to quote Huizinga again, and promising us the opportunity to escape from our daily chores. However, a total loss of the ability to perceive illusion as illusion and play as play in those who enter these alternative worlds, be they in the theatre or a game, can have grotesque and even tragic consequences. Nabokov in his famous chess novel *The Defense* (1930) shows that the absolute blurring of the boundaries between the worlds of chess and reality destroys the protagonist's psyche and finally his life. José Ortega y Gasset in his *Idea del Teatro* (1946; *The Idea of Theatre*) recalls the episode in *Don Quixote* in which the protagonist attacks the 'evil' puppets in Don Pedro's theatre, illustrating how the theatre collapses when the equilibrium between illusion and the ability to resist its spell (which Ortega y Gasset calls "the sense of unreality") is lacking:

> Don Quixote ceased being a spectator, a part of the audience, and himself became a character in the play, at which point, that is to say when he took it as reality, he destroyed it as phantasmagoria.[3]

In her early play *The Revenge of Truth*,[4] Karen Blixen acts this balance out as she lets her characters demonstrate their awareness of their part in the play:

> SABINE: Well, Fortunio, don't be sad, we have done our best, and we don't ask to do more than that. When we first began, no one knew what his role was like, indeed, we ourselves didn't know, for who can know what a character will look like on the stage? But now we have said those lines we had in us, we haven't kept a single one back, and when the curtain falls, no one can have any doubt what we really were. Oh I hope that sometime each member of the audience will be able to say the same thing![5]

The characters in this short comedy have a dual nature: on the one hand, they function as stereotypical agents of the fairytale: there is a hero and a beauty who becomes his reward, and there is also a villain (the hero's opponent, who creates obstacles which get in the way of the hero's project) and a helper. On the other hand, at the same time, the play is a meta-play and the characters are also designed as actors performing their roles. They are not always happy about their roles in the play, and sometimes they refuse to act in a scene or start commenting on another actor's performance. Their quarrels and improvisations do not, however, result in absolute chaos, as there is a character in the play – the witch called Amiane – who performs the role of the stage director and keeps reminding the actors to follow the script:

> AMIANE: The truth is that we are all acting in a marionette comedy.
> ABRAHAM: Oh, what old clichés!
> AMIANE: My children, what is more important than anything else in a marionette comedy is to keep the author's idea clear. I will tell you, even though it is a secret, that this is the real happiness which people seek everywhere else. To act in a marionette comedy is a true blessing, and now that at long last I have come into one, I will never

> go out of it again. But you, my fellow actors, keep the author's idea clear. Aye, drive it to its utmost consequence.[6]

Aage Henriksen, who was the first scholar to investigate the metaphor of life as a marionette theatre in the works of Karen Blixen, interprets this metaphor as the key to Blixen's philosophy of life, and this comedy as the container of thoughts "which later will receive much larger orchestration in her famous tales."[7] According to Henriksen, the foundation of Blixen's art is the belief that man is a marionette under the control of God, who has a plan for everyone, and that every effort to escape one's destiny is futile, as God will sooner or later put everything in its rightful place. This is Blixen's idea of *Nemesis*, the irony and paradox of life, and the divine power's reply to the *hybris* committed by man.[8]

The theme of marionettes is developed in a number of Blixen's stories. Characters who find themselves at a crossroads in life are often compared to puppets or marionettes (such as the four people entrapped in the hayloft of a farmhouse during the tide at Norderney in "The Deluge at Norderney"[9]). The metaphor is often applied to characters who are shown attempting to perform God's role themselves and to manipulate the lives of others, but who finally come to recognise that they are nothing but puppets in the Great Puppeteer's hands. One of the best examples of such a stubborn and disobedient marionette is Carlotta from "The Roads Round Pisa." She tries by all means possible to protect her step-granddaughter from the dangers of motherhood, but all of her manipulations are of no avail, and she finally repents, at least in words, for her mistake in contradicting the divine plan. Another of Blixen's prominent marionettes is Lady Flora from the rather comic "The Cardinal's Third Tale." Despite her denial of her own sensual nature – her mistrust in her body and her rejection of any physical contact with any other person – she ends up, by a twist of fate, as a patient in a sanatorium for people with venereal diseases, having kissed the foot of St. Peter's statue which had previously been kissed by a man. There is also Mr. Clay from "The Immortal Story" and Councillor Mathiesen from "The Poet," who both attempt to stage the lives of others but finally lose control over their own scenarios and realise (or let the reader realise) that they themselves have played a part in a much more impressive and unexpected design.

The image of life as a marionette theatre is generally accepted as the high point of Blixen's existentialist thinking in which she, as Jørgen Gustava Brandt claims, reveals herself as:

> [T]he author of great reconciliation, the reconciliation to the world, to life, to existence, to God, reconciliation by means of complete submission, the most consistently voluntary openness to be found in the European literature of this century, the proudest form of submission.[10]

This oxymoronic conclusion, which combines submission with pride, hints at the unconventional character of Blixen's philosophy, which differs at an essential level from the primitive fatalism that predisposes man to passivity, as the idea of the divine plan might suggest. It is not surprising that there are Blixen scholars, including Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen, who criticise the tradition of emphasising the marionette philosophy in Blixen studies and claim that it obscures Blixen's rebellion against control.[11] However, a one-sided emphasis on rebellion can be equally misleading with regard to Blixen's playful discourse. Blixen's concept is ambivalent, and as such encompasses reconciliation with destiny and the possibility of an active existence. On the one hand, the 'good marionettes' face the trials of destiny courageously and do not try to escape them. On the other hand, they accept them as a challenge, an opportunity provided by God (or destiny or even the Devil)[12] to demonstrate their courage, imagination and talent, for such 'marionettes' usually possess an aristocratic spirit and artistic sensitivity. This attitude is voiced by the storyteller Miss Malin and the charlatan and actor Kasparsen from "The Deluge at Norderney," who proclaim the fatal night to be "the hour of the falling of the mask."[13] This is not meant in the sense that their true faces will be revealed, but in the sense that their masks have to prove whether or not they are worthy of the trial that the Lord has arranged for them. This philosophy is also silently demonstrated by the culinary genius Babette in "Babette's Feast," which will be analysed in greater detail in the second part of this book. The 'good marionettes' (who are also called "proud" by Blixen) do not surrender unconditionally to the circumstances that are imposed on them by others and do not contradict their own calling, which they perceive to be God's plan. The witch Amiane preaches this idea in one

of Blixen's earliest texts, and the importance of her message is stressed by the incorporation of her words into another of Blixen's texts, "The Roads Round Pisa," in an act of playful auto-intertextuality. A similar idea is also expressed through the voice of 'Karen Blixen' – the narrator and protagonist in *Out of Africa*:

> Pride is faith in the idea that God had, when he made us. A proud man is conscious of the idea, and aspires to realize [sic] it. He does not strive towards a happiness, or comfort, which may be irrelevant to God's idea of him. His success is the idea of God, successfully carried through, and he is in love with his destiny. As the good citizen finds his happiness in the fulfilment of his duty to the community, so does the proud man find his happiness in the fulfilment of his fate.[14]

Blixen's 'proud marionettes' are observing the world and looking for a sign that would confirm that they have guessed the plan that God has for them correctly. Peter, the protagonist of "Peter and Rosa" does not feel the calling to become a priest, despite the fact that his uncle has decided his calling for him. Watching a fox which he believes to be exactly "as God meant him to be," Peter realises that he has worked against God by obeying the plans of others, and not His plans.[15] Peter is sure that God is calling him to be a sailor, and therefore makes up his mind to run away to sea.

This 'semiotic' alertness of the proud marionettes is epitomised in *Out of Africa*:

> Many people think it an unreasonable thing, to be looking for a sign. This is because of the fact that it takes a particular state of mind to be able to do so, and not many people have ever found themselves in such a state. If in this mood, you ask for a sign, the answer cannot fail you /…/ In that same way an inspired card-player collects thirteen chance cards on the table, and takes up what is called a hand of cards – a unity. Where others see no call at all, he sees a grand slam staring him in the face. Is there a grand slam in the cards? Yes, to the right player.[16]

This quotation deserves our particular attention in the context of the present book, because it widens Blixen's philosophical concept by supplementing it with the metaphor of life as an adventurous game of

cards, in which it is possible to cheat. As we can see, quite a broad metaphoric field is used to express Blixen's ontological ideas: life is seen not only as a marionette play, but also as a game of bridge, and, as will be demonstrated below, as other forms of play and art, including chess, mosaic and music.

The fact that images of games, play and art are used interchangeably by Blixen in order to express similar ideas about human existence suggests that art, in Blixen's poetics, is conceived of as a form of play, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter of this book. What is also important with regard to the present study is that these images, which are related to ontological issues, place Blixen's authorship into a context which is somewhat broader than that of the classical concept of *theatrum mundi* – a parallel that the image of the marionette theatre immediately invokes. The latter concept originated with the ancient Greeks (Plato and the Stoics), flourished during the Renaissance and has developed throughout modern times, "connoting the commensurability of life and the stage."[17] Its relevance has been extensively discussed with regard to the works of Shakespeare and Calderón in particular, but also August Strindberg and Gordon Craig, among others.[18] The images of games and playing also allow us to discuss Blixen's texts in the light of an even older philosophical concept, namely that of the *play / game of the world*, which is less often referred to in literature studies and which was briefly highlighted in the theoretical introduction to this book.

Blixen's concept of the play of the world is close to Nietzsche's conception, as it portrays the cosmic play as "innocent" and being "beyond good and evil," meaning that the standard ethical and moral criteria do not apply to it. Similarly to Nietzsche, Blixen counts herself among the "yea-sayers" to all of existence.[19] In Blixen's fictional universe, the world is not divided into good or bad, beautiful or ugly, happy or tragic: all of these opposites are perceived as necessary for the harmony of the world. In "A Consolatory Tale," this idea is expressed by the beggar Fath: "life and death are two locked caskets each of which contains the key to the other." The same idea is repeated with regard to man and woman, and rich and poor.[20] A similar idea is voiced in *Shadows on the Grass*: "An orchestra is a Unity /…/, but twenty double-basses striking up the same tune are Chaos."[21] However, Blixen's concept also differs from Nietzsche's (or at least from his interpretation of Heraclitus' image of the child at play): at the top of the pyramid of cosmic play, Blixen positions

not the elemental cosmic power, but the anthropomorphic figure of the playing God. This is the way in which the 'ultimate player' is conceived by the characters of Blixen's stories, who discuss life in terms of games and play. God emerges in their ideas not only as the Great Puppeteer, but as a player playing other human games as well. Carlotta in the story "The Roads Round Pisa" admits that "life is a mosaic work of God, which he keeps filling in bit by bit."[22] The character Kasparson in "The Deluge of Norderney" declares God to be a chess player who governs the fates of all human beings as if they were chess pieces, and yet in this divine play every single piece is made important by being a part of it:

> Not the bishop, or the knight, or the powerful castle is sacred in itself, but the game of chess is a noble game, and therein the knight is sanctified by the bishop, as the bishop by the queen. /…/ So are we sanctified when the hand of the Lord moves us to where he wants us to be. Here he may be about to play a fine game with us, and in that game I shall be sanctified by you, as you by any of us.[23]

Blixen's idea of the cosmic play is therefore also different from that of Eugene Fink, who perceives the play of the world as amorphous, with no goal, no structure, and even no players.[24] According to Blixen's conception, the play of the world takes the shape of an aesthetically perfect game, controlled by divine intelligence and imagination. It is "beyond good and evil," because every being in the world and every occurrence in a man's life, even one that to him appears to be tragic, are declared to be like pieces in a mosaic, like moves of a chess piece on the board, or notes in a melody. They each have their own purpose and meaning in the overall pattern of the divine game, although man is not allowed to know it, only to believe that it exists. This seemingly fatalistic concept has clear parallels with the Old Testament, especially with the *Book of Genesis* and the *Book of Job*. The God in Blixen's stories, just like the God of the Old Testament, is the ultimate creator who decides on the fate of men, and yet the fact that in Blixen's writings, God is also a player in various games, speaks of the difference between Him and the wrathful Jehovah. Although He is a chess player (as we will soon see, the image of chess, the epitome of rational thinking, can acquire negative connotations when applied to human beings), God in Blixen's textual universe is loyal to the spirit of play and to the element of fun, which, according

to Huizinga, is its most necessary condition.[25] Blixen's metaphor of the world as a game of chess is therefore different from its counterpart in older European literature, for example, that of the Renaissance. In this literature, a game of chess typically serves a homiletic function, and is intended to express the idea that, regardless of our roles and positions on the chessboard of life, the same end awaits everybody, thus levelling all ranks. This idea appears both in *Don Quixote* and in Thomas Middleton's *A Game of Chess*, and is probably most lucidly expressed in the late Elizabethan English comedy, *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1601) by John Marston, as quoted by Paul Yachnin:

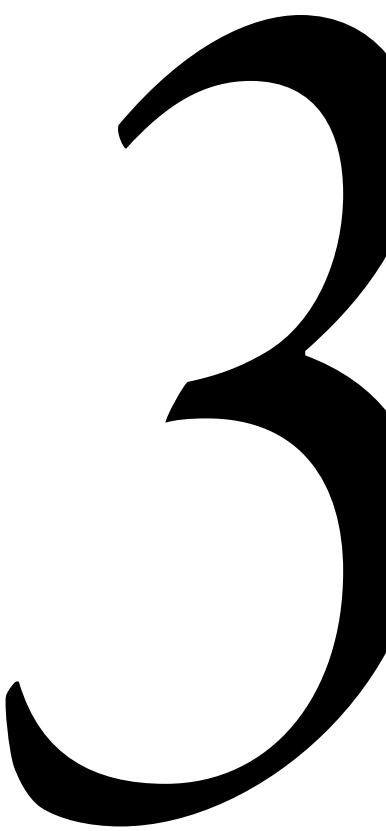
> And after death like Chesmen having stood
> In play for Bishops, some for Knights, and Pawnes,
> We all together shall be tumbled up, into one bagge.[26]

The chess metaphor in Blixen's work strikes a different cord. Her ultimate chess player is not a heartless strategist who gives no other prospect to his 'pieces' than sooner or later ending up in the 'bagge'. First of all, he is a great jester who causes surprise with his unexpected, sometimes even naughty moves: when punishing the arrogant 'marionettes' and 'chess-pieces', he turns them not into tragic but rather comic or tragicomic figures. This happens to the aforementioned Lady Flora in "The Cardinal's Third Tale," and Donna Carlotta in "The Roads Round Pisa," who loses her feather bonnet with silver curls attached to it when her carriage overturns, and thereby discloses her absolute baldness. In addition, she also breaks her right hand – a real irony of fate, as this makes her solemn oath regarding her step-daughter's life invalid (she had sworn not to give her blessing to Rosina's marriage to anyone other than the old Prince, for as long as she could lift her right hand).

Blixen's God the Player is not the only one who plays games, and the previously quoted metaphor of the game of cards in *Out of Africa* (the episode with the chameleon in "Farwell to the farm") is indicative of that. The idea of living as playing a beautiful game, even with a poor hand of cards, certainly reads like encouragement of individual initiative. The fact that it is often the characters who are artists themselves (such as the actor Kasparson in "The Deluge at Norderney," the storyteller Karen Blixen in *Out of Africa* and the 'stage director' Amiane in *The Revenge of Truth*) who voice the idea of life as play suggests that this

individual initiative is first and foremost the artist's prerogative. However, it would make Blixen's concept too banal to be reduced to such a simple scheme, according to which the world is a game played by God, in the framework of which the artist is also allowed some freedom for his or her own play. What makes this concept authentic, however, is that it allows us to call play only a certain kind of art, and its principles will be outlined in the next chapter.

# Chapter Three
# The Poetics of Art as Play in Karen Blixen's Essay "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations"



The essay "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations"[1] is valued by Blixen scholars as an important metatext, in which Blixen explicitly formulates her views on one of the central topics in her work, namely the relationship between man and woman.[2] Sometimes, it is viewed as a curious example of Blixen's contribution to the discussion of eugenics.[3] For the purposes of this book, however, it is interesting and relevant for a different reason, as a text which dwells explicitly upon games and playing.

The essay, as its title indicates, relates these phenomena to matters of gender. The main argument in this discussion can be summarised as follows: the marital institution is in crisis and needs to be replaced by a more perfect form of relationship between man and woman. The traditional marriage has become an empty shell, the contents of which have wasted away [40]. This is so, it is claimed, because marriage is no longer based on an ideal which both partners are happy to serve, such as God or the family name, as it used to be in the old days. Therefore, the marriage often collapses when love is over, and even if a marriage survives, it becomes a routine, a form of "mental cannibalism" [75] which smothers any individual development. As an alternative to the degeneration of the marital union, the text proposes the idea of love as play – understood as a relationship in which man and woman renounce their claims to own one another and enjoy sexual, spiritual and intellectual exchange. This has become possible through birth control and thanks to the hard work of "the emancipated woman" [82–83]. However, as Blixen warns, this play, as with all good play, is not going to be easy:

> Much is demanded of those who are to be really proficient at play. Courage and imagination, humor [sic] and intelligence, but in particular that blend of unselfishness, generosity, self-control and courtesy that is called *gentilezza*. Alas, there has been so little demand and exercise of this in love affairs. So many excellent men and women have demanded it of themselves in relation to their circles of acquaintances and subordinates, but in their marriages have

> thought that they had every possible right to be egoistic, uncontrolled, jealous /…/. [83]

Despite being directly related to social topics, the concept of play functions in this text on a much broader scale than as merely a poetic metaphor that consolidates the idea of unselfish and mutually-inspiring relationships. Blixen seems to be interested in the play phenomenon in general and especially in its relation to art. In the chapter called "Intermezzo," she transfers love as play into the broader context of games and art, grounding the kinship between the latter two in the extensive use of the verb *to play* and the similar nature of these activities:

> In old Danish, and most other languages, the same word was used to define playing games and playing, for instance, a musical instrument, or cards, or for acting or dancing, to which all the same laws applied, or in older times for fighting in tournaments, not much less dangerous than war itself and in which there was no less opportunity to show bravery and contempt of death, but for which such rules were evolved as the knights themselves could have wished to apply in war and in which no real hatred or enmity was present. [78]

With this text, Blixen comes closest to formulating her own explicit definition of play, which adumbrates the definitions proposed later on by Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois:

> What is under discussion here is not the kind of game[4] in which those taking part make up everything out of their own imagination, by visualizing [sic] or making themselves believe in a danger or a goal – for this kind presupposes the existence of or memory of other "real" conditions, and would be impossible to play after Ragnarok[5]…. [sic] Rather it is the kind of game that is sufficient in its real charm or boldness, yet that dissociates itself from earthly life and resembles something generally more associated with a heavenly state, as it is not subject to the strict laws of necessity but its own divinely intelligent ones, and a spirit of goodwill and harmony is assumed among all the participants and through all vicissitudes. [78]

Huizinga, as was discussed in the theoretical introduction to this book, defines play as an activity which stands outside 'ordinary' life and has no impact on it, limited in time and space, bound by its own rules and performing a socialising function.[6] All of these qualities are included in the definition above which also describes play as autotelic ("sufficient in its real charm," "dissociated from earthly life" and "subject to its own laws") and social in character ("the spirit of goodwill and harmony").

Blixen adds one more aspect to her conception of play, namely that the ability to play is proof of man's inner potential: "the best side of my nature," she writes, "reveals itself in play" [80]. This aphorism echoes the famous dictum by Friedrich Schiller, who, in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, concludes that "Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*."[7] Schiller is important to modern play theory as a philosopher who relates play directly to art, declaring the play instinct to be the foundation of all human creative activity.[8] This allusion is another hint (in addition to the previously quoted linguistic parallel) that love as play is, in this text, considered to be a form of art. The text provides us with numerous other parallels between love as play and art, of which the following are a small selection: Blixen speaks of the heavy burdens which have not allowed humanity "to see love in its life, as it does, for instance, art, as its highest "delight"" [80]; compares those who are unable to play in love with "a musician with no sense for music" [80]; and claims that the crusaders have taken from the Arabs "their first ideas of love as a game and an art" [81].

The idea of love as play, which in this text is granted the status of art, as well as the abundance of references to the world of art, suggest that another semantic level – an aesthetic discourse – might be hidden in the text beneath the discussion of the man-woman relationship. The title of the chapter in which Blixen muses on the phenomenon of play – "Intermezzo" – also suggests the double-coding of the discourse in this essay, as it refers to a form of entertainment which is performed between the acts of a play (or opera) and originally related to the masque culture. The ironic note is yet another sign that the discussion of gender and family matters may not be the ultimate (or at least not the sole) intention of this text. Consider, for example, the episode in which the high-flown words glorifying the feudal marriage stand in contrast to the comic scene that is supposed to illustrate the sacredness of such a marriage:

> There is no doubt that the farmer at Hill Farm – as long as respect for the family and the idea of property was deep and unquestioned – went to bed with his wife at Hill Farm with more solemnity and reverence than he could have shown any royal princess who had done him that honor [sic]. [69]

The irony of the text can also be heard in the statement that spouses in the old days closed their eyes to their partners' love affairs, "provided that there was no betrayal of the idea that for both of them represented what was most important" [68] (i. e., the family name). As common sense tells us, these two things – loyalty to the family name and extra-marital affairs – must have been difficult to reconcile in the times of feudal marriage. We also know from Blixen's own stories, such as "A Country Tale," "The Caryatids" and "Sorrow-Acre," that the young lady of the manor often had or carried a baby which was not her husband's.

An attentive reader will not fail to notice that the essay, in many ways, functions in a similar way to a fictional text: not only does it combine pathos and irony, but it turns love into an anthropomorphic protagonist who travels through time in the guise of a modern St. Christopher in search of an ideal. It is also full of indeterminacies that the reader is supposed to resolve. The fictional nature of the essay is further enhanced by the fact that the idea of love as play, the notion around which the entire discussion is centred, preserves the status of an ideal. It is stated explicitly that this idea has never been carried out in life [79], and we receive no assurance that it will be realised in the future. What this text seems to offer its reader is not a sociological forecast or a practical recipe for perfect love, but rather an artistic fantasy – a fiction about love as play. The reader is warned of this fantasy in the very first sentence of the essay, which contrasts two different theories of evolution: "I was still young when I left Darwin's desert and entered the verdant gardens of Lamarck" [32]. Although Lamarck's theory is viewed with scepticism by modern science,[9] in contrast to Darwin's, it is obvious that in this essay, the former is given a much higher status than the latter: unlike Darwin's "desert," Lamarck's "gardens" are a place where the trees bear fruit "that human beings have seen in their most felicitous dreams: beauty, knowledge, eternal youth" [32]. This reference to Lamarck is ambivalent and even contradictory. On the one hand, it seems to promise that dreams

may come true, and that the idea of love as play may one day become a reality, like the giraffe's desire to eat the new shoots on the treetops: "The rule is always the same: What you wish for, you shall have" [33]. On the other hand, if we consider Lamarck's theory to be an aesthetically beautiful myth, the reference might suggest the opposite idea: that the ideal that the essay is formulating has no empirical value. However, another possibility may also exist: the reference to Lamarck's theory, which in Blixen's text appears to stand closer to art than science, and which promises the possibility of the realisation of ideals, implies that ideas might come true without claiming immediate empirical validity, as, for example, happens in fiction, which can nevertheless serve as an inspiration for people in their real lives.[10]

With the premise for a metaphoric reading of the essay established, we can now proceed to a more concrete investigation of its 'secondary discourse' – the discussion of aesthetic issues and an original typology of art which can be discovered by analysing the implications of some of the images of art relating to the three models of the relationship between man and woman which are discussed explicitly in the essay.

It is easiest to conceptualise the type of art which stands behind the idea of modern marriage and which, in the present analysis, will be termed 'the art of truth' as a form of analogy with the term "love of truth" [72–73], with which Blixen characterises this relationship. The word "truth" indicates complete openness between the partners that leads to boredom and intellectual stagnation:

> The person who wishes to be truthful in relation to another must keep nothing to himself, but must reveal everything as well as demand to know everything. Truth cannot be fully achieved before people know all about each other's childhood love affairs and toothaches in detail. The true friend, son, husband has not a single corner of his soul that he can call his own, no possession that he has not shared out among the commune, and he feels that a secret is not a sweetness in the soul but a weight on his conscience. [72]

The idea of 'the art of truth' seems to be directly related to the art of conventional realism that flourished in Denmark at the time when the essay was written. Blixen refers to it explicitly when she illustrates her idea of modern marriage using a painting, or rather a type of painting,

that, very much like the spouses in her vision of a modern marriage, demonstrates a lack of imagination. This art copies situations which feature in everyday life and demands little creative effort on the part of the spectator:

> This type of search for truth is practiced [sic] particularly in the home, and Danish art, which on the whole has paid homage to such a form of truth, has glorified it in many hundreds of interiors: the husband reading, with his pipe or his glass of toddy beside him, the elder children at their lessons, drinking milk and tea and eating their bread and butter, the wife nursing the youngest child, all gathered around the same lamp, while the dog, stretched out on the carpet, contributes to the intimate atmosphere of the home [72].

A more complicated affair is to deduce the second type of art that relates to the concept of the feudal marriage. It is, however, obvious that it is the art of the past: Blixen, when musing on marital relations in the old days, invites us to a chapel, to "the tomb of the duchesse de Rohan" [66]. We might associate the image of the "imperishable marble" [69] with the art of classical antiquity. Or, most probably, it may refer to the Renaissance period that revived the classical heritage, the time when Maria de Rohan – the only family member mentioned explicitly in the text – lived. Maria's name might also be a reference to Romantic art, as it evokes the title of the opera by Gaetano Donizetti.[11] Regardless of the chronological implications of this type of art, it represents art that has passed the test of time. Unlike 'the art of truth', this art is no mimetic and conventional representation of reality, but rather a translation of it into the language of symbol and myth. This renders the reality behind the work of art unrecognisable, but only guessable, as is suggested by the ambivalent story relating to the image of the tomb. Although claiming that the ducal couple will be forever united in the "imperishable marble" [69], Blixen also allows us to realise that it is the myth of their perfect marriage that the tomb immortalises, and not the historic truth behind it. The duke or the duchess, Blixen writes, "might dream of being reunited with a more beloved spirit in Paradise" [68], thus implying that in reality, they could have been two strangers, each subject to their own passions. However, the word "might" also suggests that other hermeneutical interpretations of the myth are possible. For the sake of convention, this

type of art that emanates authority, contains a surplus of meaning and has strong connotations of long-bygone days will henceforth be called 'the symbolic classical art'.

We can finally approach the last type of art which is implied in the essay, which is represented by the idea of love as play and which accordingly will be termed 'art as play'. Some of its 'laws', like courage, imagination, intelligence and humour, are mentioned explicitly in the text as qualities which are indispensable to any play [83]. If one accepts the analogy between love and art forms in this text, then one can further specify these qualities as being bold and unexpected solutions and subversions of traditional artistic models, much like the idea of love as play is a revolution against one of the best-established institutions of humanity, and simultaneously an attempt to revive it on new grounds.[12] The extensive parallelism of the two semantic levels of the text (the discourse of love and the discourse of art) helps to explicate some other principles of 'art as play'. The respect for one's partner's right to secrecy that preserves the charm of the novelty of love as play can, for example, be translated into the language of aesthetic discourse as concealment and opacity which stimulates the audience's imagination and results in semantic relativity. As one may guess, this quality is even more intense in 'art as play' than in 'the symbolic classical art', as the spouse's right to secrecy in feudal marriage (which represents the latter) is regulated by certain conventions (loyalty to the ideal of the family name [68]), whereas lovers as players are expected to grant each other absolute freedom. However, another quality of 'art as play' can be deduced by transposing onto this concept the structural model of the ideal loving relationship. Love as play involves two equal participants and, unlike every other form of love discussed in this text, presupposes a strong feeling of partnership. It frees woman from her old role as a plaything in love and makes her "a playmate" in the game of equals – an ideal which has not yet been fully achieved:

> Now her [the first emancipated woman] grand-daughters, mentally and physically independent, are their young men's playmates in these postwar years.
>
> They do not seem to be quite sure of the game yet [82–83].

Similarly, we may expect in 'art as play' that not only the author (or, speaking from the audience's perspective, the work of art) but also the

audience is expected to play its own imaginative and intellectual game. The claim that the concept of art as play implied in this text sanctions the audience's autonomy finds support in other texts by Blixen which maintain a similar parallelism of love and art. The storyteller Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag in "The Deluge at Norderney" voices the audience's rights explicitly, when she declares (quite ambiguously, however) art to be born at the moment of its reception: "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."[13]

The concept of 'art as play' can be summed up with the help of the key image that illustrates the idea of love as play. At first sight, one would not relate this image to a particular work or type of art, as has been done with regard to the two central images behind the concepts of the feudal and the modern marriage (the marble sarcophagus and the conventional realistic painting). The idea of love as play, in this text, is represented by the image of a ship sailing across the sea. It embodies the notion of superficiality, which, the text claims, is a quality of those who play:

> Those who love to play are constantly being criticized [sic] for being superficial … [sic] and not least where love is concerned. "Yes," they can reply, "we are superficial in the same way as a ship sailing across the sea. We do not consider it any advantage to reach the bottom, for at best that is what is known as going aground" [84].

However, the image of a superficial ship does relate to two particular works of art, both of which were (later) created by Blixen herself. These are the stories "The Young Man with the Carnation" and "A Consolatory Tale," which are included in the collection entitled *Winter's Tales* and united by the character of the writer Charlie Despard. In the first story, the image of the superficial ship reappears at the moment of the protagonist's sudden revelation and in almost identical wording to that which is used in the essay:

> The ships were superficial and kept to the surface, therein lay their power, to ships the danger is to get to the bottom of things, to run aground.[14]

This image marks a turning point in the career of the protagonist, whose first book "treated the hard lot of poor children, and /…/ brought

him into contact with social reformers."[15] Despite public and critical acclaim, Charlie feels that he is on the wrong path and that God has turned away from him.[16] The epiphany quoted above is triggered by Charlie's meeting with a mysterious young man with a carnation, probably a messenger from a different aesthetic sensibility.[17] It is after this meeting that the young writer realises that he should strive towards a greater degree of superficiality, although the meaning of this notion remains unexplained. Charlie now creates his "Blue story," which reads as a symbolic account of Charlie's own creative search for the perfect form for his art – his 'blue china jar'. This proves that Charlie has taken a great step away from the heavy 'art of truth' of his first book and is able to transform his life experience into symbols and metaphors. It is doubtful, however, that he has already mastered the ideal form – the 'superficial art' that God seems to expect from him. Shortly before the story ends, we hear a dialogue between Charlie and God (in the manner of *The Book of Job*) in which God declares himself to be the creator of all 'superficial' things and also reproaches Charlie for disobedience:

> I made the ships on their keels, and all floating things. The moon that sails in the sky, the orbs that swing in the Universe, the tides, the generations, the fashions. You make me laugh. For I have given you all the world to sail and float in, and you have run aground here in a room of the Queen's Hotel to pick a quarrel with me.[18]

Charlie has not profited much from this dialogue, as once it ends, he thanks the Lord for not letting him lay "[his] hand on anything that belonged to [his] brother, the young man with the carnation."[19] It seems, however, that this was exactly what the creator of 'superficial' things expected of him and what the essence of 'superficial art' is – to take what belongs to another and to make it one's own. God accused Charlie directly of running away from the bed of the girl who happened to be the lover of the man with the carnation: "'I gave you all that last night /…/ it was you who jumped out of bed to go to the end of the world from it.'"[20] God also gives a positive answer to Charlie's question: "'Am I to be forever he who lay in bed with the mistress of the young man with the carnation /…/? And who went off, and wrote to her: "I have gone away. Forgive me if you can?"'" which suggests that Charlie has failed to live up to God's expectations.[21] Only in the last story of the collection,

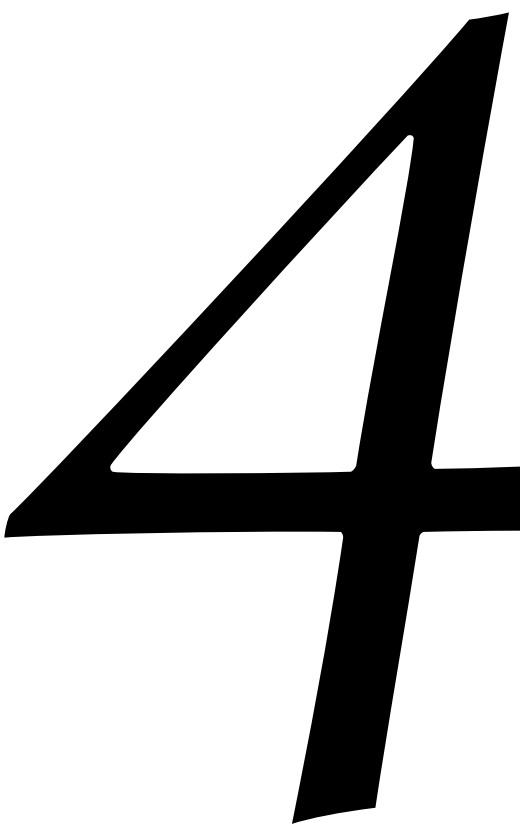
"A Consolatory Tale," does Charlie seem to have understood the lesson and to be ready to take "what belonged to [his] brother" and thus create a lighter ('superficial') form of art. After having listened to a story told by his friend Aeneas, Charlie draws the following conclusion: "'Yes, a good tale,' /…/. /…/ '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.'"[22] 'Superficial art' seems to be art which is lifted from the empirical reality which weighed down Charlie's first book and which is set into new contexts which were lacking in his "Blue story."

It was necessary to make this intertextual excursion in order to bring forth the quality of 'art as play' that we today, no doubt, would identify as intertextuality or the tendency of playful art to recycle other texts. It makes art superficial and even hollow (as are the ships that Charlie watches) in a paradoxical sense – 'art as play' is not deprived of meaning, but (as Charlie also realises about the ships) "pregnant with possibilities" and with "great depths slaving" for it.[23] Once its frame of reference has been shifted from immediate to fictional reality, or rather expanded so that it can encompass both, this art is able to float between multiple interpretations and accommodate multiple meanings.

If we read the essay as an expression of Blixen's original typology of art, we will realise that the essay, in many respects, follows the 'laws' of 'art as play' and therefore represents a metatext which comments on its own poetic principles. By employing irony and the comic element, by making use of symbolic images and intertextual references, and by double-coding its discourse, the essay proves to be a polyphonic text that boldly and ingeniously subverts the stereotypical model of the essay genre. Through its own strategies of play, this text sanctions the reader's freedom and invites playful interpretations, such as that which is given in this chapter, in which an attempt has been made to look at it from a different angle and to assemble the text anew, as a mosaic, from its hints, parallels and allusions.

Whether the poetics of art as play that the essay implies and experiments with has a more general relevance to Blixen's work will be investigated in the following chapter. It will focus on a couple of other texts by Blixen which dwell upon processes of artistic creation, employ images of games and play and therefore may potentially support, subvert or modify the poetics discussed in this chapter.

# Chapter Four
# Play as an Aspect of Character Construction



# 1. The art of Councillor Mathiesen. Goethe as a matrix

The protagonist of the "The Poet" (*Sven Gothic Tales*) Councillor Mathiesen is introduced as a man of great wealth and influence, "the prominent figure" of the little Danish town of Hirscholm where the action of the story is to take place.[1] Lacking natural talent, but possessing a sharp mind and refined artistic sensibility, he has chosen for himself the role of Maecenas, a patron of the arts. However, although Mathiesen is aware of his own artistic limitations,[2] he does not completely renounce his ambitions to be an active creator. In the end, he is revealed as the character to whom the title of the story refers, and can even be interpreted as a metaphoric representation of a particular approach to art.

As the events develop, we follow Mathiesen pursuing a plan, which he himself repeatedly describes as a work of art: a piece of music, a romance [321] and a drama [336]. The lives of two young people – the promising poet Anders Kube and the widow Fransine become his material at hand. His discourse reveals that for him they are nothing but characters that he manipulates according to his own artistic needs: he expects Fransine "to act the part of a guardian angel" [341], he looks upon Anders like "some central figure in one of his own poems" [344] and is delighted at imagining them as a shepherd and shepherdess in an idyll he contemplates [343].

Mathiesen has already been characterised in Blixen scholarship (with reference to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*) as the representation of the artist of the rational, Socratic type, one who "favours the Apollonian principle: structure, regulation, taste."[3] These qualities are suggested by the narrator who calls him "a staunch support" of "law and order" [316], and also reveal themselves in the artistic process that Mathiesen engages in. It is of special importance in the context of the present book that the depiction of this process is accompanied by allusions to Mathiesen's game playing, and the nature of his games allows us to define more exactly the principles of his art.

Mathiesen plays games in which victory can be achieved through reasoning and calculation, whilst chance is of little or no importance. It is chess and, especially, ombre [327], a game of cards which requires insight

and concentration[4] and is related to the game of piquet in "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen."[5] Card-games and chess metaphors are used in this text to convey Mathiesen's ambition to always prove himself superior to the people around him. Mathiesen, as his friend Count Schimmelmann remembers, is a brilliant player who bewilders his rivals by unexpected but well thought out moves:

> When you were most confident in your aces and kings he would put down a tiny little trump to knock them on the head, and that at a moment when you had not been aware that there were any trumps in. He had been the same as a little boy. /…/ he had a little familiar devil which at the right moment put out its head and conjured the weight out of your things /…/. Those who have no taste for devils disliked this quality in the man. The opposite type, the chess player for one, was attracted by it. [334]

The text makes a direct parallel between Mathiesen's games and his manipulative art: when new circumstances appear that require corrections to his prior plan concerning Anders and Fransine, Mathiesen speculates that he "must rearrange all the chessmen upon the board" [327]. Before wooing Fransine, he also resorts to the rhetoric of play: "Would the times for games be over now? /…/ The best games are to come" [339].

Mathiesen's art rests upon the same foundation of strategy and logic as his favourite games. An experienced chess player would attempt to predict and control the development of the game many moves in advance, and encourage combinations that best suit his strategy.[6] Likewise, when playing with his characters, Mathiesen attempts to advance by organising his material according to the ready-made schemes provided by other artists, foremost being his greatest literary authority Goethe. Mathiesen progresses in his artistic enterprise by moving from the imitation of one text by his idol to another. First, he allocates to Anders and Fransine the roles of happy lovers, since this, he believes, will save the young talent from "the world and its wild and *incalculable* influences"[7] [316]. As he watches their meeting, he reflects that "Geheimrat Goethe /…/ might – would indeed – have made something of it" and imagines the scene to be "the first chapter of a romance called *Anders and Fransine*" [321] – a parallel to Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea*.[8] When he later sees Fransine dance and realises that she is also possessed by the demonic spirit of

freedom and thus cannot be a refuge for Anders' stormy soul, he switches to another scenario, much in line with Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.[9] Mathiesen decides to marry the beautiful widow himself, leaving for Anders the role of the unhappy lover. He seems, however, to be planning to avoid the tragic finale of his model by replacing it with the scheme suggested by the novel *Wally the Skeptic*[10] by another German writer – Karl Gutzkow. According to this scheme, the heroine is about to marry a man she does not love and appears naked before her beloved on the eve of her marriage, in order "to symbolize [sic] the spiritual marriage between her and him" [346].

Mathiesen is certainly an artist who is able to make use of other texts, and hence is related to the conception of 'floating', or 'superficial' art which was discussed in the previous chapter. That his art might be in tune with Blixen's own poetics is also suggested by the earlier mentioned intertextual allusion in "The Poet" to *Wally, the Skeptic*. In "Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit" ("Truth and reality"), the concluding chapter of Gutzkow's novel, we encounter ideas which constitute a parallel to Blixen's contempt for lifeless realism in art:

> Everything that copies reality is for the masses. /…/ This literature must only be bright, glossy, and polished, because it is a mirror of reality that takes in and reproduces it faithfully. There is nothing more brilliant for the shallow minds than to sketch themselves as they are: their aunt, their cat, their shawl, their petty concerns, their weaknesses. /…/ Poetry has now become self-impregnating. Reality is living off its own bourgeois, overflowing fat.[11]

However, the story of Mathiesen's marriage,[12] as well as his de-romanticised death[13] that concludes the narrative, indicate that the text maintains an ironic distance from this character.[14] Therefore, it is unlikely that Mathiesen could be promoted as an image of the ideal, playing artist.

It is hardly accidental that the text begins with the words: "Round the name of the little town of Hirscholm, in Denmark, there is much romance" [310]. The Danish formulation has even clearer intertextual implications: ""Der er en Ring af smukke Eventyr omkring den lille danske By Hirschholms Navn."[15] The reader actually learns or is reminded of some of the tales about the origin and name of the town, as well as the tragic fate of the Danish Queen Carolina Mathilda. It seems, however,

that Mathiesen is unaware of this cultural and historical heritage and prefers to stick to his German sources.[16] No less important is his use of the latter only by means of copying and compilation. When he feels that his characters outgrow one model that he intended to imitate, he simply looks for another. He does not dare and, most likely, is unable to break and modify the given patterns, or to cross-breed them according to his own ideas and sensibility. In other words, although his art does manifest intelligence and erudition, it is deprived of other basic qualities that, according to the earlier discussed concept of art as play, are indispensable of any play – courage, humour and imagination.[17] Mathiesen cannot renounce his uncritical attitude towards his great precursor and to make fun with what he has written by twisting the classical texts in a way that suits his own artistic plans. Instead, he remains Goethe's "*ehrerbietigster Diener*" [313], as he himself declared on meeting him.[18] Right before he dies, Mathiesen seems, however, to be close to realising his mistake and arriving at the insight that good art borrows freely and boldly from the literary tradition:

> Indeed, it might be a criterion of a work of art that you should be able to imagine its characters keeping company with the people, or frequenting the places, of the works of the great masters. Would not Elmire and Tartuffe land at Cyprus, and be received there, on his master's behalf, by young Cassio, having passed on the way a ship with brown sails, a-sail for Scheria? [359]

Yet, even in this final vision, Mathiesen does not dare to think that his own imagination has the right to make use of the literary tradition without any obligation for unconditional reverence. He believes in "a social order in the world of fiction" and doubts whether "the great poet" would "let his own people – Wilhelm Meister, Werther, Dorothea – associate with the creation of his, the Councillor's mind" [359]. When trying afterwards for the last time to arrange Fransine's future, Mathiesen is still convinced that this "was in the plan of the author, of the Geheimrat" [361], confirming once again that Goethe remains for him the highest standard for his own art – an ideal that deserves to be copied, but not playfully transformed. It is noteworthy that the text mentions in passing another of Mathiesen's pastimes – "needlework in cross-stitch" [313], which although different in most respects from the intellectual strategic games

of ombre and chess, also possesses a formulaic quality – diligent copying of pre-designed patterns.

Mathiesen's character exhibits another quality that mimics the logics of the games he plays, but does not comply with the conception of art as play. He believes that his characters and the world he creates for them should forever remain under his control. Mathiesen muses upon how safe King Lear should have felt in the hands of William Shakespeare [360], and his autocratic attitude towards his own characters is also indicated by images of captivity and control: he plans to lock Anders up in "a sort of cage or coop," and keeps "an untiring eye on the youth /…/ like a mighty and dignified Kislar Aga toward a budding beauty of the seraglio for whom he has planned great things" [316]. In the final episode, when he crawls to Fransine's house after being wounded by Anders, he still thinks that "[h]e might control his world once more" [358].

The text, however, subverts the Romantic illusion of the artist as God the Creator. The dénouement of the story reveals that characters sooner or later escape from the author's control. In this text, the characters literally bring about "the death of the author": Anders shoots Mathiesen who has been secretly watching the couple's dramatic rendezvous on the eve of his marriage, whilst Fransine deals him the final blow on his head and scornful cries: "You poet!" [364]. We may speculate that literary characters are given a new life, independent of their creator, every time they become part of a reader's experience, or when they are integrated as prototypes or intertexts in other works of art. However, Blixen's text does not provide us with an answer as to how this independent life of literary characters is possible. Rather, it seems to be stressing the very possibility of their autonomous existence by depicting Mathiesen's 'characters' as artists engaging in creativity. Anders is a poet, whilst Fransine is a ballet dancer. Moreover, they are also associated with images of play: Anders is said to be spending nights "playing cards with wayfaring people at the inn" [323], and it is clear that such games, accompanied by heavy drinking, should be much less strategy-bound than the games played by his Maecenas. Furthermore, when presenting the character of Anders, the narrator discusses explicitly his "playfulness and shamelessness of mind" [318], and also points to the playfulness in Fransine's art, which manifests itself as play that frees her from all external constraints: "The dance was more than a real mazurka, very fiery and light /…/: a humming-top, a flower, a flame dancing, a play upon

the law of gravitation, a piece of celestial drollery" [326]. The name of the house in which Fransine lives and in the vicinity of which the final scene takes place speaks for itself – *La Liberté*. The idea of the possible autonomous existence of art and play relates the text to the modern phenomenological tradition, especially to Gadamer who claims that the work of art is the real subject of aesthetic experience and, therefore, resembles play which is also independent of the subjectivity of the players:

> [P]lay has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. Play /…/ also exists when the thematic horizon is not limited by any being-for-itself of subjectivity, and where there are no subjects who are behaving "playfully."[19]

The text, however, does not give promise that a piece of work created by an artist to whom the spirit of play is alien, has a chance to unfold itself in a playful way. The opposite suggestion is more likely: Fransine is aware that Anders, having shot Mathiesen, condemns himself to the gallows [362], and chooses the same destiny by finishing what he has started and crushing 'the poet's' head with a stone.

## 2. Miss Malin – an artist of carnival

A completely different, much more jovial artistic spirit dominates "The Deluge at Norderney" (*Seven Gothic Stories*), despite the dramatic circumstances of flood and lurking death in which the action is set. This spirit is first of all related to the character of Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag.[20] She is said to be "a little off her head," which might, however, be "some caprice of hers,"[21] as well as a sign of Dionysian frenzy and unlimited artistic freedom, which she paradoxically manages to control. Miss Malin is one of the four characters stranded in the hayloft of a farmhouse where they are to spend the night telling stories – there is equal prospect of them being rescued or dead when the new day dawns. Miss Malin identifies herself with Scheherazade [205], and the hayloft, surrounded by water, functions as an inclusive textual space in which she demonstrates her artistic principles.[22] Miss Malin is herself aware of this space as a gaming spot, and this once again brings to the fore the parallel between art and playing in Blixen's work. Before entering the hayloft, Miss Malin dismisses her maiden with a glance "by which you judge whether a person is likely to make a satisfactory fourth at a game of cards" [130], thus promising the reader the prospect of watching a game of the most exquisite sort.

Notably, the game of cards invokes associations with Councillor Mathiesen, although Miss Malin turns out to be a different type of player – one who does not strictly follow rules, but likes to improvise, seeing no fault in cheating. The text mentions the bilboquet [139],[23] which Miss Malin is said to play with her imaginative sins and other fantasies. It is an old game of dexterity, which used to be very popular in the royal courts of Europe.[24] It is possible to draw parallels between the specifics of bilboquet and Miss Malin's narrative equilibristics – her ability to respond promptly and playfully to a story or remark she hears from her interlocutor.[25] Yet, the most conspicuous and consistent is this character's relation to the imagery of carnival – a feast of masks and disguises. It is a play-form in which the dominant rule can be said to be the breaking of rules,[26] and which brings about transgression of "normal cultural structures in its suspension of hierarchies, its mixing of all

elements of life /…/ and its consequent emphasis on variety, freedom and regeneration."[27]

Miss Malin's character exhibits a number of structural elements of the carnival. The talent she possesses as a dancer is expressed with the help of a metaphor which transforms her into a female version of the satyr: "The little cloven hoof beneath was now daintily gilded, like that of Esmeralda's goat itself" [139]. Her 'Dionysian frenzy' might stem from the keg of gin that she and the Cardinal are drinking from throughout the night, but her family name,[28] as well as the somewhat comic motto "The sour with the sweet" [155] are, no doubt, carnivalesque in their structure. They signify one of the basic principles of carnival – the element of relativity, *viz.* simultaneous inversion and union of the opposite poles.[29] Miss Malin's carnivalesque nature also reveals itself from the mask she has taken up. Although, we are told, she had been "a fanatical virgin" in her youth [136], she is playing on the 'stage' of the hayloft the opposite role – that of "the grand courtesan /…/ if not the great whore of the Revelation" [138], who takes pleasure in human sins, "which she could pick, one by one, out of the *bonbonnière* of her mind, and crunch with great *gourmandise*" [139]. Her first name – a shortened version of Magdalena ("the ultimate embodiment of sexual transgression" according to the orthodox Christian tradition[30]), suggests, however, that this voluntarily accepted mask is not as absurd as it might first appear, but expresses, although in a subverted way, qualities inherent in the character's own nature, such as her very special 'spirituality.'

Due to its grotesque and erotic content, Miss Malin's mask can be associated with the carnivalesque images of the bodily lower stratum according to Bakhtin,[31] but it also shows how different Blixen's carnival is from that of Rabelais, which is the focus of Bakhtin's study. Whilst Rabelais' carnival is a result of transposing popular culture of laughter onto a literary text, Blixen's carnival is of a more refined sort, manifesting itself not as a folk tradition, but as a consciously perceived literary one. Miss Malin's lustfulness pertains to the verbal level only and is limited to her cheeky remarks[32] and frivolous paraphrase of Biblical plots that she engrafts with erotic overtones.[33] Its purely fictional nature is foregrounded by the character's typological parallel to other old maidens in Blixen's writing, first of all to Fanny and Eliza of "Supper at Elsinore," who are called "spiritual courtesans" due to their opulent imagination and ability to stir up the imagination of their admirers.[34] Miss Malin's

*courtisanerie* is of the same, 'spiritual', type. Her physical quality – the big nose [135, 137], which in the aesthetics of carnival represents the phallus,[35] is likely to symbolise her immense potency, though not in terms of the body, but in terms of her imaginative mind.

Miss Malin remains, however, close to the Bakhtinian concept of the carnival as a symbol of perpetual cosmological renewal through dying and a celebration of the end as a new beginning. Her image, both physical and mental qualities included, even bears resemblance to the Kerch terracotta figurines of senile, pregnant, laughing hags that for Bakhtin serve as the epitome of the carnival idea.[36] Miss Malin is also pregnant with new life, although physically she is a sterile old wreck standing on the threshold of death.[37] Similarly to Scheherazade, whose continuously interrupted and renewed narrative flow saves her life, Miss Malin challenges death by engendering new stories and staging the action of the hayloft. The parallel between narrating a story and giving birth is established in Miss Malin's introduction of her protagonist Calypso:

> She is not my own daughter, and still, by the Holy Ghost, I am making her /…/. I have carried her in my heart and my mind, and sighed under her weight. Now the days are accomplished when I shall be delivered, and here we have the stable and the manger. [155]

Unlike Councillor Mathiesen in "The Poet," whose artistic principles had to be gathered from his actions and the narrator's hints (such as, for example, the nature of Mathiesen's games and his style of play), Miss Malin postulates explicitly her aesthetic philosophy. She declares her loyalty to 'the art of masquerade' – that distances itself from recognisable empirical reality and lets imagination triumph. In the following, often cited quote, we again come across the notion of 'truth', which was discussed earlier in this book in relation to the essay "On Modern Marriage" and the view that the imitation of reality in art has nothing to do with games and playing:

> Where in all the world did you get the idea that the Lord wants the truth from us? /…/ Why, he knows it already, and may even have found it a little bit dull. Truth is for tailors and shoemakers /…/. I, on the contrary, have always held that the Lord has a penchant

> for masquerades. /…/ And when I have, in my life, come nearest to playing the role of a goddess, the very last thing which I have wanted from my worshippers has been the truth. "Make poetry," I have said to them, "use your imagination, disguise the truth to me. Your truth comes out quite early enough" /…/ "*and that is the end of the game.*"[38] [141]

The 'technical' principles of Miss Malin's artistic 'kitchen' are, however, best revealed in her narrative that she titles "Calypso's story" [157] and the marriage ritual that she stages immediately after. Everything Miss Malin encounters – events of her own life and the people surrounding her, other texts and narratives – serve for her as ingredients that she ingeniously combines. These ingredients undergo transformations during the 'brewing process,' although Blixen's story is constructed so as to allow us to follow this very process and even to trace the origins of Miss Malin's literary soup.

Miss Malin tells the story of her foster-daughter Calypso who grew up in her uncle's estate where everything female was detested [157]. Ashamed of her female body, she decided to chop off her breasts, but changed her mind after seeing a mirror reflection of a picture of nymphs being adored by fauns and satyrs. The sight awakened her female consciousness and pride, and she left the uncle's home for good.

The prototype of Miss Malin's story is present in the hayloft, as another of the four persons in the captivity of the flood. Her reaction to the story (her fearful shudder at hearing the count's name [156], her genuine interest in it and her "clear deep glance" [160]) suggests that the story has a 'realistic' background and, at the same time, is a product of the storyteller's imagination, or, as the overall narrator puts it, is "a symbol, a dressed-up image of what she [the heroine] had in reality gone through" [160]. The emphasis of the symbolic aspect of the relation between the story and the reality behind it and the transformation of an idiosyncratic life into a more universal, archetypal scheme seems to be of great importance in this text, as we realise that Calypso's story also accommodates the storyteller's own experience of which we have been told earlier. Like Calypso, Miss Malin was brought up in an atmosphere of suppressive ideals of chastity, and also broke free – yet only at the age of fifty, when she retreated "from the active service of life /…/ to the mere passive state of a looker-on" [138].

Alongside symbolically transforming 'real' experience (her own and her companion's and that of many other women), Miss Malin's story re-writes classical plots from a female perspective.[39] Calypso, whose namesake kept Odysseus in her seductive captivity, has become in Miss Malin's story a prisoner in an island ruled by men. She is also the reverse version of the H. C. Andersen's naked emperor: "the Emperor is walking along in all his splendour, sceptre and orb in hand, and no one in the whole town dares to see him" [155].

Finally, Miss Malin inscribes her synthetic character into the architextual scheme of the Gothic tale, and this choice is paradigmatic. Susan Hardy Aiken characterises Gothicism, with a reference to Ruskin, as "an exuberant manifestation of the spirit of 'play. . ., but with small respect for law'," [40] and, with a reference to Bakhtin, as an irreverent play with fragments of the past.[41] Aiken also notes the double mimetic character of Blixen's Gothicism, as it imitates the Romantic imitation of the Gothic.[42] This makes it even more apparent that imitation of art, or its 'floating', or 'superficial' nature is part of Blixen's artistic agenda. It is also important that the later Gothic, which Blixen's Miss Malin imitates, is in feminist criticism associated with the establishment of women's writing (Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe, Emily Brontë) and is often defined as a subversive genre that deconstructs patriarchal textual models.[43]

Miss Malin transfers onto her text classical emblems and symbols of the Gothic tale: a medieval castle with its tall towers, manuscripts, tapestries and secret chambers. However, typically, she subverts this Gothic model: the young woman is not pursued by an older man (like, for example, Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Radcliffe), but on the contrary, her sexuality is absolutely ignored by her surroundings. Her opponent bears no resemblance to the prototypical Gothic villain, but is rather a caricature of the misogynous culture in general: Count Seraphina spends his day in the company of pretty boys listening to *viol da gamba* and *viol d'amore* [158], doing his best to shield himself from the female sex.

There is little doubt that the subversive intertextuality of Miss Malin's art is presented in this text as a consciously perceived aspect of her literary play. This can be gathered from her comment which precedes Calypso's story and points to another intertext Miss Malin adopts – the story of her companion Jonathan that she would use as a toy for playing out her own tale:

> 'Ah, ah, ah,' said Miss Malin, when the young man had finished his tale /…/ She rubbed her small hands together, as pleased as a child *with a new toy*. 'What a story, Monsieur Timon. What a place this is! /…/.'[44] [154]

Calypso's story emerges as a counter story to Jonathan's tale, a parody of a kind,[45] and Calypso becomes a counter-character to the protagonist of the first story. Jonathan speaks of the misfortune that has befallen him: when rumours spread that his real father was Baron Gersdorff, he became a man of fashion and consequently lost his peace of mind. Miss Malin explains that it is worse to be "bent down by the opposite misfortune," when "nobody could or would see you, although you were, yourself, firmly convinced of your own existence" [155]. The incorporation of a product of another artistic imagination, by making it a springboard for one's own artistic project, is in this text symbolically represented by the marriage of Jonathan (or rather Timon of Assens, as he calls himself in his story) and Calypso. That this improvised nuptial does not unite the 'real' persons present in the hayloft, but the characters of the stories just told (or two fictions), is suggested by Timon and Calypso unexpectedly falling in love with each other. The fact that Jonathan "had not even, at the time, been aware of the girl's existence" [164] is being explained by the opulent power of Miss Malin's imagination,[46] but it also implies that such a union can be striking and is not necessarily problem-free.

As may be expected from playful, open-ended art, this marriage ritual that Miss Malin stages is open to other interpretations. In the union of two opposite characters (a young man seen by all and a young woman seen by none), we can, for example, read a symbolic expression of the idea that art has the power to realise the carnival (a)logic of dissolving binary oppositions and uniting antitheses which in real life are usually set apart.[47] The metafictional implication that textual symmetry and harmony result from the unity of opposite, at first sight incongruous, elements echoes Blixen's philosophical concept of the world as an interplay of opposing elements. We will see later this principle functioning in "Babette's Feast," in which the narrative first establishes distinct binary oppositions, and then inverses and unites them.

Having joined together Jonathan and Calypso, Miss Malin loses interest in her characters and, in this respect, she differs from Mathiesen.

Aware of the prospect of imminent death, she seems, nevertheless, to believe in the possibility of her characters living independently of her: "one kiss will make it out for the birth of twins, and at dawn you shall celebrate your golden wedding" [165]. Miss Malin lets them rest, having given them life, and watches over "the sleepers with the benevolence of a successful creator" [181]. Then, she turns all her attention towards her audience represented within the space of the hayloft by the Cardinal's figure.

Besides Jonathan and Calypso, Miss Malin and the Cardinal are another polarised and yet dialectically related textual couple. The action within the hayloft starts and ends with their dialogue, which from time to time is interrupted by some story or comment of the narrator.[48] Miss Malin flirts with the Cardinal throughout the night, provokes him with impertinent remarks and questions and thus legitimises him as her fellow player. The text supports her view of the Cardinal as her playing partner; he starts the evening by suggesting that Miss Malin should take up the role of "the hostess" and "command of the place" [150], but in the end turns out to be an artist himself. The face that has been concealed by the bloodstained bandages belongs not to the Cardinal, but to his valet Kasparson, an actor and charlatan, who has killed his master and preaches an aesthetics of masquerade similar to Miss Malin's: "not by the face shall the man be known, but by the mask" [185]. Within the framework of carnival philosophy that this text implicitly and explicitly draws on, the act of murder can be read symbolically as the killing of "the old world (the old authority and truth)" and, at the same time, as "giving birth to the new."[49] In the light of the poetics of art as play, this act seems to suggest that playful art requires a new type of interpreter, a fellow creator, or even a charlatan who has to kill within himself the 'Cardinal' – the pious reader of the scriptures.[50]

The narrative reaches its climax with a kiss between Miss Malin and Kasparson, a symbolic sign of the successful cooperation between the author and her public. The story does not, however, end here: Miss Malin starts a new story, and although it is interrupted by rising waters, she is able to utter Scheherazade's ritual formula,[51] which gives hope that the play will go on, even after its originator has gone.

Critics have stressed the parallel between the character of Miss Malin and the author who created her by finding common biographical details.[52] Blixen also achieved personal freedom and financial independence at the

age of fifty when she became a writer and, just like Miss Malin, she used to identify herself with the storyteller of *The Arabian Nights*. However, the similarities between the writer and her character are not limited to biography; the aesthetics of Miss Malin's art are also those of Blixen. The ways in which some of the principles of Miss Malin's art work with regard to one particular area of Blixen's play – that of genre – will be discussed in the next part of this book.

# Part II
# Architextual Play

# Chapter One
# Generic Simulation or the Relationship Between Karen Blixen's Texts and the Oral Tale

# 1. The terms 'story' and 'tale' in studies of Blixen's work

In literary history, as well as in studies of Blixen and her work (especially older ones), her texts are usually generically identified as 'stories' or 'tales' in English,[1] and *historier* (stories), *fortællinger* (tales) or *eventyr* (fairy tales) in Danish.[2] This is certainly related to the fact that most collections and a significant number of individual texts by Blixen contain these references in their titles and that the author herself used to refer to her works in this way.[3]

The scholars who make use of these generic definitions tend to stress the narrative character of Blixen's texts and their affinity with oral storytelling.[4] Annemette Hejlsted, for example, points out in her analysis of "The Sailor-Boy's Tale" that by imitating the figures of the traditional narrative, the text purports to be conveying collective experience.[5] Bo Hakon Jørgensen sees in Blixen's selection of the genre proof of its symbolist character, as this link with the archaic was part of symbolist poetics.[6] This link with ancient oral literature seems to be the main reason why Blixen was considered by some of her contemporaries to be "the great anachronism" in Danish literature.[7]

Often, the generic specifics of Blixen's stories are defined in Blixen scholarship by contrasting them to the realist novel.[8] This is only logical, bearing in mind Blixen's contemporary literary context and her own thematisation of this opposition in texts such as "The Cardinal's First Tale" and "The Blank Page" (I will return to this subject shortly).

One of the main qualities of Blixen's stories which separates them from the realist novel and links them to the oral tale is generally considered to be the absence of psychological depth, and the focus on the patterns of fate rather than an individual character whose "behaviour is artificial and stylized [sic]."[9]

## 2. "Scheherazade of our times" – truth or illusion?

The fact that Blixen's texts are a continuation or imitation of oral art is one of the first 'truths' that a non-Dane who takes an interest in Blixen is confronted with. Sometimes, this becomes apparent even before one is properly familiarised with her texts. For those who know the Danish language, who are interested in Danish culture and who happen to visit Denmark, an acquaintance with Blixen's texts as isolated phenomena is virtually impossible, as her personality is firmly integrated within Danish cultural and commercial mythology. In Denmark, Blixen's face looks out at you from public lectures and cinema and theatre posters, and her name is constantly being mentioned in the cultural news and even in the daily press. Blixen is even considered to be an effective Danish trademark for promoting the sale of clothes, tourism or coffee. "Karen Blixen Superstar" is the telling title of an article which focuses on the boom in Blixen-fetishism in Denmark which occurred in 1985, the year of Blixen's centenary.[10] Although the boom gradually settled down, and was overtaken around 2005 by a far more bombastic boom surrounding H. C. Andersen, Blixen still remains a very 'public' figure in her native country.[11]

In diverse contexts, and not only in Denmark, there emerges one image of Blixen that overshadows all the rest: that of a storyteller *par excellence*. This image is encoded in the title of Judith Thurman's famous biography,[12] and is prominent in one of the most memorable scenes in Sydney Pollack's film *Out of Africa* (1985), in which we follow Karen Blixen (Meryl Streep) as she tells an impromptu story for her cosily seated friends, with her voice gradually dissolving into music. The documentary *Karen Blixen – Storyteller* (1995) by Christian Braad Thomsen, which features recordings of her storytelling performances in the USA, is likewise dominated by the writer's image as a brilliant storyteller whose magnetism the listeners cannot resist.[13]

### *Key components of the Scheherazade myth*

Even today, long after texts were first freed from their makers' authority, Blixen's authorship is still introduced to the reading audience

through a lengthy discussion of her extraordinary personality and life.[14] The present book focuses primarily on Blixen's writings, avoiding the question of whether or not their play was something that the author was deliberately pursuing. On such premises, Blixen's biographical details do not seem to be relevant. On the other hand, recorded instances of Blixen's public and private behaviour, as well as her personal enunciations, can be treated as an integral part of her creative enterprise, especially as her public image rested on similar principles to those that dominated her literary production: the ability to surprise and provoke the addressee. Therefore, it is hardly necessary to reject this type of material completely, or to look down on the earlier (very popular) biographical criticism on Blixen,[15] as the image that Blixen herself created has certainly had an effect on how many readers have received her texts.

Blixen's interviews and public speeches, her autobiographical books and recollections by people who knew her show how important it was for her to create the illusion that her texts had been created in the same spirit as Arab fairy-tales or stories related by medieval minstrels. She claimed to be 3000 years old, to have dined with Socrates,[16] and she repeatedly identified herself with Scheherazade, especially when critics accused her of avoiding social topics:

> I am not interested in social questions, nor [sic] in Freudian psychology. But the narrator of the *Thousand and One Nights* also neglected social questions, and it is also no doubt for that reason that today the Arabs still gather in their public squares to hear her stories. As for me I have one ambition only: to invent stories, very beautiful stories.[17]

Also in *Out of Africa*, Blixen presents herself as a Scheherazade:

> Denys, who lived much by the ear, preferred hearing a story told, to reading it; when he came to the farm he would ask: "Have you got a story?" I had been making up many while he had been away. In the evenings he made himself comfortable, spreading cushions like a couch in front of the fire, and with me sitting on the floor, cross-legged like Scheherazade herself, he would listen, clear-eyed, to a long tale, from when it began until it ended.[18]

Blixen liked to stress that she was not able to read her stories aloud, and that she could only tell them,[19] and she claimed that each of her texts existed as a tale in her mind prior to being written down: "I actually carry my stories in my head for a long time, before I write them. I tell them and retell them to myself."[20] Some of Blixen's stories have indeed reached their addressee as oral tales. The writer has presented some of them on air,[21] and some, like "De blaa Øjne" ("The Blue Eyes"), "Kong Herodes' Vin" ("The Wine of the Tetrarch") and "Farah" have been recorded on gramophone records.[22]

## PROSODY OF THE TEXTS

Another, purely textual, aspect that provides Blixen's texts with the flavour of oral art is their prosody. In her stories, one finds entire paragraphs which contain extended sentences, the continuous rhythmic flow and alliterative sounds of which imitate the music of oral epic poetry.

Else Cederborg, who has published a number of Blixen's texts, notes the writer's special way of editing her manuscripts: Blixen would rewrite the same paragraph over and over again, although she would only change one or two words in it. According to Cederborg, the musicality of the text was more important for Blixen than its meaning.[23] Although one can doubt the validity of this claim, one can easily be convinced of the musicality of Blixen's texts by reading aloud any of her descriptions of landscape. A fragment from the English version of Blixen's "Sorrow-Acre," given below, has been deliberately divided into lines, so that prosodic features such as rhythm and alliteration would be better revealed:

> In all the short lifetime of Danish summer
> there is no richer or more luscious moment
> than that week wherein the lime-trees flower.
> The heavenly scent goes to the head and to the heart,
> it seems to unite the fields of Denmark with those of Elysium,
> it contains both hay, honey and holy incense,
> and is half fairyland and half apothecary's locker.[24]

### THE STORYTELLER FIGURE AND THE STORYTELLING SITUATION

Another of Blixen's 'nods' towards the tradition of oral storytelling is the storyteller figure that we often encounter in her texts. Among these storytellers, there are real professionals like the Arab Mira Jama ("The Dreamers" and "The Diver"), or the old hag from "The Blank Page," in whose family the craft has been passed from generation to generation. Blixen's texts are heteroglossic narratives and in many of them, including "The Dreamers," "The Deluge at Norderney" and "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen," storytelling becomes a form of communication between the characters that provides them with a chance to exchange their experiences of life and arts, alleviates their boredom and solitude, or gives them the strength to face death.[25]

### STORY AS A THEME

Alongside the previously discussed components of the Scheherazade myth (paratextual generic indications, Blixen's personal image, the importance of the acoustic element and the frequent employment of the storytelling situation), one can distinguish yet another relevant element, namely the thematisation of the art of storytelling. The narrating characters in "The Dreamers," "The Cardinal's First Tale," "A Consolatory Tale" and "The Blank Page" indulge themselves by expressing their ideas regarding narrative art. Cardinal Salviati from "The Cardinal's First Tale" proposes his own hierarchy of literature in which he distances himself from the modern novel and its all-too-human realism:

> The individuals of the new books and novels – one by one – are so close to the reader that he will feel a bodily warmth flowing from them, and that he will take them to his bosom and make them, in all situations of his life, his companions, friends and advisers. And while this interchange of sympathy goes on, the story itself loses ground and weight and in the end evaporates, like the bouquet of a noble wine, the bottle of which has been left uncorked.[26]

This modern genre is contrasted by the Cardinal with "the divine art of the story," which illuminates its characters by tracing their role and movement within the story's own unpredictable patterns:

> The divine art is the story. In the beginning was the story. At the end we shall be privileged to view, and review, it – and that is what is named the day of judgment. /…/ [W]e, who hold our high office as keepers and watchmen to the story, may tell you, verily, that to its human characters there is salvation in nothing else in the universe. /…/ For within our whole universe the story only has authority to answer that cry of heart of its characters, that one cry of heart of each of them: '*Who am I?*'[27]

Another of Blixen's sample texts that is occupied with the formulation of the poetics of the story is "The Blank Page." Its protagonist is an old storyteller who is sitting at the port of an unidentified town at an unidentified time. She tells a story about a Portuguese convent, which for hundreds of years has been producing bridal sheets for royal couples. According to an old custom, the sheet was to serve as proof of the bride's virginity, and the middle of the sheet was sent back to the nunnery, framed and kept in the gallery with the bride's name engraved on a golden plate. In the midst of the long row of these strange pictures, there was one which was "snow white from corner to corner, a blank page."[28]

This image serves as a metaphor through which the old storyteller can explain the essence of her own art:

> Where the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. /…/ 'Who then,' she continues, 'tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page.'[29]

I will soon come back to these quotations in order to address the question of whether they really convince the reader of the similarity between Blixen's texts and traditional oral narratives, or, on the contrary, whether they show how far the former are from the literary forms they thematise.[30]

### *The illusiveness of the Scheherazade myth*

A closer look at the elements that make up the Scheherazade myth reveals that they also contribute to its deconstruction.

Speaking of, for instance, the *prosody* of Blixen's texts, one has to admit that the particularly melodious descriptive and narrative passages are to be found in the exposition of stories – both of the framing and the framed ones, as well as in the descriptions of the setting in general. However, in Blixen's texts, a great deal of textual space is often occupied by scenic episodes. For example, in "Echoes," almost half of the text is constituted by dialogues between Pellegrina and other characters, with the narrator's voice remaining in the background, and this relates the text more to the architext of drama than that of oral narrative.

The presence of *the storyteller figure and the storytelling situation* also means that Blixen's discourse is related more to the written than the oral tradition, as both of these elements function, in this case, as text-internal (thematic and structural) components and not external circumstances of text-transmission. It is relevant to note that the storytelling situation has been successfully integrated into the novella paradigm. It is reflected in the tradition of arranging novellas in cycles (cf. *The Decameron* or *The Canterbury Tales*), but this situation is also established within individual novellas, such as "Carmen" by Prosper Mérimée, in which it is directly related to the *topoi* of love and death.

### COMPOSITIONAL COMPLEXITY

The frequent use of the storytelling situation in Blixen's texts results in the complexity of their composition, which in turn makes parallels between Blixen's texts and oral tales problematic. Robert Langbaum seems to be the first to have made this point by stressing the mosaic structure of Blixen's texts:

> [P]ast appears not in sequence but through tales which advance the present situation, and we do not let go of one understood episode to move on to another but insert as it were the later episodes into the earlier in order to understand them. The main question in an Isak Dinesen story is not what will happen next, but what is happening or what is the meaning of what is happening now.[31]

Texts arranged in this way, Langbaum claims, differ greatly from oral stories, which, according to E. M. Forster's definition, are "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence" and which "can only have one

merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next."[32] Were Blixen's stories like recorded oral tales, it would be easy to retell them – an unthinkable task for anyone, the author included.

Most of the stories that were 'told' by Blixen on air were only sections of her printed texts. In contrast to their printed equivalents, the orally transmitted stories were extended and supplemented with extra details, interjections and other elements of spoken language. The author's own performance lends them a musical air, and her outdated pronunciation further emphasises the archaic effect.[33] It is these inserted narrative fragments, concentrated around a single action or event and often set in historically undefined ("The Blue Eyes"), mythical or Biblical ("The Wine of the Tetrarch") times and locations, that have the greatest semblance to oral tales, in contrast to the overall complex narrative that incorporates them.[34]

### NARRATIVE SUBJECTIVITY

Speaking of the self-deconstructive character of the Scheherazade myth, one cannot avoid mentioning the notably modern narrative consciousness that Blixen's texts demonstrate. In these texts, self-perception becomes a discursive project, and the value of an individual life appears to be determined by its ability to enter into a narrative design. This idea is best demonstrated by Blixen's classical parable of life as being full of seemingly discontinuous wanderings and trials, which all combine in the image of a stork which first reveals itself when the design of one's journey is completed.[35] In "The Cardinal's First Tale," the key question in life ("Who am I?") is approached directly though the telling of a story, which, however, does not provide a final answer, but rather suggests that human identity is multi-faceted and ambiguous.[36]

### INTERTEXTUAL AND METAFICTIONAL PLAY

Similarly, the formal qualities, such as intertextuality and metafictionality, which foreground the issues of narrative subjectivity in Blixen's texts connect them to the paradigm of modern, even postmodern, self-conscious literature. Like many other "narcissistic"[37] texts, they comment on their own artistic principles and by different means point to themselves as artificial constructs. Unlike "simple" (*einfache*[38]) narrative

forms of oral art, Blixen's texts are characterised by a rich vocabulary and a refined style, and their demonstrative literariness is further enhanced by the abundance of quotations and allusions which are "drawn from the innumerable centres of culture," to quote Roland Barthes' famous notion of the text.[39] Blixen's texts play with names, titles and motifs from Greek myths and tragedies, Icelandic sagas, plays by Shakespeare, *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, novellas by Hoffmann or Goldschmidt, H. C. Andersen's fairytales, European operas and pictorial art, and even the author's own writing.[40] Like her creation, Miss Malin, who is pleased when she hears a good story and immediately sets out to play with it like a child "with a new toy,"[41] Blixen boldly mixes the styles of high and trivial literature, and subverts mythological, Biblical and classical plots. Dag Heede calls Blixen's authorship "a mirthful tumble through the cultural history of the world, an orgy of references," ranging between the pompous evocation of tradition and absolute disrespect for it.[42] Such intense and frolicsome intertextual play expands the text, meaning that it can embrace an almost limitless world – the "'world' of discourse, the 'world' of texts and intertexts."[43] This shift in the frame of reference, from that of empirical and psychological reality to that of the fictional domain, must be one of the reasons why Blixen's texts invite postmodern reading strategies such as intertextual analysis or metafictonal reading. These texts often tempt us to treat their characters as metaphors for different concepts relating to art, as is done extensively throughout the present book.[44]

If we now come back to the specific, previously quoted instances of Blixen's metafictional reflections and the meaning of the notion of the story in her works, we will see that the texts in which these reflections occur make this notion ambivalent. On the one hand, Blixen creates the illusion that the word "story" is meant to signify the oral tale. In "The Blank Page," the art of storytelling is practised and commented on by an illiterate old woman, who has even learned the Bible by way of oral transmission.[45] On the other hand, the presentation of the central event of the old woman's story and the metaphor which she employs to sum up the secret of her own art suggest a much broader concept of what the story is. After a long introduction to the nunnery and the story of the origin and fate of the bridal linen of the Portuguese nobles, we follow a lonely visitor (a princess' old playmate and lady-in-waiting) on her way to the nunnery and through the gallery. Having been escorted to the frame that bears her princess' name, she begins to recollect.[46]

The narrator then leads her eyes (and therefore, indirectly, our eyes) to the "blank page" with no name on the golden plate. It is at this picture, the narrator recounts, that visitors ("worldly wise, dutiful, long-suffering queens," "their noble old play-mates" and "old and young nuns"[47]) have their deepest thoughts, each relating the linen, we may guess, to their own lived lives. The story unexpectedly stops here and the reader feels that it is left to him or her to finish the story, to fill in "the blank page" – to find an explanation for why and how this picture came to be there.[48] The metaphor of "the blank page" set in a frame has associations with the word materialised on paper. In addition, the Danish title – "Det ubeskrevne Blad"[49] – suggests that the old storyteller's poetics apply just as much to the written text. Moreover, the word "story" seems in this text to acquire a second meaning – that of reality (memorable human experience), which deserves to be transposed onto a work of art, as one can gather from the narrator's following comment:

> For with what eternal and unswerving loyalty [to the story[50]] has not this canvas been inserted in the row! The storytellers themselves before it draw their veils over their faces and are dumb. Because the royal papa and mama who once ordered this canvas to be framed and hung up, had they not had the tradition of loyalty in their blood, might have left it out.[51]

All the pictures in the gallery had been hung up out of loyalty to the story, but this one represented the greatest loyalty of all, as, we may presume, it both incorporates human experience (the first night of marriage), and presents it in such a way that it becomes impossible to reconstruct it exactly, thus leaving it to the beholder to guess (or rather, to construct) the experience anew. In other words, the metaphor of "the blank page" seems to refer to literature which, due to its opacity, has the power to stir up the recipient's imagination and resists a single interpretation.

In the "Cardinal's First Tale," the notion of the story, although it is explicitly related to the oral form (the Cardinal replies to a question posed by his listener, the lady in black, who asks "Who are you?" by virtually telling her a story[52]), also implies a much broader literary field. In the Cardinal's illustration of his poetic 'conception', we find allusions to both oral art and classical literature:

> It [the story] will separate the two [the hero and the heroine], in life, by the currents of the Hellespont and unite them, in death, in a Veronese tomb. It provides for the hero, and his young bride will exchange an old copper lamp for a new one, and the Chaldeans shall make out three bands and fall upon his camels and carry them away, and he himself with his own hand shall cook, for an evening meal with his mistress, the falcon which was to have saved the life of her small dying son. The story will provide for the heroine, and at the moment when she lifts up her lamp to behold the beauty of her sleeping lover it makes her spill one drop of burning oil on his shoulder.[53]

This quotation refers to the Greek myth of Leander and Hero, Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," the story of Aladdin from "The Arabian Nights," the "Book of Job" ("the Chaldeans…"), Boccaccio's novella "Federigo's Falcon" from *The Decameron* and the story of Cupid and Psyche. The characters in these stories have been preserved in the cultural memory of generations of people in different countries, not due to their 'individual qualities', but due to their striking and yet archetypal fate.[54] It is also worth mentioning that the quotation above brings us back to Blixen's implied model of playful writing – the concept of the 'floating (superficial) art' discussed earlier in this book.[55] By smoothly merging together three different plots and their characters in a single sentence, in an outline of a new story ("It provides for the hero…"), Blixen's text once again points towards the possibility of cross-breeding the most diverse intertexts into one narrative and even in one character.

One can summarise this section by saying that, in Blixen's metafictional poetics, the story seems to signify literature that obeys its own internal logic to which the characters are subject, and does not aspire to be a realistic representation of human life and human nature. The story represents a form of art, the origins of which lie in real human experience or a longing for such experience, and which makes this experience universal by elevating it to the level of myth and integrating it into a vast continuum of cultural tradition. The meaning of a story is difficult to discern, and there will always be a sense of mystery to it, as well as opportunities for multiple interpretations. Those who approach it have to be ready (to paraphrase Ivan Ž. Sørensen and Ole Togeby) to complete a half-finished song, to create meaning between the lines.[56]

The modern reader may be surprised by the metafictional insights contained within Blixen's texts, some of which correlate directly with the ideas of reception theory, which was formulated many years after her stories were written. The oxymoronic idea of 'the silence that speaks' in "The Blank Page" seems to be a fitting parallel to Wolfgang Iser's theory of gaps and indeterminacies, according to which every reader fills in textual gaps in his or her own idiosyncratic manner.[57] Although Iser focuses on the limitations of individual interpretations, he does so in order to stress the inexhaustibility of the text, which also seems to be the point of Blixen's story about the blank page. The contrast which Blixen creates between the two types of picture in the gallery (those that tell a realistic story with an easily reconstructable fabula vs. the one which disrupts the beholder's natural expectations and brings her to active reflection and creation) can also be said to be reminiscent of the distinction between readable and writable texts introduced by Roland Barthes.[58]

# 3. Oral narrative as an enacted genre

As the discussion in the present chapter has shown, the relationship between Blixen's texts and the oral tradition is yet another manifestation of the ambivalent nature of her literary enterprises. One the one hand, it is possible to identify a whole array of qualities that allow us to associate Blixen's texts with the architext of the oral story (the musicality of narrative, the focus on the patterns of fate, a lack of psychological depth in characters, the storytelling situations, as well as extended apologias for the art of storytelling). On the other hand, qualities such as the complex structure of the narrative, its preoccupation with issues of narrative identity, and its emphatic literariness as a result of its dense intertextuality and tendency towards metafictive reflection leave little doubt that simple and direct parallels between Blixen's art and oral stories are impossible.

This does not mean, however, that we should reject this affinity completely and break the spell of the aura that Blixen has given to her stories. If we approach this ambivalence through the perspective of play, we can easily accept the situation as it is, and treat it as a kind of textual role-play – the oral story being both a mask, and yet also an integral part of Blixen's theatrical discourse.

The *topos* of the theatre, and more specifically the puppet theatre, has already been touched upon in the discussion of Blixen's philosophical ideas.[59] However, its function transgresses the limits of Blixen's previously discussed ideological metaphors, and manifests itself on a much broader scale, both thematically and structurally. Among Blixen's characters, there are many who belong to the world of the theatre: the actor Kasparson from "The Deluge at Norderney," the opera singer Pellegrina from "The Dreamers," the theatre director Herr Soerensen and actress Malli from "Tempests," the puppet theatre director Pizzuti from "Second Meeting," and so on. The image of the mask, as a symbol of talent and imagination, is a recurrent one in Blixen's texts. The emblem of Blixen's aesthetic ideology – the idea that "by thy mask I shall know thee"[60] is voiced twice in "The Deluge at Norderney." The motifs of theatre and masks are also prominent in "The Roads Round

Pisa" and "Carnival." Theatre is the narrative spine in "The Immortal Story," in which the action is centred around Mr. Clay's project of staging a popular story.

Theatre functions in Blixen's discourse not only as a theme, a symbol and a structural element, but also as a model for narrative technique. Blixen's typical way of sketching out a visual image is using few but very characteristic details, both with regard to the descriptions of the characters' physical appearance and the setting, especially that of interiors, which is reminiscent of stage directions in a play or film script. Consider, for example, the following extract from "Supper at Elsinore," which creates both a very tangible and a very dynamic image of the location:

> The walls of the room had once been painted crimson, but with time the colour had faded into a richness of hues /…/. In the candlelight these flat walls blushed and shone deeply, in places glowing like little pools of dry, burning, red lacquer. On one wall hung the portraits of the two young De Coninck sisters, the beauties of Elsinore. /…/ Some potpourri was being burned on the tall stove /…/. In front of the stove the table was laid with a white tablecloth and delicate Chinese cups and plates."[61]

Theatrical effect in Blixen's writing is also achieved through the frequent use of scenic, almost isochronous[62] episodes which are dominated by the characters' verbal exchange and in which the narrator's role is limited to the registration of their movements, gestures or facial expressions. In addition to the previously mentioned example of "Echoes," one can, for instance, remember "Tempests," in which one can distinguish several scenes of this type, e.g., Malli's arrival in Christiansand and her homage to the dead Ferdinand. The most dramatic and 'theatrical' scene takes place between Herr Soerensen and Malli during the climax of the story when they exchange passages from Shakespeare's "The Tempest."[63]

In light of this theatrical background, the echoes of oral art in Blixen's texts appear to function as a kind of a 'prop', or one of the numerous "déjà vu's from the history of art" in Charlotte Engberg's terms.[64] Like Blixen's depiction of places, which Engberg discusses in the quotation below, this 'prop' participates in the creation of the stylised atmosphere of long-gone times, "signifying the remote" as opposed to the reconstruction of the exact historical setting:

> Places always function as metaphors for time; no matter whether one speaks of abbeys, parks, old estates or discretely aloof burgher houses – to name but a few localities that are some of Blixen's absolute favourites – these, as a rule, are tangible, concrete, resonant spaces which signify the remote.[65]

The ability of Blixen's texts to transform themselves into a stage upon which masks are worn has already been demonstrated in the analysis of her essay "On Modern Marriage," in which under the disguise of a discourse on love and marriage, yet another textual face – the aesthetic discourse – can be discerned. A similar role-playing process takes place on the level of the genre: when reading Blixen, we experience the enactment of archaic oral art, but this does not prevent us from seeing the actor that performs this role, that is, a highly modern, self-reflexive and intellectual narrative.

The enacted character of the oral tradition in Blixen's discourse is made even more apparent by the fact that the superiority of the story over other literary forms is preached not by an anonymous narrator of the framing narrative, but by a 'tangible' storyteller-character, like Cardinal Salviati in "The Cardinal's First Tale" or the old hag in "The Blank Page." Even more importantly, these characters literally enact the tradition by telling stories to their audiences – other characters in the text. It can be noted in passing that some of the stories that Blixen has herself presented orally to an audience ("The Blue Eyes" and "The Wine of the Tetrarch") were originally attributed to storytelling characters in "Peter and Rosa" and "The Deluge at Norderney" respectively.

It is also noteworthy that Blixen often opens a storytelling situation with a scenic episode. In "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen," the stories that Mateo and Tadeo tell are preceded by dialogues. In "The Deluge at Norderney," we are informed of how the characters move and locate themselves in space, and we hear their conversation right before they start their storytelling session. In many texts, the storytelling situation takes place within a clearly delimited space, which also enhances the scenic effect: the characters in "The Deluge at Norderney" tell their stories in the hayloft of a farmhouse, while in "The Dreamers," the scene is set on the deck of a ship heading for Zanzibar, and in "The Cardinal's First Tale" it is in a library, while in "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen," the action takes place in a salon.

The performative character of storytelling situations in Blixen's work is also enhanced by the shift in the narrative mode of the episodes containing the inserted stories. The overall narrator often intrudes into the story being told by the explicit narrator of the inserted narrative and comments on the audience's reaction to it. Sometimes, an inserted story is interrupted by an indication of a gesture or a look (in "The Deluge at Norderney," we are told of Calypso's surprised look at hearing her 'own' story, while in "A Country Tale," Ulrikke similarly has a physical reaction, although due to different reasons, to the news of Linnert's death sentence, which Eitel mentions in his story). Sometimes, a storytelling character digresses from his or her story and then takes it up again (as, for example, Eitel does), or is interrupted by his or her interlocutor (Miss Malin constantly interferes with Jonathan's story with incredulous questions). Even when such inserted stories are essentially diegetic (in which the narrator presents the events indirectly, through her or his own summary and descriptions), intrusions made by the framing narrative provide them with a mimetic quality. As a result, we hear the story and, at the same time, we can follow its live transmission. This situation is different from, for example, that of *The Decameron*, in which the two levels – the framing and the framed story – do not overlap in the same way. Although we usually find out the audience's reaction to a particular story (a story told by Dioneo on the first day "first pricked the hearts of the listening ladies with somewhat of shamefastness"[66]), such comments come immediately before the new story begins. In Blixen's texts, the framing narrative constantly breaks into the one it frames, turning the latter into a live performance in which a storyteller demonstrates his or her art before the audience, who react to it in a lively manner. It is difficult to tell where the epic ends and the drama begins in Blixen's art, as its *diegesis* is paradoxically mimetic.

Huizinga, who discusses the relation of different forms of literature to play, observes:

> The epic severs its connection with play as soon as it is no longer meant to be recited on some festal occasion but only to be read. Nor is the lyric understood as a play-function once its ties with music have gone. Only the drama, because of its intrinsically functional character, its quality of being an action, remains permanently linked to play.[67]

Blixen's texts, in which characters act out the telling of a story, reconstruct this situation of epic as play, or rather they create the illusion of the live performance of an oral narrative in a written one. However, although Blixen is a master of illusion-making, her texts do not seem to be aimed at fooling the reader, as these texts expose illusions as being illusions by openly pointing to themselves as fictive constructs. Similarly to the characters in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*,[68] by Luigi Pirandello, Blixen's characters explicitly speculate about their own existence within the story (like Carlotta in "The Roads Round Pisa"), or keep thinking that somebody in 100 years will be reading about his or her and other characters' lives (Augustus in the same text). This and other metafictional strategies[69] turn Blixen's narratives into demonstrative and playful shows of textual possibilities, keeping the reader at a critical distance from what is happening in the text and at the same time stimulating intellectual effort.

It was mentioned during the discussion of the metaphor of the marionette comedy that the balance between illusion-making and the audience's ability to resist it is one of the basic foundations of the idea of the theatre. We must once again remember Ortega y Gasset, who in his "The Idea of Theatre" speaks of the paradoxical ability of the theatre to simultaneously unite and separate reality and "the unreal":

> There are two people on the stage: 'Marianinha' and Ophelia. But we don't see them as two people but as one and the same person. We are presented with 'Marianinha' who represents, plays, Ophelia. /…/ If you ever reflect on what you experience at the theatre and try to describe what you see on the stage, you will have to say something like this: first and foremost I see Ophelia and a park; behind and as though at one remove I see 'Marianinha' and the clumsily painted flats. You might say that the reality retires upstage in order to let the unreal pass through it, like projected light.[70]

This quality pertains to any type of play: even the most absorbed player is still aware that this is play, for if he or she were not, the spirit of play would be lost. Vladimir Nabokov uses this argument to explain the relationship between good fiction and play, claiming that good literature, although moving, does not allow real empathy: it does not allow one

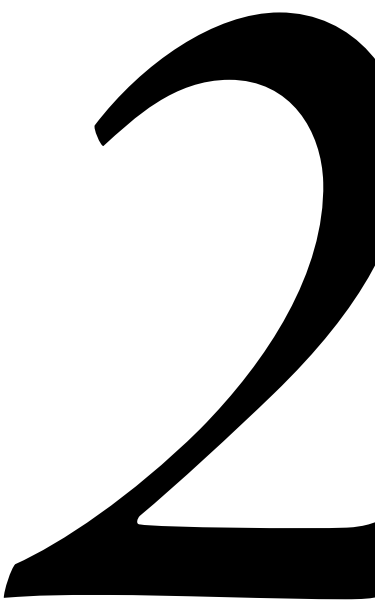
to lose oneself in fiction, but makes one aware that one is participating in an artistic game.[71]

If we apply this argument to Blixen's architextual strategies, we will see that her texts both create the illusion of a nostalgic return to the proto-forms of literature, and at the same time remind us that this return is mere play. One can neither disregard the relationship between Blixen's texts and the oral tradition, nor take it for granted. It is best to accept it as a natural paradox of play: the link between Blixen's stories and oral storytelling is artificial and demonstratively illusive, but at the same time, it is successfully and originally represented by this modern self-reflexive theatrical discourse. One cannot separate the two from each other, as one cannot separate the actress from her role while on stage.

# Chapter Two
# The Dancing Novella: Between the Canon and its Carnivalesque Subversion

"/…/ the sight of the young ladies before us, moving with such perfect freedom in such severely regulated figures."

— from Karen Blixen's "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen"



# 1. Theoretical background

It was claimed in the previous chapter that the tradition of oral storytelling participates in Blixen's texts as a literary mask, or as an enacted genre. This is certainly no obstacle to continuing to call Blixen's texts stories and tales – we can do so out of respect for the tradition set out by the writer, and in our acceptance of this mask as an integral part of her playful and theatrical *oeuvre*. By using these generic labels, we stress the musicality of her texts, her flirtation with the literary traditions of the past, as well as the sense of suspense and excitement which her texts produce in the reader. There is no danger today that the terms 'story' and 'tale' might mislead anyone into taking Blixen's texts for recorded oral narratives, not only because Blixen's readers cannot be so naïve with regard to her texts, but also because the terms have long been applied to designate written narrative forms.

There is another tradition besides oral storytelling that Blixen's texts stand in an obvious architextual relation to. This is the classical novella, as well as its related forms, such as the modern short story. Hans Brix called Blixen's texts *noveller* as far back as 1949,[1] and so did Brøndsted in his *Nordens Litteratur*.[2] In the more recent Danish scholarship, there seems to be a growing tendency to replace the previously preferred *fortælling* (tale) and *historie* (story) with this term.[3]

The Danish term '*novelle*' has its counterparts in different national traditions: the Italian *novella*, the German *Novelle*, the French *nouvelle*, the Russian *новелла*, and the Lithuanian *novelė*, and in all of these contexts, its use and meaning differ.[4] For the sake of greater clarity, the term 'novella' in the present book will be applied to the tradition which Thomas Bredsdorff defines as existing in "primarily the Romance and Germanic languages outside English," and beginning "in Italy in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, developing very little until the nineteenth century, when it took on its clearest outlines, whereupon in the twentieth century it became one among many possible models for short prose narrative."[5]

The theory of the novella, which goes back to the Renaissance,[6] is vast and rich in polemics. Scholars have attempted to distinguish its

*differentiæ specificæ* on different grounds: some aiming to find a universal definition, while others prefer the diachronic approach, based on the idea of the constant development of the genre and distinguishing its dominant features in different periods and cultural environments.[7] Being well aware of the pitfalls of constructing an abstract essentialist model of the genre, as well as of the great variety of its manifestations, I will nevertheless present below a conventional set of structural features that are recognised by a considerable number of theoreticians within the field of novella studies. This will be done, however, not in order to confine Blixen's texts taxonomically within the pigeonhole of the genre, but rather to highlight some aspects of their "participation" in the genre[8] by first establishing the "trajectory of expectations against which to register the originality and novelty" of these texts.[9] I will also sketch out the concepts of the novella as outlined by three Danish theoreticians, which together with the conventional model will serve as a point of departure and a frame of reference for tracing Blixen's own models of playful architextual transformations. Later, her texts will be related to a selection of more concrete and historically and culturally-defined forms and specimens of the genre, such as the Italian Renaissance *novella*, the German Romantic *Novelle*, as well as two classical texts – a 19th century French *nouvelle* (or *conte*) and a modern English-language short story.

### *Key components of the novella genre*

Despite their different theoretical and cultural backgrounds or methodological premises, many theorists identify the following common formal elements of the classical novella that also tend to be maintained in its later forms:

- Unity of composition (the artistry of form);[10]
- Importance of the narrator (both in terms of the subjective character of the narration[11] and the narrator's role in the structure of the narrative[12]);
- Moment of novelty (the "unheard-of" nature of the event[13] or a sudden, unexpected ending or insight[14]);
- Presence of a turning point (*Wendepunkt* according to Tieck,[15] or *determinationspunkt* according to Baggesen[16]), after which the action usually changes direction;

- Strong dramatic element (collision);[17]
- Tendency towards having fewer characters and dealing with sudden changes in their destiny or consciousness rather than character development;[18]
- Predominantly realistic mode;[19]
- Tendency towards a lyrical mood.[20]

## *Three Danish models of the novella*

### THREE ELEMENTS ACCORDING TO SØREN BAGGESEN

According to Baggesen's polemically received, yet still much discussed and applied, conception,[21] the structure of the classical novella[22] is basically defined by three key elements: the narrator, the event and the point.

1. *The narrator.* The novella, Baggesen claims, makes the narrator's function in the text especially prominent:

> The novella is a form of fiction which invites the use of an established narrating personality within the fiction. This narrating personality can vary from a purely mechanical function to an actual individualised narrator, and in the latter case, a dialectical interplay between the narrator and the story occurs which can develop into a dialectic play between the story and the reader. The narrator, being a mediator between the events and the reader, prevents under any circumstances identification with the acting characters. Yet the most important thing in the notion of the narrator is the very form of fiction which can mean the narrator's concrete presence within the fiction, but does not make it a necessity: the distinction of the narrative time from the narrated time, the fiction about an actually completed course of events which is being narrated. [23]

This quotation points towards at least two important aspects that will also prove to be relevant to the 'case study' analysis provided in the last section of the present chapter: first, the narrator divides the textual time into the narrative vs. the narrated time, and second, the narrator's

relation to the narrated story plays a major role in stimulating the playful exchange between the story and the reader.[24]

2. *The event.* The event, for Baggesen, is something that befalls the characters from without – something "irrational" or conceived independently of the characters' own deliberate actions:

> The irrational elements of existence can be part of a metaphysical interpretation of life, and in such cases, the events are perceived as the interference of non-human powers in human life. But this does not need to be the case; the irrational can occur purely by chance or be in itself a rational action, however, there is no emphasis on the actors or the motives behind their actions, but these actions are perceived as irrational interventions into other people's lives.[25]

3. *The point.* Baggesen's notion of the point is twofold, as he distinguishes between "the determinative point" (*determinationspunktet*) and "the interpretative point" (*tolkningspunktet*). The former (just like the *Wendepunkt*, according to Tieck) relates to the event in the story which functions as a catalyst for further action, while the latter assembles all the threads of the story and opens the door to a certain "interpretation of existence" (*fortolkning af tilværelsen*), thus providing an explanation for the events told.[26] According to Baggesen, the interpretative point can be absent from the text, and then the "interpretation of existence" results from mutual interaction between the narrated events and takes shape (one is tempted to add) in the reader's mind:

> These two points can coincide and then we have the real point which both determines the choice of the depicted events and draws from them a surprising conclusion. However, the two points can as well occur independently. In such cases, the determinative point is in the true sense a determinative point, since all subsequent events have their origin in it, while the interpretative point just assembles the threads in order to open up the perspective of the novella, without having any determinative impact on the events. The interpretative point can be totally absent, as the perspective of the novella opens up through the interplay of the events it presents – without these threads being assembled in a single event.[27]

### THE "STICK IN AN ANTHILL" MODEL BY AAGE HENRIKSEN

Aage Henriksen modifies Baggesen's model by rejecting his idea of the irrational nature of the event and claiming that the novella deals with a conflict between two opposing poles – a settled order and an unexpected event of any kind that constitutes a threat to it.[28] What makes his model 'catching' is its illustration using the metaphor of "a stick in an anthill" pointing towards three possible outcomes of the conflict:

> [T]he event breaks in as the unfamiliar into an ordered world, thereby producing the first point of intersection. It creates confusion, like a stick in an anthill, and an attempt is made to surmount this confusion by establishing a new, better-consolidated order. This can come about by the unfamiliar being driven out again, and then a second point of intersection comes about. It can also consist of a complete assimilation. Finally the event can triumph, bringing about a total collapse of the original order.[29]

### RHETORIC OF THE NOVELLA – THOMAS BREDSDORFF'S DEFINITION

Thomas Bredsdorff, in his paper on the structure and rhetoric of the classical novella, both paid tribute to his predecessors, and pointed to the weaknesses of their theories.[30] He rejects the criticism by Jørgen Dines Johanesen, who claims that Baggesen "went after content" and "did not adequately appreciate structure,"[31] and proves that both Bagessen's and Henriksen's definitions are of "a structural sort" and that the disagreement between them concerns something superficial – the character of the event.[32] Nevertheless, Bredsdorff points out that the model of the conflict and its possible resolution as described by Henriksen's classic metaphor (both a simplification and an effective explication of Baggesen's conception) does not define the genre of the novella, but is typical of the narrative as such, and can even appear in poetry.[33]

Bredsdorff's own approach to the classical novella supplements the structural viewpoint with a rhetorical one, which, the scholar remarks, brings one "closer to the unattainable definition of the genre."[34] Taking off from one frequently-neglected aspect of Goethe's definition of the novella, namely that it is "an unprecedented event that *has occurred*,"[35]

Bredsdorff demonstrates that classical novellas create "documentary illusion /…/ or, with a modern word, 'faction'" and produce "(a pretense [sic] of) the truth," with the narrator contributing to the creation of this illusion of authenticity.[36] However, as the presentation of events in the classical novella tends to be subjective, with no agent who knows everything, these texts, Bredsdorff argues, bring us to the sadly ironic realisation that "you can never know": that "a person's inner self is in principle inaccessible to other people" and that "people know nothing about one another."[37]

I will return to the models presented above in the analysis of "Babette's Feast" that will conclude the present chapter, but first, let us in the next section take a look at a more generalised picture of Blixen's play with the novella tradition.

# 2. Some patterns of architextual transformations in Blixen's novellas

*Peculiarities of plot structure: fragmentary unity*

Generally, Blixen's texts seem to follow the tradition of the novella genre, in that they focus the narrative around the central event. In "Supper at Elsinore," for example, the main action starts with Madam Baek, the housekeeper for the de Coninck family, taking a trip to Copenhagen. She is going there in order to inform Fanny and Eliza, who are no longer young daughters of the family, of the apparition of their brother's ghost in their childhood home. The action culminates with its central event – the meeting between the three siblings in their native Elsinore (a place renowned for apparitions since the time of Shakespeare), which takes place two days after Madame Baek sets out for her journey. This is typical of a great number of Blixen's novellas: the main action develops within a relatively short period of time and often within a single space. In "The Deluge at Norderney," the narrated events stretch out over several days, starting one evening when a heavy storm, later followed by a disastrous flood, hits the fashionable bath of Norderney. The nucleus of the action, involving four main characters stranded in the hayloft of a farmer's house, is even more limited in terms of space and time – it unfolds throughout one night and is confined to the closed space of the hayloft surrounded by the rising waters. In yet another novella, "Sorrow-Acre," the events develop within the limits of a Danish countryside estate from dawn to sunset, while old Anne-Marie is alone reaping an immense field and finally dies, having finished the job.

There are, however, only a few of Blixen's novellas in which the plot line develops without considerable interruption. This can be said of "Uncle Theodore," a novella written in Blixen's youth, and "The Ring" – probably the shortest of all of Blixen's novellas and one of the very few, if not the only one, in which all of the events are presented chronologically.[38] In most other novellas by Blixen, the plot line constantly opens up for inserted episodes which have their own micro-plots and often even their own titles (like "The Story of Timon of Assens," "Calypso's Story" and "The Wine of the Tetrarch" in "The Deluge at Norderney," or the episodes in "Babette's Feast").

The narrative flow in Blixen's novellas, such as "Babette's Feast," "Tempests" and "The Immortal Story," is often interrupted with the introduction of a new character and recounting his or her prehistory. In "Supper at Elsinore," the story about Eliza, Fanny and Morten's past is presented at the very beginning of the narrative, constituting an extended analeptic leap in respect to the main events, and can, in the re-reading process, be conceived of as memories reviving in the old housekeeper's mind, most probably already while on her journey to Copenhagen. In addition, the recount of her trip is interrupted by the scene involving the sisters' social activities at the time of Madam Baek's arrival in the house, in which the narrative focus shifts to the sisters and the old housekeeper stays 'out of sight' up to the point when they finally meet.

What seems at first sight to be a very fragmentary structure appears to distance Blixen's novellas from the traditional notion of the genre being marked by a special unity of form – a coherence between all of its constituent elements. Blixen's narrative is heterogeneous, not in the least because the inserted fragments often introduce a different style, a different genre (parables like "The Wine of the Tetrarch" in "The Deluge at Norderney," "The Blue Eyes" in "Peter and Rosa" and "The Story of the Bravo" in "The Roads Round Pisa"), or a different spatial and temporal dimension ("The Wine of the Tetrarch" tells us about the Apostle Peter's encounter with Barabbas in Jerusalem shortly after the Crucifixion, while the main action of the novella develops in 19th-century Germany).

The inserted episodes, although they interrupt the flow of the principle narrative and sometimes are stylistically different from it, are, however, not simple digressions. Paradoxically, it is exactly these inserted narratives and flashbacks that often grant the text its internal coherence. In "Supper at Elsinore," for instance, the episodes from the three siblings' youth are crucial to the story, as they introduce the participants in the novella's central event (the family reunion), while the conversation between the sisters and their male guests in their house in Copenhagen casts light on the sisters' ideas about the relationship between the sexes. Without this information, it would be impossible to understand the central dramatic scene that reveals the sisters' envy of their brother's short but experience-rich life.

An example of inserted stories which are even more ingeniously integrated into the overall narrative can be found in "The Roads Round Pisa." The novella recounts the story of the young Danish nobleman

Augustus von Schimmelmann who, during his travels in Italy, makes a promise to Countess Carlotta di Gampocorta to forward her blessing to her step-granddaughter Rosina, and thus gets involved in a family melodrama. Augustus learns from Carlotta's story that she has married Rosina off to the elderly and impotent Prince Potenziani in order to safeguard her against the fate met by her mother, who died at childbirth. Rosina has, however, managed to get the Pope's consent to annul her marriage to the Prince, and has since married her beloved Mario and now is expecting their baby. Augustus later meets Potenziani in an *osteria* in the company of two young men and overhears the story he tells them. It is a story about a nobleman who has hired a *bravo*, a paid assassin, to kill an unfaithful young friend, but later finds out that the friend is still alive. The story is followed by the reaction of one of the listeners – Prince Nino tosses a glass of wine into Potenziani's face, after which the old Prince demands satisfaction. Right before the duel is to start, Potenziani himself hears a brief story from Rosina's best friend Agnese: a year ago, she slept in Rosina's bed with a night lamp burning while Rosina had a secret meeting with Mario. This story also produces certain reactions among those who listen to it (Potenziani asks Nino for forgiveness), and yet the reasons for this reaction, just like in the case of the story told by Potenziani, remain unexplained to the reader. Only when Nino tells his story to Agnese, in which he confesses that for a year he has been thinking of nothing but the moment when he looked at her naked back in the lamplight, does the reader understand what these stories were about. Read against the other stories in the novella, Potenziani's story reveals itself to be a parable by which its narrator alludes to the contract between Nino and himself. It is Nino who is 'the bravo' in the old Prince's story – the one who was supposed to bereave Rosina of her virginity and thus deprive her of her grounds for divorce. He did what he had been asked to do, but by the irony of fate, it was Agnese who happened to be in Rosina's bed. The readers of this novella are expected to solve this puzzle themselves by establishing the causal links between the separate stories and by (re)constructing the fabula with its determinative point (what happened between Nino and Agnese on that fatal night).[39] The text, however, comes to the reader's assistance, by, for example, mentioning what seem at first sight to be insignificant details, such as the night lamp which links the stories told by Agnese and Prince Nino, and thus makes it possible to decipher the

story told by Prince Potenziani. In addition, the inserted episode of the marionette theatre performance plays a guiding role – besides serving as an illustration of the philosophy of life as a mosaic put together by God, which Carlotta theoretically arrives at, yet seems to abandon in practice,[40] it also hints at the paradoxical way that the events are presented in this text.

A particularly complex structure can be traced in the novella "The Dreamers," which nevertheless exhibits an accomplished unity of its constitutive episodes. The external frame of this multi-layered narrative introduces three characters who find themselves on board a ship sailing to Zanzibar. This seems to be an ideal situation for replaying the tradition of the genre to join separate stories into a cycle. However, the text is both a novella cycle *en miniature* and *en caricature*, as the reader's natural expectation to hear each character in the frame narrative tell his own story is not fulfilled. The first of the characters to be introduced, Prince Said, does not utter a word until the very end of the novella: he cannot contribute to the debate on the art of storytelling that follows, as he is a warrior with a heart filled with "the hope of revenge"[41] and thus a hero and not a producer or disseminator of stories. The second of the party, the "much renowned storyteller Mira Jama himself,"[42] first takes up his own tale when prompted by Lincoln, but soon gives up narrating. He confesses to have lost the ability to tell stories that would stir up people's emotions, and stories about poverty and unpopularity (a hint towards 'the art of truth'[43]) do not appeal to him at all.[44] Only the third traveller, the Englishman Lincoln Forsner, takes the time to narrate his tale, which unexpectedly develops into a entire storytelling (or dreamtelling) session which occupies most of the textual time and space.

Lincoln's story is a response to Mira's confession, and an alternative to the storytelling tradition which the latter represents.[45] This metafictional aspect serves as a causal connection between Lincoln's story and the one that frames it. In turn, Lincoln's story functions as a frame for several stories at once, which are paradoxically strung together by the principle of interruptions and deferrals, thematically encoded in the text's ample references to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.[46]

In her elegant analysis of "The Dreamers," Charlotte Engberg makes use of Peter Brooks's concept of "narrative desire."[47] Blixen's narrative, she claims, resists definite closure and thus seems to challenge Brooks's theory (based on plot-orientated authors), according which we read in

anticipation that the end of the narrative will make sense of what has been read.[48] Although Brooks is well aware of the fact that "we have no doubt forgone eternal narrative ends,"[49] and his theory is more aimed at casting light on the psychological mechanisms of reading rather than explaining the qualities of individual texts, the idea of bringing Brooks's concepts to the study of Blixen's work as a theoretical frame of reference seems to be especially productive, not least for illustrating the paradoxical internal coherence of "The Dreamers," but also because the novella appears to constitute a narrative parallel to Brooks's academic theorising.

In his story, Lincoln tells the other characters about his passion for a mysterious woman named Olalla whom he has met in a brothel in Rome, and who disappeared as soon as he made up his mind to marry her (this, as the fairytale tradition has taught us, would mean the end of the story). Lincoln suspects Marcus Cocoza, a rich old Jewish gentleman he has repeatedly noticed in Olalla's vicinity, to be involved in her disappearance. Lincoln narrates his desperate search for Olalla which brings him to Switzerland, but he deviates from his story by introducing two new characters whom he meets there and who also have stories to tell. The reader, whose narrative desire has already been aroused, is thus left without the anticipated retrospection,[50] and is instead seduced into a new, no less intriguing story, which also turns out to possess a beginning and a middle, and yet no definite end. This story is narrated by a man whom Lincoln calls Pilot, and his story is also a love story. Its hero is the narrator himself, and its heroine is Madam Lola – a milliner in Lucerne, but also a revolutionary. Pilot ends his narrative with his escape from Lucerne (due to his involvement into the revolutionary events, his life was threatened), and yet at the point when he meets Lincoln, he is still hoping to be reunited with Lola, which leaves the reader with the expectation of hearing the continuation of his tale. The story that follows immediately after Pilot's story (or, to be more exact, intrudes into his unconsummated story about Madam Lola, which in turn has been incorporated into Lincoln's equally unconsummated story about Olalla) is told by Pilot's companion Baron Guildenstern. As we can by now naturally expect, this story also features a mysterious woman who cannot be possessed by the man who is attracted to her. This time the woman is Madam Rosalba, from a provincial town in Western France, who has dedicated her life to the memory of her lover – the Spanish General Zumala Carregui. In this brief story, the narrative principle of interruption, as Tone Selboe

points out, gains thematic significance: in a dramatic scene containing direct allusions to *Don Giovanni*, the reader's narrative desire is paralleled by the Baron's erotic approaches, while the deferral of 'retrospection' is mirrored by Rosalba's continuous forestalment of the blissful moment that the Baron so desires.[51] It remains unrevealed whether or not Don Giovanni in the form of the Baron receives his satisfaction (while Don Giovanni as the reader's desire is definitely disappointed once again), as the Baron's story is interrupted in the middle of its climax, first by Pilot's exclamation at recognising in Rosalba the heroine of his own story, and later by the appearance of a woman in whom all three men recognise the object of their desire.[52] They chase her, and the reader follows along, until the three men's persistent question "who are you?" makes the woman jump off a precipice.

All three stories told by Lincoln seem to acquire narrative closure in the final story of his complex narrative, which Lincoln presents as being told by the dying woman's loyal companion Marcus Cocoza. The woman, Cocoza explains, was Pellegrina Leoni, a primadonna who had lost her voice in a fire that broke out in the opera house in Milano. Having made her admirers believe in her death, she decided not to be one person any more, but to continuously play new roles, like she used to do on stage. This secret having been revealed and formal closure to all the three stories having been granted, Pellegrina dies as a perfect illustration of Peter Brooks's theory, according to which the classical narrative plot mimics the internal logic of the discourse of mortality.[53] The figure of the elusive Pellegrina[54] unites all of the threads of Lincoln's narrative, but also serves as a metaphor for the 'text' as such: she embodies the narrative that escapes death as long as it can defer closure and resist the insistent reader's demands for a final interpretation.[55] Pellegrina dies when her secret cannot be maintained for any longer, very much as it happens with the narrative, which reaches its 'death' upon the moment of retrospection, which, according to Brooks, grants order and significance to its plot.[56]

### *Collision without a conflict*

Another quality of Blixen's writings that relates them to the architext of the novella is their inherent dramatism: the collision of opposing powers as the driving force behind the development of the plot, as is reflected in the model of the novella which is offered by Henriksen. In many of

Blixen's texts, we meet characters who are polar opposites to one another, and whose encounter moves the action forward: the pious community of Berlevaag and the representatives of the outside world in "Babette's Feast," Adam and his uncle in "Sorrow-Acre" and Lady Flora and Father Jacopo in "The Cardinal's Third Tale." However, the outcomes of these encounters reveal that this convention is both maintained and subverted by Blixen. Blixen's collision is different from that which dominates Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, or German Romantic novellas. In these classical texts, the opposing powers are real antagonists who enter into an open clash with one another (like, for instance, Sophocles' Antigone and Creon, Shakespeare's Hamlet and Laertes, and Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas and Junker Tronka). Their conflict is usually portrayed and resolved in a way which leaves little doubt as to the side on which the text's sympathy lies, or which of the forces is shown as being more powerful. The situation is different in Blixen's novellas, in which the opposing characters usually represent different values, social positions or artistic ideas. They meet in a story, in which they are allowed to express these values and ideas and seek dominance, and yet it is for the most part difficult to judge unambiguously which party the text has proven to be superior in the end. A good example of this is the novella "Sorrow-Acre," which is based on an old Jutland legend and was written as an answer to the challenge to describe the manorial culture, which Blixen had received from the Danish cultural historian Hartvig Frisch.[57] Several binary oppositions can be distinguished in the plot of this novella: master vs. servant, man vs. woman, Scandinavian gods vs. the gods of Classical Antiquity, and yet the most salient and encompassing opposition seems to be the dichotomy between two generations, or rather two epochs and their respective cultures.[58] The first one, represented by the old lord of the estate, is the feudal culture of Danish countryside nobility, in which the value of an individual is defined by his representational role within a hierarchically ordered social structure. The other one, represented by the lord's nephew Adam, is the cosmopolitan and liberal social consciousness that prioritises the rights and freedom of the individual.

The action of this novella is set around 1775,[59] and starts (after a lengthy and symbolic description of the landscape) with the meeting of the two men on the morning after Adam's arrival in his uncle's estate and his childhood home. Adam has spent nine years travelling, and has missed the chance to inherit his forefathers' land and property, as his uncle has

married the bride of his recently deceased son in order to preserve the direct line of succession. Adam will live through this day partly as a companion to his young aunt, but also as a spectator to a drama that his uncle has staged: the widow Anne-Marie is left alone to reap a vast rye field, from dawn until sunset, which would usually be a day's work for three men.[60] It is the price she has to pay in order to save her son, who has been accused of setting fire to his landlord's property, with the evidence pointing equally towards his innocence and guilt. The decision cannot be repealed, not only because the landlord claims that his word is "the principle of the land" and therefore irrevocable,[61] but also (as one can gather from his extensive philosophising) because he believes Anne-Marie's deed to be meaningful in that it grants her the main role in a tragedy – "a fund of resource, a treasure for the coming generations to live on."[62] Adam, influenced by his new ideas of freedom and justice, is horrified by his uncle's demonstration of power and is close to seeing him "as a symbol of the tyranny and oppression of the world."[63] However, his consciousness undergoes transformations during the day, and although he first decides to leave the manor and go to America, he later changes his mind, by starting to see meaning in his uncle's actions and acknowledging his suffering – unlike Anne-Marie, the old lord could not save his son. One could therefore think that it is the uncle's philosophy that triumphs, and a number of readers, the writer Tom Kristensen included, have been outraged by the story, identifying the old lord's views with Blixen's own.[64] However, the text resists this identification as far as the ethical aspect of the story is concerned, both because its reader in real life is more likely to share Adam's views,[65] which are even claimed to echo those expressed by Blixen in other contexts,[66] but also because one cannot miss the irony in the way in which the old lord's character is construed. Irregardless of his own speculations about comedy being a privilege of the gods, the old lord cannot be perceived as a godlike character by the readers who hear him declare values, which, as he himself knows perfectly, do not hold true. Preaching the sacred importance of the direct continuity of the family line, he nevertheless accepts the role of the buffoon in a tragicomedy of fate: while playing a god in a human tragedy, he is granted a pair of horns, and appears to tolerate the idea that his successor will not be his own son.[67]

It would be equally unfair to say, however, that the text does not inspire sympathy with this character, especially if one looks beyond the ethical aspect of the conflict. The old lord is one of Blixen's numerous

physically barren 'spiritual aristocrats' who are the last of their kind, standing for values that are irrevocably lost. Indeed, the shift of the epochs which is represented in this novella has also been discussed in aesthetic terms by, for example, Charlotte Engberg[68] and Susan Brantly,[69] who read the two male characters as representatives of different literary traditions. The lord's is the art of the story, the same as is preached by the Cardinal in "The Cardinal's First Tale": it "values plot over character" and its "story teller must sometimes be cruel to the characters in order to remain true to the story." Adam's role is that which is befitting a character in a novel – a product of the humanistic age, who "has gained freedom for the individual at the cost of aesthetic values."[70] The ambivalent outcome of the conflict and the characters' exaggerated, melodramatic behaviour also suggest that the text has no ambition to moralise 'how it ought be', but rather symbolically narrates 'how it once has been and no longer is' – whatever social and aesthetic losses and gains this change implies.

It seems to be a general feature of Blixen's novellas (although one learns to be careful with making generalised judgments with regard to her work) that none of the conflicting or opposed parties achieves an absolute and final victory. Even in cases where there seems to be a winner, the character's superior position is usually simultaneously undermined by the narrator's irony. This also applies to "Babette's Feast," which will be analysed shortly. We will observe a power shift that takes place within the binary oppositions and which constitutes the structural foundation of the novella, with first the one, then the other of the 'opposing' powers dominating, and with Babette's 'victory' over Berlevaag turning out to be momentary and fleeting. Such ambivalent outcome of the collisions in Blixen's texts contribute to their openness and playfulness, as it ensures that they are free from categorical statements and didacticism, leaving the privilege of moral or aesthetic judgment to the reader.[71]

### *Characters as non-typical types*

It has already been pointed out that the people in Blixen's stories are not psychologically individualised and nuanced characters whose internal development is revealed in the text, and which are instead more characteristic of the realist novel that dominated Blixen's contemporary literary landscape. In Blixen's work, almost nothing is said explicitly about the characters' emotional and psychological state or nature, although we

can sometimes make guesses from a character's physiological reaction to other characters' words or actions, their names, and even the games they play. Neither are Blixen's characters individualised in terms of their language, and they also function in stylised environments. They can be called types or stock-characters, as they reappear in ever-new variations: we can, for example, distinguish flocks of 'old maidens' (the sisters de Coninck, Lady Flora, Miss Malin, The Prioress[72]), 'Catholic priests' (Father Jacopo, Cardinal Salviati, Cardinal Hamilcar von Sehestedt[73]) and 'witches' (Simkie, Babette, the same Miss Malin[74]).

However, the characters in Blixen's novellas are not types in the sense that they represent generalised embodiments of certain human qualities and functions, which we could adopt in our lives as symbolic paradigms and which we could relate to ourselves or people we meet and come to know (like we can name a cynical plotter an Iago, or a naive idealist a Don Quixote). Blixen's characters, especially those in her *Seven Gothic Tales*, are too atypical for that – they are hyperbolised and often grotesque in their defiance of the natural laws of human existence. As Dag Heede aptly notices, in Blixen's novellas, the 19th century Italian, German and Dane can chat together with no linguistic difficulty,[75] and the reviewer of *Seven Gothic Tales* Frederik Schyberg, who was quoted earlier in this work, is annoyed by the characters' unusual sexuality, claiming that in this book:

> /…/ *there are no normal people.* /…/ Men love their sisters, aunts love their nieces, some characters are in love with themselves, young women *cannot* bear children, or do not *wish* to have any, a French countess flings into her lover's face that he loves her husband and not her /…/. *Morten de Coninck* is in love with his ship "Fortuna," while Baron von Brackel and Count Boris cherish tender feelings towards a skull and a whole skeleton respectively.[76]

The effect of artificiality in many of Blixen's characters is produced by their oxymoronic structure – a combination of contradictory, mutually exclusive qualities. An interesting case in this respect is the group of 'old maidens', 'virgin libertines', or, in Blixen's own terms, "spiritual courtesans,"[77] a representative of which, Miss Malin, was discussed in the first part of this book. Having been fanatical virgins in their youth, these old ladies feel no shame and fear no authority, using even the Bible as

a source for their naughty anecdotes and comparisons. Excited by their own imagination, they play the part of coquettes, swanning about with *bons mots* in a company of males, and (as in Miss Malin's case) puckering up their withered lips for a kiss. These figures unite what in life is usually separated – innocence and sin, erotic appeal and physical ugliness, sterility and fecundity. These are paradoxical characters that, in spite of their grotesque qualities, represent the things that seem to be valued most in Blixen's authorship: imagination, courage, grand gesture and wit. However, they are often improbable as representations of human life and character, and like the previously discussed metafictional reflections on the art of storytelling, signal the fictional nature of the world in which they dwell.

If we can speak of any character development in Blixen's texts, it is in their movement between different intertexts, which again foregrounds the characters' reference to a fictional rather than an empirical reality. One and the same character can be associated by Blixen with a whole array of literary and other fictional prototypes. Malli, the protagonist of "Tempests," for instance, appears to be a perfect simulacrum, patched together from allusions to other works of art and their characters: Shakespeare's Ariel, Miranda and Juliet, Senta from Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, even Jesus Christ. No less broad is the referential field of the previously discussed Pellegrina. She evokes Violetta from Verdi's *La Traviata*, as well as Donna Anna and Don Giovanni himself from Mozart's opera, and she is also called Donna Quixotta. Her family name Leoni and her faithful companion Marcus Cocoza allow her to be associated with the statue of the winged lion of *Piazza San Marco* in Venice and with the image of Blixen – the author, the narrator and the main character of *Out of Africa*.[78] The expansive intertextual space within which Blixen's characters move brings us once again to the previously expressed point that her texts, among other things, are metanarratives postulating authentic philosophies of art and literature, in which the characters function as metaphors for abstract ideas and aesthetic concepts.[79]

### *Blixen's novellas as a pastiche of the novella tradition*

One characteristic aspect of Blixen's play with the novella tradition is her accommodation of the entire history of the genre – from its beginnings to modernist, and, in some way, even postmodernist forms. Her texts can

be related to the Renaissance *novella* and the German Romantic *Novelle*, to the French *conte* from the end of the 19th century and the English language *short story* from the beginning of the 20th century, as well as to the metafictional story from the end of the 20th century. It would be outside the scope of the present book to investigate all of these aspects in detail, and yet a short overview of some characteristic parallels will hopefully suffice to demonstrate the synthesis and subversive character of Blixen's architextual play.

The tradition of the Renaissance novella, of the type exemplified by Boccaccio, is evoked by Blixen's frequent use of the model of the framed narrative, in which different characters present their stories.[80] Blixen had planned cycles that were supposed to follow this model directly, like *Brudeparret ventes*[81] and the novel *Albondocani*,[82] which were both left unfinished. In the former, the first novella functions as a frame which establishes the situation, in which the guests at a wedding decide to entertain themselves by telling stories in order to pass the time while waiting for the bridal couple to arrive. The novellas that follow have nothing to do with the events in the frame narrative, and the only link between the individual novellas is the genre that the frame sets: the guests are expected to tell a horror story. This certainly reminds us of *The Decameron*, which sets a new theme for each day. The stories in the second project were to be united by the same character – that of Prince Albondocani.[83]

However, in many of Blixen's other novellas this model is transformed and squeezed into a single text (for example, "The Dreamers," "The Deluge at Norderney" and "Tales of Two Gentlemen"), and is often combined with the Chinese-box model of the *Arabian Nights*. Interestingly, Blixen recaptures in these novellas, which represent a novella cycle *en miniature*, one of the earliest qualities of the genre that seems to be completely irrelevant to its modern forms. This is the origin of the novella in "a cultivated society," as discussed by Friedrich von Schlegel with regard to Boccaccio.[84] Persons who in Blixen's texts have the privilege of recounting stories for other characters and reflecting on their artistic principles are often aristocrats, representatives (albeit sometimes false) of old and noble families. They are thus related and also opposed to the young Florentines fleeing in panic from the plague in *The Decameron*. The list of these characters would certainly contain the names of Prince Potenziani ("The Roads Round Pisa"), Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag and the impostor

Cardinal Hamilcar von Sehestedt ("The Deluge at Norderney"), Baron von Brackel ("The Old Chevalier") and Cardinal Salviati ("The Cardinal's First Tale"), as well as the old lord from "Sorrow-Acre." With a great deal of pathos, these characters preach wisdom on matters of life and art and are often identified by critics as mouthpieces for the author's own ideas.[85] It is generally accepted that nobility is not a social category in Blixen's work, but instead signifies a certain aesthetic or spiritual approach and is related to the Nietzschean notion of spiritual aristocracy. According to Else Cederborg, the aristocrat in Blixen's universe is the one who stands closest to God in terms of the power of imagination and who is a bit of a charlatan, but knows how to accept with dignity the trials of destiny.[86] The pathos that accompanies these characters is counterbalanced by irony, and this results in an ambivalent (both idealistic and mocking) attitude towards this 'cultivated society'. Blixen's spiritual tribunes are typically impotent people, old spinsters or Catholic priests whose sexual deficiency signals the decline of the values they represent.[87]

Yet another aspect that relates Blixen's novellas to their Renaissance precursors is a strong erotic element.[88] Sexual intercourse, either completed or interrupted, takes place or is implied in "The Monkey," "The Roads Round Pisa," "The Immortal Story," "Ehrengard," "The Old Chevalier" and many other texts.

However, Blixen's narrative is never vulgar or pornographic.[89] Erotic content is suggested through hints and metaphors only, and is never portrayed directly. A typical example would be Carlotta's euphemistic hint about Prince Potenziani's (!) impotence in "The Roads Round Pisa": "a caprice of nature had made him, although an admirer of our sex, incapable of being a lover or a husband."[90] Neither this novella, nor, for example, "Sorrow-Acre" contain explicit erotic scenes, but they lead the reader towards constructing them in his or her mind. In the case of "The Roads Round Pisa," the text produces in this way an event in which one girl loses her virginity instead of another, which is reminiscent of the typical Renaissance motif of 'lovers by mistake'. It has been previously mentioned that Sørensen and Togeby (re)construct the 'true' course of events by describing in everyday words and in technical detail how the rape has been carried out. Although some readers might be annoyed by such a 'vulgarisation' of Blixen's text, the authors' aim seems to be to make us aware of Blixen's playful narrative patterns and her ability to render the most 'indecent' things in a non-primitive way.

No fewer ties connect Blixen's novella with the form cultivated by Romantic authors. The novellas in *Seven Gothic Tales* stand closest to the Romantic spirit, and this relationship is also hinted at in the letter to the American writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher by Blixen's brother Thomas Dinesen:

> You may perhaps find the "Tales" rather old-fashioned, as regards style and form, – they do, in fact, strike me myself as being somewhat in the manner of the "Short Stories" of the beginning of last century. At the same time I imagine that there may be people to whom this style may appeal, and whom it may interest as a kind of new note in short stories, – I feel somehow like that about them myself.[91]

The action in almost all of Blixen's stories is set in the past – about 100 years earlier than the time they were composed. The action in *Seven Gothic Tales* is set specifically in the first part of the 19th century – the period when the Romantic novella flourished. However, there are things that relate Blixen's texts to the Romantic (especially German) tradition other than the period being represented. These include the arabesque structure of the plot, the combination of narration and reflection, the emphasis on the role of the artist and the transcendence of art as opposed to the dull existence of the bourgeoisie, a return to myth as a contrast to realistic and didactic art, the role of the landscape, the motifs of madness and the *Doppeltgänger*, the use of irony, etc.[92] Blixen, no doubt, gives these things her own individual touch. Madness can become a voluntarily accepted mask, which is not assumed in order to protect oneself, but in order to have more fun (as in the case of Miss Malin in "The Deluge at Norderney" or the Prioress in "The Monkey"). Romantic love is spiced up with rather grotesque sexual undertones, the description of the landscape imitates not nature, but an artistic tradition, and its Romantic aura can be easily dispelled by some witty and comic remark, as in the following passage, which is inserted into the otherwise romanticised description of the coast of Norderney:

> Heinrich Heine, who visited the bath, held that the persistent smell of fish which clung to them would in itself be enough to protect the virtue of the young fishermaidens of Norderney.[93]

Nevertheless, although incorporating qualities of the Renaissance and Romantic novella, Blixen's stories belong to the literary heritage of the first part of the 20th century. They can be paralleled to the modernist short stories by Ernst Hemingway, Carlson McCullers, or early James Joyce, as they suggest or raise existential questions and show characters in a moment of crisis, which is followed by an unexpected insight (epiphany). The theoreticians of the Anglo-Saxon short story often consider the epiphany to be a key structuring element of the modern short story, and it has also been acknowledged as an important feature in Blixen's writing. According to Johannesson, "[w]ith very few exceptions Dinesen's plots serve exactly this function: they are designed to provide a central figure, or several figures, with a new vision or insight."[94] Such insight would dawn upon Blixen's characters not as a consequence of a single event, but rather after several events which have arranged themselves into a story so that the characters can suddenly see a pattern and a meaning in the things they had to undergo. This has been already discussed with respect to the character of Countess Carlotta in "The Roads Round Pisa," who after numerous attempts to outwit destiny, finally realises that "life is a mosaic work of the Lord's which he keeps filling in bit by bit."[95] General Lowenhielm also experiences an epiphany in "Babette's Feast" when he, under the spell of the miracle created by Babette, renounces his rational attitude to life. However, the convention of using epiphanies does not escape ironic transformation by Blixen, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter in connection with the analysis of the intertextual dialogue between "Babette's Feast" and "The Dead" by James Joyce.

Finally, it can be mentioned that the ironic distance which Blixen's stories keep from the traditions they synthesise (by caricaturing the representatives of the 'cultivated society', parodying romantic clichés and creating pseudo-epiphanies), as well as their focus on the issues of textuality, allow them to be seen in relation to the postmodern metafictional novella, such as the type created by John Barth.[96]

# 3. "Babette's Feast" – a model novella or its parody?

*Introduction*

"Babette's Feast" was originally composed in English and published in 1950 in the American periodical *Ladies' Home Journal*. Two years later, it was published in Denmark as a separate book in a translation by Jørgen Claudi, and was afterwards reproduced in Danish by Blixen herself and included into the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter* (1958), with its American and English counterparts *Anecdotes of Destiny* coming out the same year.[97]

This text is, no doubt, one of the most popular Blixen wrote, and has been analysed from numerous angles.[98] However, neither its relation to the architext of the novella and the cosmogony myth, which will be in the focus of the present section, nor its intertextual play with the classic short story "The Dead" by James Joyce which will be discussed in the next chapter, seem to have been investigated.

The analysis provided in this section is first of all aimed at explaining the formal structure of the text in respect to the theoretical definitions of the classical novella proposed by the two Danish theoreticians Søren Baggesen and Aage Henriksen and briefly presented in the first section of this chapter. The analysis will not, however, be limited only to structural matters, but will be complemented by a semantic interpretation of the text and some considerations regarding its rhetoric – to the extent to which it is necessary to illuminate the issue of architextual play.

*Narrator – a 'body' behind the voice*

When reading the text for the first time, one will hardly speculate about who tells the story of the French woman Babette and the two single Norwegian sisters. One is much too intrigued by what is being told and the narrator does little to make the reader aware of her presence in the text. She acts as a typical, quite covert heterodiegetic narrator who does not participate in the events she recounts, nor refers to herself explicitly.[99] Yet, upon closer reading we would notice her presence in some personal

comments by which she accompanies her narration (like the remark following the information that the two sisters had a French maid: "It was a strange thing for a couple of Puritan women in a small Norwegian town; it might even seem to call for an explanation"[100]), or in the characters' unified speech (the language of Babette who has "never learned to speak the language of her new country" [36] does not differ from the language spoken by other characters or the narrator).

Yet another marker which raises the reader's awareness of the presence of a narrating agency in the text is the reader-oriented exposition. "Babette's Feast" starts with an introduction of the space, time and characters, as is typical of both fairy-tales and short stories:

> In Norway there is a fjord – a long narrow arm of the sea between tall mountains – named Berlevaag Fjord. At the foot of the mountains the small town of Berlevaag looks like a child's toy-town of little wooden pieces painted grey, yellow, pink, and many other colours.
>
> Sixty-five years ago two elderly ladies lived in one of the yellow houses. [23]

Unlike the majority of shorter narrative forms, Blixen's text possesses not one, but several expositions. When introducing Lorens Loewenhielm, the narrator tells the story of his and Martine's encounter which has its own beginning, middle and end. The first sentence of its exposition employs a typical stylistic fairy-tale formula, defining the time and space in general, non-specific terms: "*There was* a young officer named Lorens Loewenhielm, who had led a gay life in his garrison town and had run into debt" [25].[101] The fairy-tale atmosphere in this episode is further enhanced by an element of folklore (according to the family legend, one of Lorens' forefathers had married a Huldre, a Norwegian mountain spirit [24]), as well as by intertextual allusions to H. C. Andersen's fairy tale "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" (to be discussed later).

Another of the brief stories that constitute the narrative, the story of Philppa's meeting with the melancholic French opera singer Achille Papin, also reads almost as a fragment in itself, as does the episode "A Letter from Paris" relating Babette's arrival in Berlevaag and her dramatic escape from the horrors of the French Civil War. It even contains a seemingly 'happy ending' – Babette receiving shelter with the two

merciful ladies, although in respect to the central episode – that of the feast, it is only a prehistory.

All the individual stories, although providing the narrative with a fragmentary touch, are nevertheless smoothly strung together and united by the central episode of the feast, which suggests that in this text, we are dealing with a narrator who is a professional storyteller. It is even possible to imagine her as a character, like those we meet 'in person' in other Blixen texts, such as Miss Malin in "The Deluge at Norderney," or the old storyteller in "The Blank Page": it is sufficient to make a few very basic arithmetic calculations in respect to different versions of the novella and we can determine the time to which the storyteller belongs and maybe even see her face.

Babette appears at the sister's doorstep in 1871 and, in the English text, the feast takes place twelve years later, in 1883. In her own respect, the narrator places events around the feast "[s]ixty five years ago" [23], and thus locates herself and the time of the narration as 1948 (1883 + 65).

It is curious that in both the Danish version translated by Claudi and the one included into *Skæbne-Anekdoter* and composed by the author herself, fourteen, not twelve years had passed since Babette's arrival in the sisters' house.[102] This moves the narrator's time forward to 1950. The two years that expand the duration of Babette's stay with the sisters before the dinner in the Danish text correspond exactly to the two year interval that separates the first publications of the English and the Danish variants. In this way, the historical context in which the text was written brings to the fore the implicit relation between the narrator figure in "Babette's Feast" and the image of the author who created it.[103] This also contributes to the dialectic relation between the narrator and her story, which, according to Baggesen, is an important aspect of the classical novella, but more of this later.

### *Events*

The events in "Babette's Feast" develop over a lengthy stretch of time: thirty years pass from Martine and Lorens meeting for the first time until they see each other again at the Dean's centenary. Although such temporal limits seem to be more characteristic of the novel than the novella or the short story, "Babette's Feast" differs, however, from the traditional novelistic narrative, as its structure is elliptic, non-linear, and

constituted of fragments temporally distant from each other. The exposition is followed by three analeptic leaps backwards in time (the three stories mentioned above), later Babette's twelve (fourteen) years in Berlevaag are summarised, and in the following chapter, we learn about her "good luck" – the 10 000 francs won in the French lottery. The rest of the narration is focused on the feast – Babette's arrangements for it, its course and aftermath. The feast is the nucleus of the narrative to which all other episodes are related, resulting in the unity of form one would expect from a classical novella. The protagonist in Martine's 'love story' is present at the feast in person, and without Babette and Papin (the protagonist in Philippa's story) the miracle of the feast could not have happened at all (it was Papin who had sent the fleeing Babette to the sisters' house). Finally, the episode which portrays Babette's prosaic existence in Berlevaag with its suggestive title "Still Life" [35] serves as a contrast to the miracle of the feast created by the power of Babette's art.

The Norwegian Blixen scholar Tone Selboe in her analysis of the novella points out the scenic character of the feast episode, which underlines its central function in the text.[104] The scenic tempo can also help to foreground other pivotal episodes and events in the novella. The story of the young Lorens and Martine, for example, contains at least two short scenes which are reminiscent of two shots in a silent film, the first of which pictures their first meeting in the marketplace, and the second Lorens' visit to the Dean's house. Other scenes would be the duet of Zerlina and Don Giovanni performed by Philippa and Papin, the scene describing Babette's arrival in Berlevaag, the scene in which she asks for permission to arrange the dinner, as well as the very final scene in which Babette's identity is unmasked.

Especially those scenes that coincide with the introduction of a new character seem to foreground the events that could be considered as preparatory for the central event of the feast. As we will see, all these events fit, although in a playful triple way, into the model of the classical novella as defined by Henriksen.

The deep structure of "Babette's Feast" is particularly inviting for the application of Henriksen's model, as it rests on binary oppositions which in the course of the narrative prove to be unstable. One traditionally distinguishes in this text the oppositions of the pious life of the community vs. the pleasures of the world that the latter renounces, of Catholicism vs. Protestantism, of rural and provincial vs. urban life, of religion vs. art.

All the oppositions can be reduced to the principal one: the little world of Berlevaag and 'the great outside world', which through its three representatives breaks into the familiar settled order of the former.

At the beginning of the story Berlevaag emerges as a secluded space, separated from the rest of the world by mountains [23].[105] The centre of this universe is the yellow house in which the Dean and his daughters reside. Its own, additional delimitation from 'the great world' is symbolically reiterated later in the text in the description of the dining room (the traditional coming-together place for the town's religious community):

> This low room with its bare floor and scanty furniture was dear to the Dean's disciples. Outside its windows lay the great world. Seen from in here the great world in its winter-whiteness was ever prettily bordered in pink, blue and red by the row of hyacinths on the window-sills. And in summer, when the windows were open, the great world had a softly moving frame of white muslin curtains to it. [49]

This short paragraph repeats the words "the great world" three times, thus stressing the opposition between it and Berlevaag. However, it also contains implications of the frailty of the boundaries between the two worlds – the moving curtains. The symbolism of this paragraph is even more apparent in the Danish text, in which the number of windows in the room corresponds to the representatives of 'the great world' who in the course of time happen to trespass the borders of the little one.[106]

### *The first 'stick' – Lorens Loewenhielm*

The first 'event' (in Henriksen's terms) that strikes the world of Berlevaag from without is the acquaintance between the young officer Lorens Loewenhielm and Martine. Lorens' world is the world of active life, world of ambition and earthly pleasures in which, as the narrator lets us know, he is not happy. Martine emerges before his eyes as "a gentle, golden-haired angel to guide and reward him," who could alter his existence and grant him "a higher and purer life, with no creditors, dunning letters or parental lectures, with no secret pangs of conscience /… /" [26].

However, Lorens' hopes remain unfulfilled, as in the presence of the Dean and his disciples his tongue fails him and he retreats from

Berlevaag's austere universe. Once again he returns to 'the world', yet this time it is not gambling and amorous feats, but career and glory. Having renounced Martine, Lorens renounces his dream and chooses the rational approach to life, as suggested by his farewell words: "I shall never, never see you again! For I have learned here that Fate is hard, and that in this world there are things which are impossible!" [27].

No matter how melodramatic Lorens may sound and appear, he, like many of Blixen's central characters, is not spared comedic qualities, if one understands the comic in James Wood's terms of "comedy of forgiveness," which evokes both laughter and sympathy and in which one does not laugh at, but with.[107] On the one hand, Lorens is a handsome man, popular among his fellow officers and bearing a ringing name which indicates courage.[108] Later he turns out to be the only one who can truly appreciate Babette's art and is therefore an especially important guest for Babette, but also an important character for the reader, as it is through him that we learn what the guests are being served to eat and drink. On the other hand, we will find details in the text that significantly reduce his grandeur, such as in the mute marketplace scene, which contains a sentence that has clear lexical, syntactical and situational allusions to the sentences in H. C. Andersen's "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" picturing the silent exchange of glances between the tin soldier and the paper maiden:

> BLIXEN: "He looked down at the pretty girl, and she looked up at the fine horseman." [25]
> ANDERSEN: "He looked at her, and she looked at him, but they said never a word."
> "He looked at the little maiden, and she looked at him; and he felt that he was melting away."[109]

The Danish originals sound even more alike:

> BLIXEN: "Han saa ned paa den smukke Pige, og hun saa op paa den kække Rytter."[110]
> ANDERSEN: "Han så på hende; og hun så på ham, men de sagde ikke noget."
> "Han så på den lille jomfru, hun så på ham, og han følte han smeltede /…/."[111]

Both Andersen's and Blixen's character are soldiers in uniform, but they are also similar in their silence. Having gained admission to the Dean's house, Lorens "could find nothing at all to say" [26], and the sisters later remember him like "the handsome, silent young man who had so suddenly made his appearance, and so suddenly disappeared again" [28]. However, if H. C. Andersen's soldier keeps silent because of his sense of honour and can be called a tragic figure ("Had the soldier only called out, "here I am!" they would easily have found him, but he did not think it proper to shout when he was in uniform."[112]), Lorens who loses his speech in front of a psalm-singing religious flock, cuts, undoubtedly, a tragicomic figure.

*The second 'stick' – Achille Papin*

The second person who approaches the space of Berlevaag is Achille Papin, a famous opera singer from Paris. Neither is he to become a conqueror and the outcome of this event is the same as of the first one – expulsion in Henriksen's terms. Like Lorens, who represents the physical and rational world, Papin stands in opposition to the religious world of the Dean and his community. However, he is also the opposite of Lorens as he represents the world of art and imagination and is a stranger in the real one. Identifying himself with the part he plays, he kisses Philippa in an artistic zest, and is later baffled by her decision to terminate the singing lessons:

> A little later he thought: "I wonder what is the matter with that hussy? Did I kiss her, by any chance?"
>
> In the end he thought: "I have lost my life for a kiss, and I have no remembrance at all of the kiss! Don Giovanni kissed Zerlina, and Achille Papin pays for it! Such is the fate of the artist!" [31–32]

Papen's character not only represents the world of art, but, in Philippa's respect, also signifies the possibility of a different, presumably fuller, or happier life. For Martine, this possibility seems to have been a marriage with Lorens, for Philippa – the realisation of her singing talent.

*The third 'stick' – Babette*

The third 'event' is the arrival of Babette, a refugee from the Paris Commune. From the very start, the sisters feel a strange anxiety in Babette's

respect for her complete otherness. Paris, where "luxury and extravagance" [36] reigns, embodies better than anything else for them the strange and dangerous world they have rejected.

Babette is, however, not expelled like Lorens or Papin. Out of Christian mercy and probably sentimentality, the sisters give shelter to the woman in need sent to them by Providence and an old acquaintance of theirs. Babette experiences, according to Henriksen's model, the second outcome, i. e. assimilation. For many years, she patiently cooks the sisters' modest meals, although, as the reader is later to find out, she is a culinary genius from a most fashionable Paris restaurant. Why the great world loses again in Babette's person is not difficult to explain. The little we know about Babette before the news of her great gain makes her a half-character, just as Lorens, Papin or the sisters, unable to become a victor on a foreign ground. Babette's function as a representative of physical, everyday existence is embodied in her role as a *pétroleuse* in Paris and a servant in Berlevaag, with the latter being symbolically summarised in the allusion to the Gospel according to Luke: "the dark Martha in the house of their two fair Marys" [37].

## *"The point"*

The events described above form the axis of collision between 'the great world' and the world of Berlevaag, which will reach its climax in the episode of the feast. However, there are other moments in this narrative that have direct structural and causal connection to the central episode and which can be best described with the help of the term "the point" offered by Baggesen.

### DETERMINATIVE POINT

In "Babette's Feast" the point splits into two: the determinative and the interpretative, as has been provided by Baggesen's definition. The determinative point is the moment when Babette receives the news of having won the lottery and regains her former status as an artist, although the reader learns about the latter only in retrospect.

After this point, the relation between the Berlevaag community and Babette starts changing, with Babette's growing power showing through her altered behaviour and the way the sisters see her. If her request to

arrange the festive dinner is accompanied by the look of her eyes "pleading as a dog's" [42], she later appears to the sisters as "the bottled demon of the fairy tale" who "had swelled and grown to such dimensions that her mistresses felt small before her" [45]. Her new strength is also expressed vocally. Although before the determinative point Babette says almost nothing, having heard the sisters protest against the idea of the dinner, she becomes dauntlessly resolute ("Babette took a step forward. There was something formidable in the move, like a wave rising" [43]), and delivers a boisterous speech.

### INTERPRETATIVE POINT

The opposition of the two worlds culminates on the eve of the feast, and is intensified by a whole range of diabolic metaphors which reflect the sisters' and the community's view of Babette.[113] We are made aware of how inimical the brothers and sisters are against everything that Babette is about to offer them, swearing not to say a word about it. However, Babette's dinner, which they feared to be "a witches' sabbath" [46], develops into the celebration of holy communion: "[S]omehow this evening tongues had been loosened" [56], the brothers and sisters confess the sins of their youth and grant forgiveness to each other. This central event, an interpretation of which will be offered in a short while, is followed by a dénouement – the interpretative moment, in which, as provided by Baggesen, all the strings of the earlier narration are assembled. It even opens a certain 'interpretation of existence', which is explicitly voiced by Babette quoting Papin:

> It is terrible and unbearable to an artist /…/ to be encouraged to do, to be applauded for doing, his second best. /…/ Through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost! [68]

This episode fills in the major ellipsis of the text and provides the miracle of the feast with a logically sounding explanation: Babette had once been the chef of the finest restaurant in Paris – a genius of gastronomic art. Solving the enigma at the very end of the narrative is a classical method (as in short stories like "La Parure" by Guy de Maupassant (1884; "The Necklace"), "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry (1906), or in classical

whodunits). However, in Blixen's text, the surprise is reserved for the sisters, while the reader is granted the possibility to start filling in the ellipsis already in the reading process. This happens with the help of various textual hints, mainly through General Loewenhielm's recollections and comments. The interpretative point thus only formally assembles the events into a logical chain, and in order to dive deeper into the meaning of the text, we have to take a better look at its central event – Babette's feast.

## *Babette's feast. Story as the main dish*

### RITUAL AMBIVALENCE. LAST SUPPER OR HEATHEN CEREMONY?

A number of Blixen's critics have stressed the ritual character of the episode of the feast, especially associating it with the myth of Atonement.[114] The feast alludes to the Last Supper, as well as the Wedding at Kana (12 guests, the inversed transformation of wine into water[115]). Wendy M. Wright who writes about the film based on Blixen's story makes a direct relation between Babette and Christ,[116] and Gabriel Axel's cinematic interpretation of Blixen's text seems to justify this parallel, as it shows Babette wearing a distinct black cross on her neck which the camera often focuses on.

However, allusions to the New Testament in Blixen's novella are ironic,[117] and we know from other Blixen's works that she herself was against simplified and irresponsible treatment of this dangerous "old theme with its divine and human associations."[118] In her review of the novel *Rytteren* (1949; *The Riding Master*) by the Danish author Hans Christian Branner, Blixen blames the writer for "blending mystery and myth"[119] and showing unambiguously which character in the book is Christ. As Ivan Ž. Sørensen and Ole Togeby put it, Branner's novel in Blixen's eyes is "a gospel which is supposed to redeem the reader," while for her, "characters in the story are something one tells about, and not what the reader is to believe in."[120] In "Babette's Feast," Blixen herself takes up this "old and dangerous theme," yet the way in which she places her characters in relation to it is more complicated, leaving more freedom for the reader's own judgment and interpretation.

Babette's direct parallels to Christ are impeded by her demonic qualities (although such vision says more about those to whom it belongs than about Babette). It is also made problematic by the nature

of Babette's sacrifice driven by personal necessity, as is clear from her reply to Philippa's gentle reproach:

> "Dear Babette," she said softly, "you ought not to have given away all you had for our sake." /…/ "For your sake?" she replied. "No. For my own." [66][121]

Finally, Babette is not the only character in the text who can be associated with Christ. The Dean, although long dead, is also present at the supper held in his honour. The first thing the guests see upon entering the sisters' house is "the face of their beloved Master, wreathed with evergreen" [49], a detail that both situates the Dean in what happens here and now and within the timeless space of eternity. The pious sisters and brothers recall the miracles performed by the Dean, which echo those by Christ: his "walking upon the waves," to the other side of the frozen fjord to keep a Christmas sermon [57]. Also later in life, when recalling the dinner, they would think that they had been granted "one hour of the millennium" [62] – the promise cherished in them by their spiritual leader. The reader, however, knows that the bliss they had experienced is the result of Babette's art, be it achieved with the help of exquisite wine and food.

Such ambivalent use of the Atonement myth links the two contrastive figures, the priest and the artist who both are able to transcend earthly time and space. During the feast, time and eternity converge, the brothers and sisters believe that they are seeing their Promised Land, Lorens is transposed by Babette's regale to Paris of his past. "The artist possesses some of the divine transcendence, namely the ability to create change," as Charlotte Engberg writes of Babette.[122] There is, however, a major difference between the two ways of transcendence, as the Dean's belief demands absolute renunciation of this world, whereas in Babette's art, "one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite or satiety" [58]. She does not disclaim the reality, but grants it with meaning, by transforming and creating it anew.

This idea can be developed further by interpreting the feast episode in relation to heathen myths of Cosmogony and the rituals associated with them and unfolding in this text alongside the Christian ones.

Seen through the eyes of its inhabitants, Berlevaag is a sacral space, where everything earthly is being renounced and holy hymns are being

chanted. However, set against the background of heathen mythology (this reading being invited by the structure of the narrative divided into traditional bipolar oppositions), this space acquires a different, quite opposite meaning, especially after the Dean's death. That Berlevaag and Norway can in this text represent chaos, a wild and untamed space, is already implied by their geographical position. Berlevaag is located in the North East in relation to Paris where Papin and Babette come from. In the cosmological model of Nordic mythology, in the context of which it is logical to set a text in which the action takes place in Scandinavia and which is written by a Scandinavian author, the North and the East are the lower poles associated with darkness, death and with what is uncultivated, while the South and the West are the domains of light and life, the pure and sacred.[123] Some of these 'chaotic' qualities seem to lurk behind Papin's impression of the vast wilderness of the Norwegian landscape which overwhelms him by its "snowy summits, the wild flowers and the white Northern nights," making him feel "small in the sublime surroundings" [29]. Babette, a Parisian like Papin, should have seen the place in a similar way – as untamed and foreign.

The sense of chaos is, however, strongest felt in the everyday life of the community. As long as the Dean is alive, it is kept outside the tiny and secure space of the town, but the situation changes some years after his death, which is the cause of great sorrow to Martina and Philippa:

> [I]t had been to them a sad and incomprehensible thing that in this last year discord and dissention had been raising their heads in his flock. They had endeavoured to make peace, but they were aware that they had failed. /…/ From a past half a century back, when the unshepherded sheep had been running astray in the mountains, uninvited dismal guests pressed through the opening on the heels of the worshippers and seemed to darken the little rooms and to let in the cold. The sins of old Brothers and Sisters came, with late piercing repentance like a toothache, and the sins of others against them came back with bitter resentment, like a poisoning of the blood. [38–39]

In mythological thinking there is one secure way of dealing with the uncultivated chaotic space, namely by performing rites of cosmicization, as explained by Mircea Eliade:

> [W]ild uncultivated regions and the like are assimilated to chaos; they still participate in the undifferentiated, formless modality of pre-Creation. This is why, when possession is taken of a territory – that is, when its exploitation begins – rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.[124]

The cosmicization of the foreign location is not carried out spontaneously, but "according to an archetype."[125] Babette's dinner also has ritual qualities,[126] and it is obvious according to which archetype she is acting. Following the model of the luxurious *Café Anglais* of Paris where she exercised her art, Babette establishes within the space of Berlevaag a space of her own, thus realising the third possibility according to Henriksen. The establishment of a new temporary space in the very centre of the world of Berlevaag is indicated by the figure of the doorstep, through which the guests have to pass: "Tonight the guests were met on the doorstep with warmth and sweet smell" [49]. Having crossed the border, they enter a qualitatively different space in which body and soul unite and past and present meet. Babette's art makes earlier antagonisms dissolve: the pious community and the intruder from the great world General Loewenhielm eat and drink at the same table.

Like a real cultural hero, Babette brings the world back to the primordial time of the beginning of things, and out of opposing elements creates her cosmos.[127] Actually, the possibility of the communion of the opposites – 'the great world' and Berlevaag, the flesh and the spirit, man and woman, reality and dream, past and present, was already implied in the very first pages of the novella by the metaphor of the kiss. The Biblical quote "Mercy and Truth, dear brethren, have met together /…/ Righteousness and Bliss have kissed one another" [26] is the first time expressed by the Dean, and during the dinner, it is taken up by the General [59]. This is a quotation from the Book of Psalms, however it has been transformed, as Blixen substitutes in it the word "Bliss" for the word "Peace."[128] It seems to be a conscious transformation on the author's part, as the same happens in the Danish text, where instead of the word *Fred* (peace), a similarly sounding word *Fryd* (joy, delight) is used.[129] The kiss in Blixen's paraphrase of the Holy Scripture thus supplies the original Biblical discourse with erotic connotations, and in this way, it adumbrates the convergence of

the spiritual and bodily experience taking place during the dinner, at the same time serving as a metaphor of what often happens in art.

Babette's art makes all the guests experience what they have lacked or rejected. The pious Brothers and Sisters indulge, although unconsciously, in bodily pleasure by tasting wine and food, while the man of the world Lorens Loewenhielm regains his idealism. Having failed to understand how the dishes of the finest restaurant in Paris could be served on the table of the Dean's humble house, he finally gives up looking for reasonable explanation of things: "General Loewenhielm no longer wondered at anything" [59]; "better to be drunk than mad" [57]. The intertextual allusion of the dinner to the Wedding at Kana, its exuberance, as well as the general's farewell words to Martine ("I shall be with you every day that is left to me /…/ if not in the flesh, which means nothing, in spirit, which is all /…/" [62]) allows the feast to be interpreted as the staging of Martine and Lorens' wedding which has never taken place in 'reality'. By analogy, the dinner also symbolically stages the possibility of Philippa's triumph as a diva of Paris, since it was to *Café Anglais* that her admirers were supposed to draw her carriage, according to Monsieur Papin's predicaments many years ago: "the crowd would unharness her horses, and themselves draw her to the Café Anglais, where a magnificent supper awaited her" [31]. It is not accidental that the dinner having ended, Philippa finally perceives herself as an artist or realises that she really could have become one. This is indicated by her final words, which are a repetition of those she once heard from Papin, and which, although addressed to Babette, seem to be directed at herself:

> "/…/ In Paradise you will be the great artist that God meant
> you to be! Ah!" she added, the tears streaming down her cheeks.
> "Ah, how you will enchant the angels!" [68]

### *Engendering of narrative*[130]

The parallel of the feast episode and the cosmogony myth are an invitation for the episode to be read as a symbolic narrative about the creation of a new world – the world of art. Although such a conclusion is not new,[131] it is still interesting to trace how, through a careful selection of symbols and their play, the text creates the parallel between the miraculous culinary event and art, narrative art in particular.[132]

A hint towards this parallel can be found in another of Blixen's texts which also uses food metaphors to elucidate an aesthetic concept. In the already quoted review of H. C. Branner's novel, Blixen addresses her contemporary writers with the following words:

> The average Danish reader who, for more than three-quarters of a century has been satiated by the depiction of reality, has, – like the thirsty hart in a dry land that smells and senses a running spring far away – suspected and sensed myth and adventure far away in the *Riding Master* – the spring, the fountain, the well; and has run towards them. The skilled writer has himself not known with what tones he has attracted people, but people pricked up their ears and recognized them. /…/
>
> Danish poets of the year of Our Lord 1949! Press the *grape* of myth or adventure into the empty goblet of the thirsting people!
>
> Do not give them *bread* when they ask for *stones* – a rune stone or the old black stone from the Kaaba; don't give them a *fish*, or five small fish, or anything in the sign of the fish, when they ask for a *serpent*. [133]

In this quote which playfully subverts Biblical imagery,[134] Blixen warns against the primitive use of the Christian mystery ("fish") and realism ("bread") in literature and advocates the art of the mythical story ("grape," "stone" and "serpent"), which speaks of what is universal to man and resists univocal interpretation. If we now return to Babette's menu, we will literally find all the symbolic ingredients of the good story in it. Read in the relation to the quotation above, exquisite wine and grapes acquire new symbolic meaning, as does the turtle soup, with the figure of the turtle undergoing interesting transformations. The turtle comes to the sisters' house alive and, seen with Martine's eyes, evokes traditional Christian interpretation, as the symbol of evil:

> In the light of the lamp it looked like some greenish-black stone, but when set down on the kitchen floor it suddenly shot out a snake-like head and moved it slightly from side to side. /…/ this thing was monstrous in size and terrible to behold. [45]

However, seen against the background of heathen cosmogony myths, the serpent-like turtle invites a different interpretation. Out

of the 'serpent' Babette makes a soup – an act which in itself reads as a symbol of creation, since the killing of a serpent in different cultures symbolically stands for the overcoming of chaos and creation of cosmos.[135] It is noteworthy that the turtle is not only associated with a serpent by Martine, but also with a stone, another of the metaphors in the review quoted earlier, standing for the mythic, symbolic, non-realist, non-preaching narrative.

Before going to the table, the anxious and alarmed guests sing a psalm which is a direct reference to the Gospel according to Matthew, but also to the review quoted earlier in which the Gospel words are subverted:

> Wouldst thou give a stone, a reptile
> to thy pleading child for food? … [sic] [50]

Ironically, it is exactly this which they get served in the form of a turtle soup, yet the reader who is familiar with the symbolic meaning of these ingredients from Blixen's essay, reads them as symbolic components of the myth-like story representing the narrator's and, behind her, the author's own art. The narrative symbolism of Babette's 'story' is also enhanced by the temporal and spatial fluidity of the episode. Babette's dinner takes place both in Berlevaag and Paris, as well as in Celestial Jerusalem and transforms the initial "sixty-five years ago" and "the small town of Berlevaag" into "once upon a time … far far away" of a fairy tale, or into the eternal and universal chronotope of the myth.

Read as a story, as a myth-related narrative, the episode of the feast turns into a text within a text, a fictional space within a fictional world. This space, is however, not created out of nothing, and one of its functions in the text even seems to be laying bare the principles of textual genesis. These paradoxically evoke those later formulated in Wolfgang Iser's theory, according to which, the literary text both oversteps and incorporates reality by transferring its separate elements onto the fictional space in the act of fictionalising. These elements combine and interact among themselves, creating a new reality, a space of textual play. This is what gives the fictional text its double quality: it both represents what is and what is possible.[136]

We can trace this idea of the dual nature of the literary text in the episode of the feast, which assembles almost everybody (with the exception of Papin) mentioned earlier in the text. The earlier events serve as

a background for the central episode and can even be said to represent 'the raw material' for Babette's art – the extra-textual reality behind the fictional world that Babette creates. This new world preserves some of the relationships that the characters have been initially involved in (Martine and Lorens, the Dean and the community, Philippa and her talent), yet through interaction with new textual elements, these relationships undergo transformations and are set into a new spatial and temporal frame. The episode of the feast projects the possibilities of the 'real' life that have never been fulfilled: Martine and Lorens' wedding, Philippa's triumph as an artist. At the same time, none of these possibilities are shown as actually taking place, and this new world retains until the very end its 'as if' quality. The guests are not celebrating Martine's wedding or Philippa's talent. Both events are nothing but visions, the possibilities that in 'life' turned out to be impossible, and have only been staged by Babette's art and verbalised through the interpreter's discourse.

There are a few other points illustrating the idea that "Babette's Feast" is a story about the storyteller who with the help of Babette's character explores and comments on the art she practices herself. Reading the novella in this way, one can better understand the presence of certain textual paradoxes. One would not wonder, for example, why Lorens is astonished on hearing the words of his own speech, as his reaction reminds of that of 'living' prototypes who have recognised themselves in a literary text:

> "/…/ For this reason we tremble …[sic]" Never till now had the General stated that he trembled; he was genuinely surprised and even chocked at hearing his own voice proclaim the fact. [60]

The interpretation offered here also explains why the narrator calls the events that happen immediately before and during the feast the "tale" ("Babette remained in the house of the Dean's daughters for twelve years, until the time of this tale" [35]), although at that point, she has already recounted the stories from the sisters' youth, and the story of Babette's arrival and her 12 years in Berlevaag.

The reading of the feast episode as a metaphor for the art of the story is also supported by the presence of a transitory narrative space which emerges between this episode and the dénouement of the novella. After the feast, the heavy snowfall is said to cover all the houses letting the

town sleep until the late afternoon [63–64] and thus prolonging the ideal time for almost a night and a day. The feast having ended, Philippa and Martine believe that from now on, their life will be different, and the distance between the heaven and the earth will be reduced:

> "The stars have come nearer," said Philippa.
> "They will come every night," said Martine quietly. [63]

The old Brothers and Sisters, having left the Dean's house, stumble in the snow, "as if they had indeed had their sins washed white as wool" [63]. This image of snow, through its allusion to Isaiah's prophecy,[137] becomes a suggestion of the purifying power of art, the idea already formulated by Aristotle. At the same time, the text ironically unveils the transience of the aesthetic experience. Having read the entire text, we realise that it ends where it started. After a period of intoxicated sleep, Berlevaag will return to its former state of being, and Babette will never go back to Paris – a sad evocation of Auden's famous dictum "that poetry makes nothing happen."[138]

This sad ending does not, however, contradict the ironic and playful tone of the text. The story already created cannot simply vanish, especially when we feel in the text the presence of the narrator – a professional storyteller with a face reminiscent of the author's own. This presence (which the analysis offered here has hopefully helped to elucidate) secures the possibility of the 'eternal return' of Babette's miracle, and this once again foregrounds the dialectical relation between the narrator and her story (and the authorial image behind them), which, according to Baggesen, is an essential aspect of the classical novella.

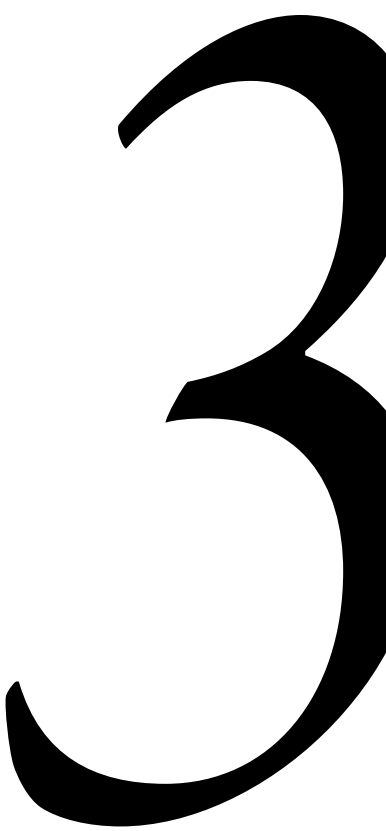
Had one finished the analysis of "Babette's Feast" at this point, one would have reasons to claim that the text in many respects functions as a model example of the classical novella. Indeed, it exhibits numerous *differentiæ specificæ* of the genre, enough to satisfy most novella theoreticians. It features *few key characters* with the focus lying not on their psychology, but their role in the patterns of fate and narrative. It possesses *a distinct plot line* that evolves around its nucleus – the feast episode to which the rest of the textual segments relate (*unity of composition*). One can recognise in it all the *structural elements* distinguished by Baggesen and Henriksen: *narrator*, who divides the textual time into the narrated time and the narrator's time, *events*, i. e. collision between two opposing

worlds, as well as a *determinative* and *interpretative point* that respectively trigger the action and set the narrated events into a logical chain opening up a world view perspective. The novella, as the present analysis has demonstrated, is also a *symbolical* narrative about the engendering of art, with *the narrator entering into a dialectic relation with her story*. Also rhetorically, the novella creates the *truth effect*, with all events appearing credible within the fictional world that the text establishes, and it even leads to the same existential conclusion – that "one can never know."[139] However, "Babette's Feast" points away from the rhetorical model of the classical novella, by simultaneously breaking the spell of the illusion of reality it creates, by laying it bare, and by making into its major theme the very process of transforming reality into fiction.

There are other qualities in this text that both evoke and subvert conventions of the genre. Like many other novellas and short stories, this text employs a mythical structure, but does so in an original way, by playing out two different mythological paradigms against each other. Also the tripling of the collision and its outcomes (the realisation of all three possibilities as defined by Henriksen) proves to be a playful interpretation of the traditional structure of the classical novella.

More aspects of architextual play in "Babette's Feast" will be discussed in the next chapter by continuing explorations into its ties with the novella tradition, or rather its later form – the modernist short story represented by James Joyce's "The Dead."[140]

Chapter Three
Challenging the Precursor



# 1. "Babette's Feast" vs. James Joyce's "The Dead"

*Parallels of the plot*

The parallels between "Babette's Feast" and "The Dead" (*Dubliners*, 1914), "the paragon of modern short stories,"[1] are multiple.[2]

Feasting is the central situation in both texts, and in both we encounter similar character types: two elderly unmarried sisters, one of whom has been endowed with a talent for singing, as well as a male guest of honour who distinguishes himself from the rest of the company by his social position / education and who delivers a speech at the table. The two texts are also similar in their patterns of plot development, as both are based on the contrast of moods – tragic vs. festive / comic. In both texts, the mood of the initial situation is unexpected in respect to the one indicated by the title and contrasts with the prevailing mood of the text as a whole. "The Dead" starts with a description of festive commotion, but is dominated by the atmosphere of death and spiritual paralysis created with the help of a whole range of "mortuary allusions,"[3] and culminating in Gabriel's epiphany that he himself has been a living dead. Analogous contrast, although of the opposite direction, can be traced in "Babette's Feast." Its festively predisposing title is followed by the introduction of Berlevaag and its joyless community. Nevertheless, the exuberant dinner which later intrudes into the characters' monotonous existence, as well as their naïve behaviour and unconscious surrender to the power of Babette's art secures the lucidly comic impression that the text leaves on the reader. Finally, the endings in both texts ring a tune contradictory to the tonality of the entire text: critics point towards the possibility of Gabriel's spiritual rebirth,[4] while the circular composition of "Babette's Feast" sadly foregrounds an inevitable return to the old way of existence in Berlevaag.

The two texts also have a similar deep structure resting upon traditional binary oppositions, the opposing poles of which converge in the course of the narrative.[5] The polysemous image of snow is yet another link between the two texts. In the "Dead," it can be related to many things: death, but also nature (as a contrast to Gabriel's artificiality); it is also

what unites all Ireland, both its living and its dead. In "Babette's Feast," the snow, just like the stars that "have come nearer"[6] signifies the union of the body and spirit under the spell of Babette's art, but it also implies the evanescent nature of the aesthetic experience.

Although "Babette's Feast" might appear to be an improvisation on the theme, structure and images set by another text, it nevertheless distances itself from its model in several respects.

"The Dead" belongs to the early stage of Joyce's writings and despite its strong symbolism offers a realistic, even naturalistic representation of the recognisable Dublin of the beginning of the 20th century. It reflects the spirit of the day and diagnoses the characters' state of mind in relation to this spirit. Thus it is also a psychological story, and the paralysis of the Irish mentality, particularly its fixation on the past, which is the dominant theme of the entire collection, is paralleled by the protagonist's personal situation. Gabriel comes to realise that he is a greater stranger to his wife than a long dead boy who once has been in love with her and who probably has died for her. Thanks to the narrator's assiduous recount, the reader of "The Dead" is allowed, as Eric Bulson points out, to get "an intimate look" into the protagonist's "deepest fears, desires, and insecurities."[7]

"Babette's Feast," as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, is not a realistic, but a meta-narrative about art and its engendering. It rejects psychological character analysis and has no ambition to recreate the atmosphere of the real Berlevaag or Paris, these names rather serving as signposts of the symbolic topography of the world divided into opposites.[8] Blixen's text announces it to be art's prerogative to abolish the dichotomies of life and resist the flow of time, whereas in Joyce's text, the hope for the protagonist's harmony with his environment lies in the psychological moment of his coming to self-awareness, although art (the song that triggered Gretta's memories) has a role to play in this process.

By foregrounding the theme of art and the artist in "Babette's Feast," Blixen seems to be reproaching her precursor for leaving this theme latent and overshadowing it with psychological and political motifs and concerns.[9] This is not to say, that Blixen's text in any way belittles or refutes its prototype. Blixen's irony is reminiscent of that discussed by Linda Hutcheon in respect to literature which she calls "metafiction," it is irony, which "is more playful than ridiculing, more critical than destructive."[10]

This type of irony is not to be missed in Blixen's unfolding of a small detail in Joyce's text into a separate story in her own text. During the opera talk, one of Joyce's characters – Mr. Browne, tells of the time, when

> the gallery boys would sometimes in their enthusiasm unyoke the horses from the carriage of some great prima donna and pull her themselves through the streets to her hotel.[11]

As was already discussed in the previous chapter, the image created by Joyce is evoked by Blixen in the story of Papin and Philippa – in Papin's vision of Philippa's future triumph as a Paris opera diva. If one comes back to "The Dead" after having read "Babette" and with the above parallel in mind, one will be very likely to relate this image to Joyce's Aunt Julia and project Philippa's fate onto her. One will be much more aware of this character's personal and at the same time universal drama – the forsaken talent and the world impoverished by the loss of an artist.[12] It seems that by subjecting to her own ideological and aesthetic needs the material of another text, Blixen is able to alter the reading of the latter, thus testifying to Jorge Luis Borges' idea that "every writer *creates* his own precursors."[13]

### *Epiphany*

The play of "Babette's Feast" with the precursor text is not limited to their ideological dialogue, but continues on the level of structure, involving the element of epiphany, which in both texts calls for special attention.

Joyce is generally considered to have introduced the term 'epiphany' into literature.[14] He formulated the concept explicitly in *Stephen Hero*, an early version of *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916):

> By epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.[15]

The term 'epiphany' is taken from religious discourse where it signifies "manifestation of a god, or a spirit in body" (in Christianity – of Christ to the Magi).[16] Having been successfully adopted in literary criticism,

epiphany is interpreted as "a psychological and literary mode of perception,"[17] or a moment of "a fleeting insight" that "can reveal the possibility of transcendental truth."[18]

The epiphany is by no means the prerogative of a particular genre. Moments of revelation are present in William Wordsworth's poetry, as well as in the novels by Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf.[19] However, in the Anglo-Saxon short story of the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century, an epiphany becomes a highly important structural element, usually coinciding with the most emotionally and semantically charged point in the text.[20] As Robert Langbaum has observed, in short stories (and short poems), the epiphany usually "occurs at the end, reordering and rendering static all that has proceeded."[21]

Epiphany plays a unifying role in *Dubliners*, in which each short story, according to Umberto Eco, "appears like a vast epiphany, or at least the arrangements of the events tend to resolve themselves in an epiphanic experience."[22] "The Dead" is the concluding story in the collection, and the epiphanic mode is at its highest here. Its importance is stressed by the timing of the feast in the Morkans' house: as a number of critics note, it takes place on the 6th of January when the Christian world celebrates the feast of the Epiphany.[23] The epiphany occurs at the end of the short story, when Gabriel, looking at his sleeping wife, realises that he doesn't know her at all and becomes aware of his own inability to experience "the full glory of some passion."[24] As one can judge from his resolution to "set out on his journey westwards"[25] and the image of snow that falls over all Ireland, this is also the moment when Gabriel accepts his Irish identity, as Ireland is throughout the text associated with the West.[26] There are, however, different interpretations: Brewster Ghiselin claims, for example, that both the image of snow that falls over the lonely churchyard and "the journey westward," signify movement "into death,"[27] thus not only implying the protagonist's spiritual disintegration, but possibly also foreshadowing his physical death. Whatever interpretation one chooses, the epiphany, although it appears at the very end of the text, is considered to mark the turning point in the protagonist's life. In most criticism on the text, the epiphanic moment is viewed as bearing the greatest semantic emphasis, and although "the text never quite equals the epiphany,"[28] the way the latter is interpreted often appears to determine the interpretation of the text as a whole. Umberto Eco makes a similar conclusion about the collection in its entirety, claiming that the epiphanies in *Dubliners*

are "key moments," "climax, summary, and judgment of the entire situation," and thus different from those in Joyce's later writings where they represent "an operative moment of art" – "the act of the *artist who shows something* by a strategic elaboration of the image."[29]

In "Babette's Feast," it is Gabriel Conroy's counterpart – General Loewenhielm – who experiences an epiphany. It befalls him during the dinner, when he gives up his prior intention "to dominate the conversation round that same table by which young Lorens Loewenhielm had sat mute" [55] and stops wandering at anything [59]. The General delivers a speech, sharing with the others his unexpected insight into infinite grace, which grants us "which we have chosen" and "which we have refused" [60]. To this, he will later add: "in this world everything is possible" [62], indirectly acknowledging that his former choice of a rational attitude to life had been a mistake. This situation formally corresponds to the conventional use of epiphany (it strikes the General suddenly and reveals "transcendental truth"). The problem is, however, that one can hardly call Lorens the subject of this revelation. It is more correct to call him its object or medium, as one can gather from the narrator's comment concerning the General's startled reaction to his own words in which the irrational aspect of the epiphany reaches the level of the grotesque:

> [H]e was speaking in a manner so new to himself and so strangely moving that after his first sentence he had to make a pause. /…/ it was as if the whole figure of General Loewenhielm, his breast covered with decorations, were but a mouthpiece for a message which meant to be brought forth. /…/ he was genuinely surprised and even shocked at hearing his own voice proclaim the fact. [60]

Robert Langbaum, who has investigated epiphany as a modern mode, shows that epiphany is not only a literary but also a psychological phenomenon: "it is not an incursion of God from outside," but one which arises "from a real sensuous experience." An epiphany, according to Langbaum, is brought on by "a sensitive observer," who finds himself in a "sensitized condition," and his insight is only triggered by a trivial object or incident.[30] In Blixen's text this model is reversed. The object that triggers the epiphany (Babette's exquisite dinner in the sisters' modest home) is by no means trivial, but its effect is comic, in that the epiphany

befalls the observer in the direct sense of the word. This observer is not especially sensitive, but, as the earlier quoted narrator's remark suggests, is rather reminiscent of a dummy 'pronouncing' words, which in reality are uttered by someone manipulating it. It is also ironic that despite his 'transcendental discoveries', Lorens remains ignorant of the true nature of the event in which he immediately participates. Although he is the only one in the company who is able to properly appreciate Babette's art, he leaves Berlevaag without finding out that the dinner has been prepared by the same woman it made him recall.

This parodied epiphany endows Lorens' character with new comic traits and, in contrast to its hypotext,[31] tunes the text into a playful key. However, it is also indicative of the tendency in Blixen's work to abstain from psychological analysis. In contrast to Joyce, who "wished to depict the sensory texture of thought and feeling that constitutes a human life,"[32] Blixen's texts seem to question the very possibility of understanding a human being.[33] Finally, Blixen's comic epiphany makes fun of the convention of the genre to place semantic emphasis in certain points of a narrative. Joyce's "strange sentence"[34] ("the journey westwards") has left many critics with the impossible task of deciphering its meaning. Blixen's text seems to be even more explicit in teasing the naïve reader who expects to find in Lorens' revelation the key that will unlock the text or at least lead her towards its 'true' meaning. It is a set of banal clichés that he or she gets instead.[35] This trick is also an appeal to the reader to pay attention to all the slightest details in the text, reading them against each other and arriving at one's own personal epiphany. After the analysis offered in the previous chapter (which focused on the metafictional aspect of Blixen's novella), one can, for example, suggest the following one (by making a small change in the General's words): "in the world *of art* everything is possible." A cliché again? Then Blixen must be pulling the reader's, just as the General's, strings.

## 2. Surprises of the surprise ending: Blixen's "The Heroine" vs. "Boule de suif" by Guy de Maupassant

"Babette's Feast" is not the only text by Blixen that replays a novella or a short story by another author, and by replay here is not meant the sporadic borrowing of motifs or images, but the transformative rewriting of a plot *per se*, with its thematic and structural elements included. It seems that there might be something in the genre itself that invites such replay and which made Friedrich von Schlegel in his considerations of the *Novelle* point out the possibility of remodelling already known stories so they would acquire the charm of novelty.[36]

Blixen's rewritings of classical stories have been already investigated by other scholars.[37] Among them are the dialogue between "Boule de suif"[38] ("Ball of Fat") by Maupassant and Blixen's "The Heroine."[39] The present analysis of this 'textual couple' is not so much aimed at interpreting Blixen's story by using Maupassant's text as a key to the semantic contents of the former, but rather at highlighting the architextual play of Blixen's text with the structural model of its hypotext. One cannot do this, however, without first considering the thematic parallels of the two texts.

In both stories, the action takes place during the Franco-Prussian war. In "Boule de suif," we follow a company of Frenchmen who flee from Rouen, which has been occupied by the Prussians. On their way to Le Havre, they are detained by a Prussian officer who refuses to let them pass unless Miss Elizabeth Rousset, a coquette nicknamed "Ball of Fat," satisfies his desire. The latter, being a French patriot, proudly rejects the proposal, but her fellow-travellers finally make her accept it, and then later turn away from her in disdain. In "The Heroine," we encounter an analogous situation, but its outcome is inverted. Frederick Lamond, a young Englishman and a student of religious philosophy, flees Berlin and on his way gets stranded in Saarburg together with a group of French travellers. The Germans, having found Frederick's manuscripts and notes, accuse him and an old priest of espionage, putting all the company in danger of being executed. Just as in "Boule de suif," the permission to travel further can be granted for a certain price: the Prussian colonel requests that the beautiful Heloise (of whom we first know no more

than that she is a rich and generous young widow) would come and fetch the passport "dressed like the goddess Venus."[40] Heloise leaves it up to her fellow-travellers to decide whether she should accept the proposition, and they proudly turn it down. Soon, however, they get the permission to leave, and Heloise receives a bouquet of roses from the officer "[w]ith his compliments. To a heroine" [75]. Some years later, Frederick meets Heloise in Paris, where in an exquisite music show called "Diana's Revenge" she performs the role of the Roman goddess "with nothing on at all" [77].

The surface structure of the narrative in "Boule de suif" is quite elementary and thus it differs from the majority of his stories. The plot follows a linear development and has no ellipses to be filled in (either by the text itself or in the reader's mind) that would spice up the text with the unexpected, surprising touch that Maupassant's stories are often associated with.[41] The compositional mastery of this text is of a different kind. The text is constructed according to the principal of mirror symmetry: the Last Supper motif introduced at the beginning of the narrative (Elizabeth generously sharing the princely contents of her food-basket with her hungry fellow travellers) is inverted in the closing episode, which pictures the companions' greedy eating and demonstrative ignoring of the woman who had saved them. This contrastive, rather than elliptic, structure better suits the ideological contents and the form of humour in this text. Maupassant's "Ball of Fat" is no comic or tragicomic anecdote about ironic paths of fate or human weaknesses,[42] like his "Un Million" ("A Million"), "Ce cochon de Morin" ("That Pig of a Morin"), or "La Parure" ("The Necklace"), but a bitter social and psychological satire, with the tension accelerating and culminating in the final episode with words of outright indignation:

> She felt herself drowned in the scorn of these honest scoundrels, who had first sacrificed her and then rejected her, like some improper or useless article. She thought of her great basket full of good things which they had greedily devoured, of her two chickens shining with jelly, of her *pâtès*, her pears, and the four bottles of Bordeaux; and her fury suddenly falling, as a cord drawn too tightly breaks, she felt ready to weep. She made terrible efforts to prevent it, making ugly faces, swallowing her sobs as children do, but the tears came and glistened in the corners of her eyes, and then two great

> drops, detaching themselves from the rest, rolled slowly down like little streams of water that filter through rock, and, falling regularly, rebounded upon her breast. She sits erect, her eyes fixed, her face rigid and pale hoping that no one will notice her.[43]

Blixen has chosen a different model, creating in her text an ellipsis (Heloise's profession) which is only filled in at the very end of the text: when watching the show, Frederick finds out that the woman whose honour he and his companions thought they had saved has been performing in a nude show since her very youth. It is certainly ironic from the perspective of the history of literature that Blixen, although subverting her precursor's plot, places her story in the company of the so-called stories with a surprise ending, a form, of which Maupassant is considered to be a master, but which he does not use in the story that Blixen subverts.[44]

The issue of the ending has received a great deal of attention by theoreticians of the short story. The Russian formalist Boris Ejxenbaum even considers it to be one of the two key features of the genre:

> By its very essence, the story, just as the anecdote, amasses its whole weight toward the ending. Like a bomb dropped from an airplane, it must speed downward so as to strike with its warhead full-force on the target. /…/ "Short story" is a term referring exclusively to plot, one assuming a combination of two conditions: small size and the impact of plot on the ending.[45]

The ending has been a focus of investigation in a number of American short story studies of last decades.[46] The short story theory makes a distinction between the notions of the 'end' and 'closure' – a dichotomy that seems to have appeared with the emergence of the open-ended short story in the third decade of the 20th century. Before that, the ending usually granted semantic coherence to the story, and, as suggested by Susan Lohafer, likened the classical short story to a completed puzzle game: "it was the nature of short stories to click at the end. It was their special power – their formal duty."[47] The ending of the open type of short story is different, it is ambiguous in such that it does not solve the conflict in the story. In such short stories (and Lohafer is quoting Austin Wright), "[c]losure arrives when there is semantic completion of

a specific interpretation."[48] It means that the task of semantically completing the story is shifted from the text to the readers who can "figure out things for themselves."[49]

These two short story conventions meet in Blixen's "The Heroine." On the one hand, the twist ending of the story, as practiced in the 19th century tradition (by Edgar Allan Poe and Maupassant, and a little later by O. Henry) carries strong semantic charge. It reveals Heloise's secret and shows the central event of the story (the encounter with the Prussian officer), as well as the figure of Heloise in a completely new light, removing from them the heroically romantic aura which had been created through Frederick's focalising look. On the other hand, Blixen's story remains open, since this ending explains neither the relationship between Heloise and Frederick, nor the motive for Heloise's 'heroic' act. Nearly all who analyse this story in one way or another give away the difficulty of relating Heloise's profession to her reaction to the colonel's request: "It would have cost her nothing to comply with the officer's demand"[50]; "She could on that occasion, her occupation taken into consideration, very easily have paid the price and even secured herself a triumph"[51]; "The point is that Heloise could have given away for a penny, or just for nothing, the honour for which "the people" had put their lives at stake, – for this is what she does in life."[52] It is more than ironic that the interpreters almost word by word repeat what the characters in "Boule de suif" think: "The brutal thought, expressed by his wife, dominated all minds: "Since it is her trade, why should she refuse this one more than another?""[53]

"The Heroine" plays with the surprise ending convention in a similar way to how "Babette's Feast" plays with that of epiphany. It establishes a situation that shapes the reader's "horizon of expectations" which, however, is not fulfilled in the course of the further narrative. The reader of "The Heroine" is lured into a story, which in many respects resembles a classical one: it reconstructs a classical 19th century plot, is set in the same period, and spins an intrigue that catches the reader's interest from the very start. If one is not familiar with Blixen's style, one might be induced to passive reading in anticipation of the moment when, to refer to Baggesen again, all the earlier threads converge, and the perspective of the story opens up.[54] As this does not happen, the imitation of the classical structure turns out to be a "red herring"[55] which both misguides the reader, but also incites her to more active engagement with

the text. The mischief of this situation lies, however, in the fact that one, even having finished reading the story, may not at once become aware of its open ending. The readers who still thirst after clarity and closure will be easily deceived into believing that they, just like their colleagues in the 19th century, are provided with an explanation of what they have been reading. At least this is what Heloise's words to Frederick during their meeting in Paris can be taken for:

> They would have made me do it, to save their lives, if he had put it straight to them at first, or if they had only been left to themselves. And then they would never have got over it. /…/ I tell you, my friend, for those people, it would have been better to be shot than to live on with a bad conscience. [79]

Heloise's words suggest that she acted with the purpose of saving the good conscience of her fellow-travellers and giving them an opportunity to make themselves heroes. One of the early interpreters of the story, Robert Langbaum, sees in this explanation a reflection of Abelard's teaching to which Heloise's name alludes. According to Langbaum, Heloise's deed had a symbolic significance to those who witnessed it. In respect to Frederick, Heloise's behaviour allowed him to understand the doctrine of the Atonement, on which he was writing a treatise, in the way that had been interpreted by Abelard, namely, that the meaning of Atonement lies not in the crucifixion, but in its effect on us. Thus, Langbaum claims:

> The implication is that the Crucifixion was like Heloise's sacrifice in that it meant nothing to God to die. Since Heloise's example inspires the refugees to offer to die for her, another implication is that the Crucifixion was designed not to absolve us of our sins but to show us what we must be prepared to do for any value we cherish.[56]

Langbaum's interesting conclusion is based on the assumption supported by Heloise's own words that her intension was to save her companions from accepting the proposition. The text, however, contains several ambiguous hints that undermine Heloise's version of what happened in Saarburg. These hints imply that her performance was meant for Frederick whom she wished to have wished to see her naked, and to engage with her into a more intimate relationship, but he did not

understand any of her signs.[57] Right after the episode with the German officer, Heloise says to Frederick: "There was a falling star. You might have wished" [75], as if reproaching him for a missed occasion. During the conversation with Frederick in the music-house in Paris, she characterises the German officer as "an honest young man" who "could really want a thing" [79–80]. Right afterwards come the words clearly aimed at Frederick: "Many men have not got that in them" [80]. The idea that Heloise did want to be seen seems to be directly confirmed by her final remark: "'How I wish, my dear friend,' she said, 'that you had seen me then'"[81]. In respect to the 'theory' that Heloise spells out for Frederick, these hints create textual *aporia* which makes a definite interpretation impossible.

Fortunately, the reader, even when being lured into the trap of the 'covertly open' ending, does not end up in a complete impasse. It is very likely that Elizabeth W. Bruss, one of the proponents of the analogy between texts and games, would classify this text as a "mixed motive game," *viz*. such a game, where "the implied initiator of the game" [the implied author] and the reader are not absolute antagonists, but have a shared interest.[58] Although "the implied initiator" is constructing obstacles for the reader, the latter should not be misguided completely in his or her endeavour to understand the text: "An entirely defeated, gulled, or bewildered audience could hardly appreciate the skill or even recognize the triumph of an author."[59] Even if one is against equating texts and games, one can accept the idea of playful cooperation between Blixen's text and its reader, which combines misleading and guiding. The polyphonic intertextual field into which the protagonist of Blixen's text is planted is a labyrinth and Ariadne's thread in one: it can both entrap and lead one towards an exit. Originating in a semantically lucid short story by the French naturalist, Blixen's Heloise is united with her legendary French namesake, as well as Tennyson's Godiva, goddesses of classical mythology, or the heroines of Italian Renaissance painting. The readers, depending on their experience, erudition and theoretical background, may play their own games with the heroine and the text – choosing among various intertexts or their combinations and with their help constructing the meaning of the text.

That this strategy gives a great deal of room for the reader's creativity can be demonstrated by comparing intertextual analyses by two authors who arrive at very different interpretations.[60] Lisbet Holst's

feminist-psychoanalytical reading of "The Heroine" focuses primarily on such intertexts as the Atonement myth, the classical myth of Diana (Artemis) and Actaeon, as well as the story of Heloise and Abelard. The treatise on the Atonement that Frederick is writing, the description of Heloise's appearance during the interrogation and the three chances to get closer to Heloise that Frederick had had and missed, allow Holst to associate Heloise with Christ, and Frederick – with Peter who has thrice renounced him. She claims that the title of the performance, "Diana's revenge," suggests that Frederick's failure to respond to Heloise's approaches has a destructive effect on his psyche, and even leads to his symbolical castration, since the myth of Diana and Actaeon, "speaks of what happens to a man who satisfies himself automatically by just watching a naked woman at a distance."[61] However, the central point of Holst's interpretation is grounded in the allusion of the text to the story of Heloise and Abelard that has reached us in the form of their letters. Holst demonstrates that Blixen's Heloise, just like her namesake in the Middle Ages, is yearning to be acknowledged as a woman, albeit as a sinful one. Holst claims with reference to Lacan that only in a discourse that emphasises women's sensuality, is woman being recognised as a subject. Thus according to this interpretation, Blixen's story proves that in the discourse that reprehends woman her lust (like in the scriptures by the Holy Fathers) there is "more ethics, simply more balls /…/ than in any of Abelard's or Frederick's literary penances" that reject her as a sexual being.[62]

Ivan Ž. Sørensen, who in his interpretations of Blixen's work often refers to her biography and personality, sets Heloise's figure into an even broader intertextual, or rather intermedial context. He pays special attention to the paintings by Veronese and Titian that portray Venus and Diana. Associating the changes in Heloise's appearance with the respective images of one of the two goddesses, Sørensen claims that Heloise turns into a Diana because Frederick fails to accept her as a Venus. Sørensen reads the story as an inversive paraphrase of the myth of Diana and Actaeon, in which Diana is taking revenge for not having being seen. Finally, in analysing the text's allusions to the Pygmalion myth, Sørensen claims that Frederick, opposite of Pygmalion, turns a live woman into a piece of art, and that the couple of Heloise and Frederick represent Blixen's ironic self-portrait, in which desire (Heloise) and art (the writing Frederick) can never be reconciled. Sørensen comes to an original conclusion, one

that inverses Freud's sublimation theory: in Blixen's case, it is not the unfulfilled sexuality that gives impetus to creative production, but it is creative ambitions that do not allow the realisation of desire.[63]

Due to Heloise's origin in a literary prototype, its relation to a wide range of other intertexts, as well as its ekphratic framing in multiple paintings, it is also possible to read the text as a meta-aesthetic narrative which ironises over Frederick's naive attitude to art. Holst considers it to be Frederick's greatest limitation that he fails to accept Heloise as a living woman and sees her only as work of art,[64] yet this might be exactly the point with Heloise. The text allows for the interpretation of this character as a metaphor for the work of art, and perhaps even narrower, as that for the picture. Heloise is related to the world of pictorial art not only in Frederick's mind, but also in the narrator's descriptions of Heloise's appearance that revoke famous scenes by Italian masters,[65] as well as by her role in the *tableau* – a stage genre in which action freezes into a picture.[66] If Blixen's Heloise stands for the idea of the picture, then the meaning with her is to be seen, but seen in a special way.

When Frederick observes the pictures in *Das Alte Museum* in Berlin, he is only concerned with what they depict, and is happy when he can recognise in them "Biblical characters," "mythological and allegorical figures" [68]. He treats Heloise in a similar way: she is for him "like the books" that he has read [76], and when he compares her to a picture, he is not struck by her individual beauty, but finds in her traces of motifs he knows from other pictures – "the goddesses of Titian and Veronese" as they "sit enthroned or dance" [70]. What Heloise – 'the picture' – seems to be expecting from him and what he is not able to do is to experience her through his senses, and not only intellectually, to be moved by her 'naked' form – her lines, shapes and colours, but also to acknowledge that she is more than she immediately represents for him. Frederick seems, somehow, to have been advancing in the right direction: after he had parted with Heloise, "his heart was aching both with happiness and with woe" and he even seems to have learnt that there are things about Heloise that will be "left uncomprehended, an unexplored, a mysterious area." However, as the narrator further tells us, he returns to his "old self of the universities of England" that "demanded to be enlightened, to know and to understand" [76].

These four interpretations (by Langbaum, Holst, Sørensen and the one just sketched out) have not been presented here in order to argue

which of them is the most 'correct'. To insist on the special value of the last interpretation would be at least impertinent, since it only develops further what has been proposed by other interpreters. These different roads round "The Heloise" have been followed in order to show that the text kindly opens for them all. There have been, and will be, other ways to read this text, and yet even after a most interesting and convincing interpretation, there will be something in the text that will be, to refer to "The Heroine" again, "left uncomprehended" and "unexplored." However, an interesting interpretation will usually serve as a starting point for a new one, joining and carrying forward the process of the evolution of critical discourse as a continuous play of challenge, dialogue, rivalry and renewal. But this is already a different story and different play…

# Concluding Chapter

# Summing up

Blixen's texts are texts at play in that they exhibit the traditional qualities of the latter: freedom against restriction, openness, innovation, fun and resistance to closure. They challenge literary conventions and juggle elegantly with other texts. They produce playful narrative structures and defy final interpretations, opening themselves generously to the play of the reader's interpretive ingenuity.

Blixen's texts invite themselves to the approach taken in this book by pointing towards their own playful nature through a whole set of meta-communicative signals: explicit discussions of matters of play and the employment of a wide range of play and game *topoi* which perform important functions in the texts in which they appear. A game of piquet, for example, becomes a model for the narrative structure in "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen," suggesting new possibilities for interpreting the story, but also reminding the reader that this reading will soon be challenged by a new interpretation. Play and game metaphors guide us towards Blixen's philosophy of *Weltspiel* in which man's life is subject to chance and choice, severe necessity and humorous paradox. They open up for the poetics of art implied in her essay "On Modern Marriage," which in this book has been read in an untraditional way – not as a discourse on the relationship between men and women, but as a text that suggests an original typology of art. Its ideal form is 'art as play' in such that it sanctions the audience's freedom and floats freely on the waters of literary tradition, demonstrating humour, boldness, intelligence and imagination. The images of game and play also partake in the construction of characters and in the expression of aesthetic ideas these represent, as has been demonstrated by the analyses of two stories from *Seven Gothic Tales* – "The Poet" and "The Deluge at Norderney."

Although play is an ambivalent, open-ended phenomenon, its manifestations still allow for a certain systematisation. This has been done in the study behind the second part of the book, which was aimed at tracing some typical mechanisms of architextual play in Blixen's texts. The discussion and analysis in this part focused on the relation of the author's texts to two generic paradigms that her work is traditionally

associated with: the oral story and the classical novella. The affinity of Blixen's writings with the oral tradition appears to be more of an artistic construct, achieved through strategies of mimicry or textual role-playing. We can compare this to the bluffing strategy of a card player who declares a combination which does not correspond to the cards one actually has at hand. It is doubtful, however, that this bluffing move of Blixen's texts is meant to cheat their fellow player, it is rather used to amuse and intrigue, to widen up his or her literary horizon, and also very importantly – to speak about what is essential in the narrative, be it an oral or a written one.

The relation of Blixen's work to the second generic paradigm, the classical novella, has turned out to be ambiguous as well. Her texts balance between the loyalty to the generic canon and its subversion, with the traditional elements of the genre often functioning as play objects that Blixen originally manipulates and transforms. At the same time, it is possible to trace new regularities: the coherence of the plot in Blixen's text, for example, is paradoxically achieved through the interplay of its heterogeneous elements. Blixen's *oeuvre* is dynamic in that it oscillates between the negation of structure (the overstepping of generic conventions) and the creation of new ones: even being transformed, the traditional elements of the genre remain the structural vertebra of a text and in their transformed form tend to be repeated in other texts. No matter how tempting it would be to call some patterns of such architextual play (fragmentary coherence, collision without conflict, non-typical types, quasi-epiphany) rules of Blixen's architextual games, I have refrained from doing so for several reasons. Firstly, because I share the view that it is a fallacy to conflate literary conventions with regulatory rules, as was discussed in the introductory chapter. And secondly, even if one accepted this analogy, in order to define these strategies as rules, one would need to undertake a much broader investigation (ideally, of all of Blixen's texts that participate in the genre of the classical novella and its related forms), which could show whether these new conventions form a 'law', *viz*. a general pattern in Blixen's work in its entirety.

This book could have been structured in a different way by distinguishing more strategies of play and discussing them in separate chapters: wordplay, stylistic play, metafictional play, intertextual play, social play and more. However, having started investigating architextual play in Blixen, I realised that it is difficult to divide textual play into separate

and fixed categories as one type of play easily combines with or develops into other types of play, and that play indeed resists constrictions and is open to constant change.[1]

The play of Blixen's texts with other texts of the related generic paradigm ("The Dead" by James Joyce and "Ball of Fat" by Guy de Maupassant), for instance, manifests itself both in the *intertextual* (*hypertextual*) *dialogue* with the themes and ideologies of their hypotexts, and in the *architextual deconstruction* of the structural patterns of the latter (epiphany and surprise ending). This provokes *play with the reader* whose expectations have been aroused and deceived, who has no other way out of the text other than joining in its play and granting it semantic closure, and who discovers in the text the *metafictional* (*meta-aesthetic*) *play* with 'laws' of art that the text both implies and exhibits. Nevertheless, I wish to believe that there will be studies focusing on other playful texts and other play strategies in Blixen, for example, that of lexical and stylistic play, which for a person who is neither a native speaker of Danish nor English remains too ambitious a task.

The critics who have touched upon aspects of play in Blixen have directly or indirectly contributed to the deconstruction of the old and firmly established myth of Blixen as an elitist author. Hopefully, this book adds to the theoretical legitimacy of this process, by showing that play, which naturally embraces ambiguity and ambivalence, is the dominant principle of this otherwise quite unpredictable discourse. This approach encourages the embracing of the internal contradictions and indeterminacies of the authorship instead of trying to solve them once and for all, and to see in them a renouncement of the patent of final truth, a sign of respect and confidence in the reader as a fellow player. Blixen's play is of a social, perhaps even democratic type (and who says that democracy is without challenge?), such which "always requires "playing along with"".[2]

I have read somewhere that Blixen was able to produce in her interlocutor the feeling of being interesting to oneself. Something similar is happening with her readers. Her texts are able to make us imagine along, question, search, and dare, perhaps even revealing "the best side of [our] nature," which, according to Blixen (and Schiller) is the essence of play.[3] However, if we conceive of Blixen's play as something which is not self-contained, but which requires to be taken up by the reader, we will also learn to be less arrogant with regard to other interpreters and

other interpretations, and will be less sure about the nonpareil serendipity of our own insights, hopefully refraining from attributing ourselves to "a select group of kindred souls capable of following her [Blixen's] indirections and allusions."[4]

And finally, I believe that a scholar who chooses the perspective of play cannot avoid being influenced, at least to some degree, by its spirit. Maybe some will find that the author of this book has sometimes allowed herself too much freedom in her interpretations by voicing ideas which in the text are left inexplicit and sometimes paying too little attention to the issues that it explicitly raises. Who knows, maybe there cannot be a play critic who is "not a bit of a charlatan," "the quality of charlatanry" being "indispensable" not only "in a court, or a theatre, or in paradise,"[5] but also in a discourse on literary play. Those who know Blixen will know what is meant by these words. To reassure others, it must be said that I have been conscious of the limits of interpretation set by the texts themselves, and also referred extensively to other sources that in their own interesting ways deal with the same texts. The reader of the present book, especially if he or she just starts her or his acquaintance with Blixen, will know where to go further. One should be warned, however, that this journey might be a risky one and turn into play one pursues for life.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION · CHAPTER ONE

1 'The reader' or 'the interpreter' will be in this chapter referred to as 'she', since the more politically correct alternative 'he or she' is too cumbersome and because I base my assumptions about the possible reader-response first of all on my own experience as a reader.

2 Catherine Bates. *Play in a Godless World*. Open Gate Press, 1999, p. 72.

3 Karen Blixen. *Breve fra Afrika 1914–31*, 1, 2. Ed. Frans Lasson. Gyldendal, 1978. The English translation: Isak Dinesen. *Letters from Africa*. Ed. Frans Lasson. Trans. Anne Born. University of Chicago Press, 1981.

4 See, for example, Torben Brostrøm. Karen Blixen, in his & Jens Kistrup's *Dansk litteraturhistorie*, 5. Politikens forlag, 1977, p. 257, and Thorkild Borup Jensen. *Karen Blixen – en kanonforfatter*. Dansklærerforeningens Forlag, 2009, p. 65.

5 Consider, for example, Blixen's own words written in a letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen: "For it is, – quand *même*, – my firm belief that life is very beautiful and rich and great; indeed, should I die of plague on a dung heap I would still believe it. And it is this that I will always, always wish for you, beloved brother, that you may see life's gloriously beautiful face through all the misery you come to see, and may preserve that faith. I have probably become something of a Muhammadan through having been with Somalis so much; if Fara [sic] comes to Paris /…/ you will see what strength there is in their simple, unperturbable belief in fate" (Dinesen (1981) *op. cit.*, p. 76). For the impact of Blixen's African experience on her authorship, see also Merete Klenow With. Om Karen Blixen og hendes forfatterskab, in Karen Blixen. *Et Udvalg*. Ed. Merete Klenow With. Gyldendal, 1964, p. 178.

6 See Liselotte Henriksen. *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999, p. 58.

7 Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 2.

8 On the stylistic and dramatic effect of Blixen's own reworkings of her texts, see Walton Glyn Jones. Karen Blixen's Translations of Her Own Work, in *Karen Blixen – Out of Denmark*. Danish Literature Information Center, 1998, pp. 3–24.

9 See, for example, Peter Olivarius. Karen Blixen. Den radikale aristokrat, in Jens Anker & Knud Wentzel (eds.). *Hovedsporet: Dansk litteraturs historie*. Gyldendal, 2005, p. 546; Jette Lundbo Levy. En usamtidig fortæller?, in Jette Lundby Levy [et al.]. *Litteratur-historier: Perspektiver på dansk teksthistorie fra 1620 til nutiden*. DR Multimedia, 2004, p. 317.

10 Danish original: "Hjemmehørende i fjerne tider og egne dukkede hun op som en fremmedartet fugl i den danske andegård, sjælden og fornem, og blev straks modtaget med behørig reverens og beundring" (Mogens Brønsted. *Nordens Litteratur efter 1860*. Nordisk forlag, 1972, p. 371). Even a stronger metaphor is used in an interview on Danish Radio referring to the situation after the publication of her first book: "a lonely orchid among the homebred spiritual cabbage heads" (Danish original: "en ensom orkidé bland de hjemlige, åndelige kålhoveder"), see Else Brundbjerg (ed.). *Samtaler med Karen Blixen*. Gyldendal, 2000, p. 136.

11 Richard Gandrup. Syv fantastiske Fortællinger, in *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 28.09.1935, reprinted in Hans Andersen & Frans Lasson (eds.). *Blixeniana 1980*. Karen Blixen Selskabet, 1980, pp. 232–234 and Ivan Ž. Sørensen & Ole Togeby. *Omvejene til Pisa. En fortolkning af Karen Blixen "Vejene omkring Pisa."* Gyldendal, 2001, pp. 258–259. See also Gandrup's answers (as well as those by Emil Frederiksen) to the questionnaire written in the mid-sixties by Hans Holmberg and published in his *Glæde over Danmark, 11: Om Karen Blixen*. Högskolan i *Kristianstad*, 1986, pp. 161–162 and 167–168.

12 Danish original: "Et Stykke blændende kunstnerisk Simili af en begavet, men forskruet Forfatterinde"; "Isak Dinesen præsterer en Effekt, men ingen Pointe" (Frederik Schyberg. Isak Dinesen, alias Baronesse Karen Blixen-Fineckes "Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger": Et Stykke blændende kunstnerisk Simili, in *Berlingske Tidende*, 25.09.1935, reprinted in Andersen & Lasson (1980) *op. cit.*, pp. 225–231, extracts from the review can also be found in Sørensen & Togeby (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 57).

13 See, for example, Dag Heede. *Det umenneskelige: Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001, p. 25.

14 See Robert Langbaum. *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, p. 155.

15 It is symptomatic that an interviewer on Danish Radio in 1951 reverently greets the writer by calling her "a genius" and "a living classic" (Danish original: "et geni"; "en levende klassiker," see Brundbjerg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 135). Shortly after Blixen's debut, a reaction against neorealist literature took place, with the literary magazine *Heretica* playing an important role in this process. A new generation of authors (Martin A. Hansen, H. C. Branner, Albert Dam and others) emerged who brought back myth and fantasy into Danish literature. These changes in the Danish literary climate are likely to have contributed to the gradual establishment of Blixen as a central figure in the Danish literary landscape.

16 Danish original: "[D]en litterære placering af hende havde været tvivlsom, navnlig i Danmark. Selv har jeg altid foretrukket at se hende i en europæisk sammenhæng. I en tradition, hvor gamle motiver brydes op og bringes til at danne nye mønstre. Jeg har oplevet hende som et hjørne i en trekant, hvor de

to andre hjørner er Stravinskij og Picasso" (Erling Schroeder. *Pierrot: Erling Schroeder fortæller*. Rhodos, 1984, p. 2).

17 P[hillip] M[arshall] Mitchell. *A History of Danish Literature*. Gyldendal, 1957, p. 275.

18 Of those, the relation to Sigrid Undset seems to be the most problematic, as is also evidenced by Blixen's comments on Undset's view of life which Blixen finds "despicable" for its "horror of all phenonomena of life; horror of any form of love or passion, horror of every kind of experience, and the frightful horror of darkness and death" (Dinesen (1981) *op. cit.*, p. 274).

19 "Sorrow-Acre," for example, draws on an old Jutland legend, and "The Fish" tells a story of the Danish King Eric Glipping. One of Blixen's earliest stories, "Grjotgard Aalvesøn og Aud," 'recycles' a fragment of Snorri's "Saint Olav's Saga" (for a detailed analysis of this intertextual dialogue, see Ieva Steponavičiūtė. Saga Reflections in Karen Blixen's Texts (with focus on Grjotgard Aalvesøn og Aud), in Ērika Sausverde & Ieva Steponavičiūtė (eds.). *Approaching the Viking Age* (ser. *Scandinavistica Vilnensis*, 2). Vilnius University Publishing House, 2009, pp. 163–177. For more on Old Scandinavian topics in Blixen's juvenilia, see Else Cederborg. Indledning, in Hans Andersen & Frans Lasson (eds.) *Blixeniana 1983*. Karen Blixen Selskabet, 1983, pp. 32–35.

20 Brantly writes about the significance of body language and physiological responses for expressing a character's emotional state in Blixen's texts making the assumption that this technique might have been borrowed from Icelandic sagas (Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 3).

21 See Borup Jensen (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 65–69.

22 Isak Dinesen, in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (retrieved from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/163827/Isak-Dinesen). This and all the subsequent references to online sources in the book can be retrieved on 15 03 2011.

23 Brøndsted (1972) *op. cit.*, p. 374.

24 With (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 215.

25 Mitchel (1957) *op. cit.*, p. 275.

26 Thomas R[eed] Whissen. *Isak Dinesen's Aesthetics*. Kennikat Press, 1973, p. 5.

27 Bo Hakon Jørgensen. Historien som orfisk forklaring på spørgsmålet: Hvem er jeg? – eller sanselighedens metafysik i KB forfatterskab, in his *Symbolismen – eller jegets orfiske forklaring*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1993, p. 165.

28 Ellen Rees. Holy Witch and Wanton Saint. Gothic Precursors for Isak Dinesen's "The Dreamers," in *Scandinavian Studies*, 78 (2006), pp. 334, 347.

29 Grethe F[ogh] Rostbøll. *Længslens vingeslag: Analyser af Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1996, p. 12.

30 Morten Kyndrup. Dinesen Versus Postmodernism. The Criticism of Modernity and the Problem of Non-simultaneousness in Relation to Isak Dinesen's Works, in Gurli A[agaard] Woods (ed.). *Isak Dinesen and Narrativity: Reassessments*

*for the 1990s*. Carlton University Press, 1994, pp. 133–149. Kyndrup does not claim that Blixen is a postmodernist author, but rather shows that her writings lend themselves to the postmodern strategies of reading, especially due to their critique of modernity and understanding of modernity as a construct (see especially p. 136).

31 Charlotte Engberg. *Billedets ekko: Om Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 2000, p. 19.

32 Poul Borum. *Danish Literature: A Short Critical Survey*. Det danske Selskab, 1979, p. 74.

33 For example, by Aage Henriksen, see his Karen Blixen, in his *Litterært testamente: Seks kapitler om kærlighed*. Gyldendal, 1998, pp. 211–247.

34 See, for example, Marianne Juhl & Bo Hakon Jørgensen. *Dianas hævn: To spor i Karen Blixens forfatterskab*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1981 (The English translation: *Diana's Revenge: Two Lines in Isak Dinesen's Authorship*. Trans. Anne Born. Odense University Press, 1985); Annelies van Hees. *The Ambivalent Venus: Women in Isak Dinesen's Tales* (ser. *The Nordic Roundtable Papers*, 8). Trans. Patty van Rooijen. University of Minnesota, 1991; Susan Hardy Aiken. The Uses of Duplicity: Isak Dinesen and Questions of Feminist criticism, in *Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen: Tradition, Modernity, and Other Ambiguities (A University of Minnesota International Symposium, April 17–20, 1985): Conference Proceedings*. University of Minnesota, 1985, pp. 84–90.

35 By, for example, Judith Thurman in her *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller*. St Martin's Press, 1982.

36 By Heede (2001) *op. cit.*

37 *Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen: Tradition, Modernity and Other Ambiguities. A University of Minnesota International Symposium*, April 17–20, 1985.

38 A selective review of play related theories and definitions will be presented in the following chapter of the Introduction.

39 James S. Hans. *The Play of the World*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1981, p. 17

40 Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Seabury Press, 1975, p. 93.

41 Roger Caillois. *Man, Play and Games*. Trans. Meyer Barash. University of Illinois Press, 2001, p. 9.

42 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 32.

43 R[obert] Rawdon Wilson. *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory*. Northeastern University Press, 1990, p. 19.

44 Michai I. Spariosu. *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse*. Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 2.

45 Paul B. Amstrong. *Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form*. Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 31.

46 Else Cederbog. Introduction: Karen Blixen – Her Life and Writings, in Isak Dinesen. *On Modern Marriage and Other Observations*. Trans. Anne Born. St Martin's Press, 1986, pp. 1–31.
47 Susan Hardy Aiken. *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*. Chicago University Press, 1990.
48 Heede (2001) *op. cit.*
49 Tone Selboe. Karen Blixen, in Anne-Marie Mai (ed.). *Danske digtere i det 20 århundrede*, 1. Gad, 2000, pp. 467–483.
50 Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*
51 Sørensen & Togeby (2001) *op. cit.*; Ivan Ž. Sørensen. *'Gid De havde set mig dengang': Et essay om Blixens heltinder og Tizians gudinder*. Gyldendal, 2002.
52 Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 5.
53 Peter Hjort S. Bjerring. Hin stjernes oprindelse – en lang latter lød, in his *Karen Blixen – ansigt til ansigt med Gud*. Forlaget Infokom, 1987, pp. 66–79.
54 Donald Hannah. Acting and the Mask of Comedy, in his *'Isak Dinesen' & Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality*. Putnam, 1971, pp. 147–161.
55 Ivan Ž. Sørensen. Karen Blixens humor, in Sørensen (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 151–155.
56 This claim seems to square well with Gunhild Agger's analysis of the elements of the perfect bestseller in Blixen's work which deconstructs the writer's image as an elitist author (see Gunhild Agger. Genskrivningens veje – Karen Blixen og massekulturens skabeloner, in Hans Jørgen Nielsen (ed.). *Kultur, identitet og kommunikation*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1988, pp. 71–90).
57 It is, however, by no means absolutely unknown. At the end of the Soviet era, a translation of "The Heroine" ("Eloiza") by Danutė Krištopaitė was included in the collection: Zita Marys (ed.). *Danų novelės*. Vaga, 1987. Later, *Anecdotes of Destiny* were published (Karen Blixen. *Lemties Anekdotai*. Trans. Zita Marienė. Tyto Alba, 1995) and the translation of *Out of Africa* from English was published twice (Karen Blixen. *Iš Afrikos*. Trans. Violeta Tauragienė. Tyto Alba, 1996 and Lietuvos rytas, 2006). The publications were followed by some reviews in the Lithuanian cultural press, and there have also been a couple of academic articles on Blixen by the author of the present book (Karen Blixen apsakymų dvasios kurtizanės in *Literatūra*, 39/3 (1997), pp. 132–152; Karenos Blixen apsakymų senmergė tradicinio ir moderniojo feminizmo požiūriu, in Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė (ed.). *Feminizmas, visuomenė, kultūra*. Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 1999, pp. 224–235).
58 Ieva Steponavičiūtė. The poetics of art as game in Karen Blixen's essay *On Modern Marriage and Other Observations*, in Reda Pabarčienė (ed.). *Kultūros intertekstai / Cultural intertexts / Интертексты культуры* (ser. *Acta Litteraria Comparativa*, 2). Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2006, pp. 17–27; The game of piquet in "Tales of Two Old Gentlemen" by Karen Blixen, in: *Studi nordici*, 16 (2009), pp. 45–51; Story as the main dish: On some

transcreative mechanisms in Karen Blixen's "Babette's Feast," in Per Erik Ljung & Claes-Göran Holmberg (eds.). *Translation, Adaptation, Interpretation, Transformation. Proceedings from the 28th Study Conference of IASS, Lund 3–7 August 2010*. Open Journal Systems: Lund University Libraries, 2011 (can be retrieved from http://www.sol.lu.se/conferenceRegistration/displayFulltextsPrintVersion.php?conferenceId=1).

## INTRODUCTION · CHAPTER TWO

1 Relating to play, from the Latin *ludus*: see *Merriam-Webster Online* (retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ludic).

2 These words, of course, have derivative forms, like *игривость* (playfulness) in Russian. In Lithuanian, which is my mother tongue, one sometimes differentiates between *žaidimas* (game) and *žaismas* / *žaismė* (play, playful mode or activity), although this distinction is not identical to that which is used in English and which will be explained further. *Žaidimas* refers not only to a specific activity like football or chess (a game), but also to the process of playing, and even to an attitude or state of mind (cf. *Jai viskas tik žaidimas* [All is mere play to her]). The Scandinavian languages accommodate a similar distinction to the one that exists in English: *lek* (play) vs. *spil* (game) in Swedish, *leg* vs. *spil* in Danish and *lek* vs. *spill* in Norwegian, although these distinctions are not absolutely identical (see, for example, Erik Zillén. *Den lekande Fröding: En författarskapsstudie*. Nordic Academic Press, 2001, p. 29). The distinction that in English is expressed with the help of the words *play* and *game* seems to be possible to render even in languages which do not lexically differentiate between the two concepts: in German and French, for example, one can do so by using articles and singular vs. plural forms.

3 See Brian Edwards' review of the different concepts of play in The Reader as Trickster, in his *Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction*. Garland Publishing, 1998, pp. 11–37 and the summary of Newton Garver's distinction between game and play in Steven Scott. Playing the Games we Read and Reading the Games we Play, in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 23/2 (June 1996), p. 374 (retrieved from http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/crcl/issue/view/327).

4 Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Seabury Press, 1975, p. 93.

5 Edwards (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 17.

6 See Bernard Suits. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. David R. Godine, Publisher, 1990, pp. 34–41; Scott (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 374; and Edwards (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

7 As David Parlett points out, "[t]he word [game] is used for so many different activities that it is not worth insisting on any proposed definition" (see his

*The Oxford History of Board Games*. Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 1). The idea that games should be studied with regard to their type but not in general goes back to Ludwig Wittgenstein who, in his *Philosophical Investigations* defines the relationships between different games in terms of "family resemblances" and concentrates on the study of language games:

> 66. Consider, for example, the activities that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on. /…/ For if you look at them you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. /…/
>
> 67. I can think of no better expression to characterize [sic] these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family.
>
> (Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker & Joachim Schulte. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 36.

8 Edwards (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

9 Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. MIT Press, 2003, p. 303.

10 The full title: *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spelelement der cultuur* [*Homo Ludens – A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*].

11 Under the aspect of play (Latin).

12 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens – A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 32.

13 According to Roger Caillois, Huizinga's study is an inquiry into "the creative quality of play principle" (which is therefore too broad) and fails to provide "description and classification of the games themselves," focusing too much on competitive games, or rather "the spirit" that rules this kind of game (which is therefore too narrow): see Roger Caillois. *Man, Play and Games*. Trans. Meyer Barash. University of Illinois Press, 2001, p. 4. For a critique of the ontological aspect of Huizinga's theory, and especially his delimitation of the sphere of play in opposition "to the real, to work, and so forth," see Jacques Ehrmann. Homo Ludens Revisited, in *Yale French Studies*, 41 (1968), p. 32.

14 Huizinga (1970) *op. cit.*, pp. 223–224.

15 A term introduced by Gonzalo Frasca, who defines it as a "yet non-existent discipline that studies game and play activities" and concentrates on the study of digital games: see his Ludology meets Narratology: Similitude and Differences between (Video)Games and Narrative (1999) (retrieved from http://www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm). Olli Sotamaa also develops his theory of computer game culture with ample reference to Huizinga: see his The Player's Game: Towards Understanding Player Production Among Computer Game

Cultures, in *Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis*, 821 (2009), pp. 37–40 (retrieved from http://acta.uta.fi/english/teos.php?id=11176).

16 Caillois (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 10.

17 See ibid., pp. 11–36.

18 R[obert] Rawdon Wilson. *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory*. Northeastern University Press, 1990, pp. 77–78.

19 Suits (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 41.

20 See Salen & Zimmerman (2003) *op. cit.*, pp. 73–80 for a survey of the definitions of the game concept, of which seven out of eight include rules as a key component.

21 Frasca (1999) *op. cit.*

22 Interestingly, Suits argues that make-believe situations can actually possess constitutive rules and may therefore represent a game activity, the goal of which is to keep the dramatic action going. The constitutive rule (the "less efficient means" used to achieve "the desired state of affairs") in such a game would be inventing dramatic responses on the spot and thus both creating and enacting the script (the more efficient means would be simply reproducing (mimicking) one that has been pre-prepared: Suits (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 137). However, this argument is difficult to apply to Vidart and Frasca's example: the child, although obviously partaking in a creative process and responding to his or her own role, would not necessarily find these means to be "less efficient." Even if he or she answered in the affirmative when asked directly, one can hardly expect such a player to exhibit a "lusory attitude," that is, that he or she should *voluntary* and *consciously* accept these "unnecessary obstacles" in order to be able to play exactly this game. As Suits himself points out, small children's games of make-believe "display rather serious defects" and their "goals, rules and strategies /…/ appear unclear and unfixed." He would probably attribute the activity in question to children's typical "dramatic projections of day dreams or fantasies" (cf. ibid., p. 95).

23 "Talk about games in literary texts does not always invoke the concept of play but rather such factors as pattern, form, and structure" (Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 78).

24 See Salen & Zimmerman (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 79. See also Parlett's concept of game as "a twofold structure based on ends [objectives and outcomes] and means [rules]" (Parlett (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 3).

25 See Mihai Spariosu. *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse*. Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 1.

26 Among these theoretical works, one can name Matei Calinescu. *Rereading*. Yale University Press, 1993; Edwards (1998) *op. cit.*; Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*; and Wolfgang Iser. *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven Literarischer Anthropologie*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991. Studies dealing with the issue of play in the works of particular authors include: Ruth Burke. *The Games of Poetics: Ludic*

*Criticism and Postmodern Fiction*. Peter Lang Publishing, 1994; Zillén (2001) *op. cit.*; David Gascoigne. *The Games of Fiction: Georges Perec and Modern French Ludic Narrative*. Peter Lang AG, 2006; and Joseph Feeney. *The Playfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ashgate, 2008.

27 See Chapter 2 of Part 1.

28 Fragment 52. Quoted from Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 13. Spariosu takes the citation from Geoffrey Stephen Kirk & John Earle Raven. *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*. Cambridge University Press, 1957.

29 See Miglena Nikolchina. *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf*. Other Press, 2004, p. 31.

30 For a review of the translations of the fragment and the Heraclitian ontology of play, see Yücel Dursun. The Onto-theological Origin of Play: Heraclitus and Plato, in *Lingua ac Communitas*, 17 (October 2007), pp. 69–78 (retrieved from http://www.lingua.amu.edu.pl/Lingua_17/lin-6.pdf).

31 Lithuanian original: "tai, kas įvyksta kaip atsitiktinis kauliuko metimas, žiūrint retrospektyviai, tampa neišvengiama ir lemiama nuo jo priklausančių pasekmių grandinei; iš chaoso randasi kosmosas" (Mantas Adomėnas. Komentaras, in Hėrakleitas. *Fragmentai*. Aidai, 1995, p. 232). The child moving pieces on the board performs, according to the translator, the same function: determining what gods and people will become (ibid.).

32 Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 129.

33 Friedrich Nietszche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of Greeks*. Trans. Marianne Cowan. Regnery Publishing Inc., 1998, p. 62.

34 Martin Heidegger. *The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 113. Following Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 120 and Stuart Elden. Eugen Fink and the Question of the World, in *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 5 (2008), p. 53 (retrieved from http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia05/parrhesia05_elden.pdf).

35 Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 132.

36 Eugene Fink. *Spiel als Weltsymbol*. Kohlhammer, 1960, pp. 230–238.

37 Following Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 131–132.

38 Following Burke (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 8 and Julius Elias. Art and Play, in Philip P. Wiener (ed.). *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, 1. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, p. 101 (retrieved through the University of Virginia Library from http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=DicHist/uvaBook/tei/DicHist1.xml.

39 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. James Creed Meredith. Ed. Nicholas Walker. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 133–134. My emphasis.

40 Friedrich Schiller. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Ed. Reginald Snell. Dover Publications, 2004, pp. 75–84, 131–137.

41 For more on Kant and Schiller's contribution to play studies, see Gordon E. Slethoug, Game Theory, in Irena R. Makaryk (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. University of Toronto Press, 1993, p. 65 and Play / Freeplay, Theories of, ibid., p. 145; Elias (1973) *op. cit.*, pp. 103–106.
42 Following Slethoug (1993) *op. cit.*, pp. 145–146.
43 Gadamer (1975) *op. cit.*, p. 99.
44 See Jean Grondin. Play, Festival and Ritual in Gadamer, in Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt (ed.). *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. Lexington, 2001, p. 3 (retrieved from http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/grondinj/pdf/play_festival_ritual_gadam.pdf).
45 Ibid.
46 Hans-Georg Gadamer. The Relevance of the Beautiful, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 23–24.
47 Peter Hutchinson. *Games Authors Play*. Methuen, 1983, p. 14.
48 Ibid. Hutchinson takes as a point of departure the conception of "mixed motive literary games" proposed by Elizabeth W. Bruss (see her The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games, in *New Literary History*, 10/1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 153–172), who, in turn, adapts the mathematical theory of game developed by Thomas Shelling for literary studies.
49 Swedish original: "en katalog över litterära grepp och tekniker som sedan länge men under delvis andra beteckningar behandlats av litteraturforskningen" (Zillén (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 14).
50 Calinescu (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 133.
51 Ibid., pp. 128–129.
52 Wolfgang Iser. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 276–280.
53 Ibid., pp. 267–268.
54 Ibid., p. 273. Iser is quoting from Gregory Bateson. *Steps to an Ecology of the* [sic] *Mind*. New York, 1981, p. 19f.
55 Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 104. It can be noted that there are texts that are purposively designed as games to be played by the reader and which come with prescribed rules for reading, like *Rayuela* (1963; *Hopscotch*) by Julio Cortázar, which is structured according to the principles of the empirical game of hopscotch (it consists of short episodes which are reminiscent of the squares in a game of hopscotch). The reader is invited to read by jumping from one 'square' to another in accordance with the model of the empirical game, as prescribed by the narrator (*viz.* to play the game), but is also 'allowed' to read the text in the 'normal' way.
56 As James A. G. Marino has observed, the concept of game as a temporally and spatially limited activity, which is subject to its own rules and free from

the influences of the external world, should have been especially attractive to the structuralist concept of the text as an autonomous and closed structure (see his An Annotated Bibliography of Play and Literature, in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 12/2 (June 1985), p. 306 (retrieved from http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/crcl/issue/view/239).

57 Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

58 As Wilson wittily remarks: "Even if one cannot readily recall an instance of pastoral without sheep /…/, it is surely possible to imagine one: bring together a number of the common pastoral motifs and, if they are skilfully handled, who will miss the presence of sheep?" (ibid., p. 92).

59 Ibid., p. 98.

60 However, this means that play also risks becoming a cliché that innovative authors will try to subvert. Fortunately, play has limitless possibilities, and one form of play can easily develop into a new one.

61 On the playfulness of carnival, see, for example, the chapter "The Play of Carnival and the Carnival of Play" in Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 25–73.

62 Deconstruction is, in turn, indebted to Nietzsche and his concept of play: see Spariosu (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 154.

63 Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The John Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 50. For more on Derrida's concept of play, see Edwards (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 55–75; Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 15–17, 42–43, 65–66 and more.

64 Ihab Habib Hassan. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward Postmodern Literature*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. 267.

65 For example, in such studies as: Brian Edwards. Deconstructing the Artist and the Art: Barth and Calvino at Play in the Funhouse of Language, in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 12 (June 1985), pp. 264–286, or Martine Hennard. Playing a Game of Worlds in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40/2 (Summer 1994), pp. 299–317. For the Lithuanian reader, the book by Ingrida Ruchlevičienė *Kūryba kaip žaidima: Kosto Ostrausko Dramaturgija* [*Creative Work as Play: Kostas Ostrauskas' Dramas*] (VDU leidykla, 2003) is worth mentioning here, as a study that adopts the perspective of play in order to sketch out postmodern tendencies in the Lithuanian exiled playwright Kostas Ostrauskas' dramatic works by focusing on the issues of intertextuality, the deconstruction of cultural traditions, metafictionality and play with authorial masks. It is not rare, however, for one to find manifestations of this type of play in classical texts, like those by William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Henry Fielding and others: see, for example, Howard Felperin, 'Tongue-tied our queen?': The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*, in Geoffrey H. Hartman &

Patricia Parker (eds.). *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Methuen, 1985, pp. 3–18.

66 Zillén borrows Renate Hof's argument that the mathematical game theory has proven that a strict distinction between play and game is no longer possible (Zillén (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 29). My own argument is that anyone who writes in English can hardly neglect this distinction, nor ignore its frequent occurrence in literary play studies.

67 Zillén (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 28.

68 Ibid., p. 493.

69 Wilson (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 18.

70 This term refers to the concept of 'architextuality' ("the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text"), which was put forward by Gérard Genette in his *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré*, 1982 (here quoted from *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky. University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 1).

71 George Bateson. A Theory of Play and Fantasy, in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Ballantine Books, 1972, p. 179. The essay was first read (by Jay Haley) at the A. P. A. Conference in Mexico City in 1954.

72 See Zillén (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 22. I admit, however, that my argument against equating the signals 'this is literature' and 'this is play' is more of a sophism, for metafiction is undoubtedly an aspect of textual play (which is related to mimicry), representing play with the illusion that the text both creates and dispels.

73 Quoted from Hutchinson (1983) *op. cit.*, p. viii.

74 From the interview published in *The Paris Review*, 93 (Fall 1984) (retrieved from http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2955/the-art-of-fiction-no-83-julio-cortazar).

75 From his *Lectures on Russian Literature*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 106.

76 From *Lolita* (1955). This is quoted from Vladimir Nabokov. *The Annotated Lolita*. Ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. Vintage Books, 1991, p. 32

77 From *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974). This is quoted from Vladimir Nabokov. *Look at the Harlequins!* Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975, p. 9.

78 From the interview with Lidia Vianu, published in her *Desperado Essay-Interviews*. Editura pentru Literatură Contemporană, 2009, p. 153 (retrieved from http://www.mttlc.ro/editura/carti/desp_interviews.pdf).

79 It is only logical to precede a discussion of play with a discussion of meta-signals, as they are often sent before real play commences.

## PART I · CHAPTER ONE

1 See, for example, W[illiam] K[urtz] Wimsatt. Belinda Ludens, in *New Literary History*, (Winter 1973), pp. 357–374; or Daniel Edelman. Cooks, Forks Waiters: Chess Problems and Vladimir. Nabokov's *The Defense*, in *American Chess Journal*, 3 (1995), pp. 44–58.

2 See Chapter 2 of the Introduction.

3 Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 49.

4 Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen). *Anecdotes of Destiny*. Penguin Books, 1986a, p. 74.

5 Isak Dinesen. *Last Tales*. Penguin Books, 1986b, p. 63. All further citations in this chapter are to this edition with page numbers indicated in square brackets.

6 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 32.

7 Roger Caillois. *Man, Play and Games*. University of Illinois Press, 2001, p. 6.

8 See the description of the rules of piquet: Piquet, in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (retrieved from *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/461477/piquet), or Piquet, in *Card Games* (retrieved from http://www.pagat.com/notrump/piquet.html).

9 The ability to surprise, to produce unexpected and even funny solutions seems to be a highly favoured quality in Blixen's discourse, be it applied to a person or art. It is even considered divine, as the storyteller Mira Jama in "The Dreamers" reminds us: "I have been trying to for a long time to understand God. Now I have made friends with him. To love him truly you must love change, and you must love a joke /…/" (Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 308).

10 Danish original: "at bevise hele verden /…/ at hun var til" (Karen Blixen. *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1. Gyldendals Tranebøger, 1993, p. 85). The sentence is missing in Blixen's English version [71], but the idea can be gathered from the context – the denial of individual existence to the daughters of the family, and the ambitiousness that the nobleman notices in his fiancée.

11 "Infidelity is for women in the world of nobility a way to freedom, not a praiseworthy, but maybe the only one" (Grethe F[ogh] Rostbøll. *Længslens vingeslag: Analyser af Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1996, p. 216. Danish original: "For kvinderne i det adelige miljø er utroskab en vej til frihed, ikke en rosværdig vej, men måske den eneste").

12 Blixen (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 75. In the English text: "their game" [63].

13 Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

14 Ibid., p. 157.

15 Danish original: "er mandkønnet overlegent" (Rostbøll (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 217).

16 The Danish text modifies the husband's vision by adding another game metaphor which has even stronger implications of selfish manipulation. He sees

his wife as "a valuable piece, as the queen herself in the game of chess, in the career of a great man" [71]. Danish original: "en værdifuld brik, af betydning som selve dronningen i et skakspil, i en stor herres karriere" (Blixen (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 85). However, this metaphor also implies the wife's latent power, as the queen is the most powerful piece on the chess board.

17 An excellent example of the method is the book by Ivan Ž. Sørensen & Ole Togeby. *Omvejene til Pisa: En fortolkning af Karen Blixen "Vejene omkring Pisa."* Gyldendal, 2001. A very helpful tool for performing an intertextual analysis of Blixen's texts is the inventory of references composed by Bernhard Glienke in his *Fatale Präzedenz: Karen Blixens Mythologie*. Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1986, pp. 98–157.

18 Søren Kierkegaard. *Either / Or*, Part 1. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 315–316.

19 Play theory is highly relevant to modern psychology and sociology. Among the most prominent scholars in this field are Gregory Bateson, Donald Winnicott and Brian Sutton-Smith.

## PART I · CHAPTER TWO

1 Roger Caillois distinguishes mimicry, or role-playing, as one of the four major categories of the play continuum (see Chapter 2 of the Introduction). An interpretation of Caillois' classification in theatrical terms is offered by Patrice Pavis. The play aspect of theatre, in *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. University of Toronto Press Inc., 1998, pp. 268–269.

2 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens – A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 32.

3 José Ortega y Gasset. The Idea of Theatre, in *Phenomenology and Art*. Trans. Philip W. Silver. W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1975, pp. 184–185.

4 Original title: *Sandhedens Hævn*. The comedy was composed by Blixen in 1904 for her home theatre, and was first published in the literary magazine *Tilskueren* in 1926. The English translation was devised by Donald Hannah and published in his book *'Isak Dinesen' & Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality*. Putnam & Company, 1971. This remains Blixen's only published play, although in her younger days she also wrote other plays including "Marsk Stig" and "Rolf Blaaskægs død" [Rolf Bluebeard's Death]. The surviving fragments of these plays were published in *Blixeniana 1985* (see Liselotte Henriksen, *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999, p. 278). For information concerning the lesser-known play "Iphigenia," which Blixen also wrote in her youth, see Frank Egholm Andersen. Iphigenia og polakkerne i Paris. Iphigenia, et ukendt skuespil, in *Bogens Verden*, 4–5 (2004) (retrieved from http://wayback.kb.dk:8080/wayback-1.4.2/wayback/20100107153228/http://www2.kb.dk/guests/natl/db/bv/04/4_5/indh.htm).

5 This is quoted from Isak Dinesen & Donald Hannah. The Revenge of Truth: A Marionette Comedy, in *Performing Arts Journal*, 10/2 (1986), p. 108.
6 Ibid., p. 109.
7 Aage Henriksen. Karen Blixen and Marionettes, in *Isak Dinesen / Karen Blixen. The Work and the Life*. St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 19.
8 For Blixen's own discussion of the concept of Nemesis, see her letter to Johannes Rosendahl in Frans Lasson & Tom Engelbrecht (eds.). *Karen Blixen i Danmark: Breve, 1931–1962*, 1. Gyldendal, 1996, pp. 390–392.
9 The image of marionettes unites them in a common destiny: "As if they had been four marionettes, pulled by the same wire" (Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 131). The story will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 4 of Part 1.
10 Danish original: "den store forsonings digter, forsoningen med verden, livet, tilværelsen, Gud, forsoning gennem den fuldkomne underkastelse, den mest konsekvente villige aabenhed, som man kan finde i den europæiske litteratur fra dette aarhundrede, den stolteste form for underkastelse" (Jørgen Gustava Brandt. Et essay om Karen Blixen, in *Heretica*, 6/3 (1953), p. 303).
11 Marianne Juhl & Bo Hakon Jørgensen. *Dianas hævn: To spor i Karen Blixens forfatterskab*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1981, p. 275.
12 When explaining the much more relaxed attitude of the natives towards risks in life, Blixen claims in *Out of Africa* that for them, "God and the Devil are one, the majesty coeternal, not two uncreated but one uncreated." By doing so, she seems to be advocating the embracement of risk as a natural component of life (Isak Dinesen. *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*. Vintage Books, 1989, p. 19).
13 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 143.
14 Dinesen (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 250–251.
15 Isak Dinesen. *Winter's Tales*. Penguin Books, 1983, pp. 154–155.
16 Dinesen (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 353.
17 Tracy C. Davis & Thomas Postlewait. *Theatricality*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 8–9.
18 See, for example, Franz Link & Günter Niggl (eds.). *Theatrum mundi: Götter, Gott und Spielleiter im Drama von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Duncker und Humblot, 1981; Christiane Leiteritz. *Revolution als Schauspiel: Beiträge zur Geschichte einer Metapher innerhalb der europäisch-amerikanischen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (ser. *Komparatistische Studien*, 18). De Gruyter, 1993, pp. 11–22; Claire L. Carlin & Kathleen Wine (eds.). *Theatrum Mundi: Studies in Honor of Ronald W. Tobin*. Rookwood Press, 2003; Göran Stockenströmpp (ed.). *Strindberg's Dramaturgy*. University Of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 69–74; Davis & Postlewait (2006) *op. cit.*, pp. 1–39; 90–126.

19 See Isak Dinesen. On Mottoes of My Life, in *Daguerreotypes and Other Essays*. Trans. P[hilip] M. Mitchell & W[illiam] D[oremus] Paden. The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 14.
20 Dinesen (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 212, 216 and 218.
21 Dinesen (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 378
22 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 49.
23 Ibid., p. 133.
24 See Mihai Spariosu. *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse*. Cornell University Press, 1989, pp. 125–133.
25 Huizinga (1970) *op. cit.*, p. 21.
26 Paul Yachnin. A Game at Chess, in *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 22/2 (Spring 1982), p. 323. This article offers a review of the chess allegory in European Renaissance and English Jacobean literature, focusing on its meanings in Middleton's play.

## PART I · CHAPTER THREE

1 The text was written by Blixen before her breakthrough as a writer, in 1923–24, after her separation from Bror Blixen, and while she was still living in Kenya. It was a reply to her brother Thomas in their discussion of sexual morality. The essay was first published as "Moderne Ægteskab og andre Betragtninger" after Blixen's death, in *Blixeniana 1977* (for bibliographical information, see Else Cederborg. Notes to "On Modern Marriage and Other Observations," in Isak Dinesen. *On Modern Marriage and Other Observations*. Trans. Anne Born. St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 97 and Liselotte Henriksen. *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999, pp. 221–222 and 347). Long extracts from the essay have also been included in: Dana Mack & David Blankenhorn (eds.) *The Book of Marriage – The Wisest Answers to the Toughest Questions*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001, pp. 113–128. All of the subsequent citations will be taken from Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, with page numbers indicated in square brackets.
2 As, for example, in the following studies: Mogens Pahuus. *Karen Blixens livsfilosofi*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1995, pp. 43–44; Dag Heede. *Det umenneskelige: Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001, pp. 175–177. See also the analysis of the essay by the Danish writer Suzanne Brøgger: Karen Blixen og lidenskaben, in her *Brøg*. Forlaget Rhodos, 1980, pp. 243–274.
3 As, for example, in the short review of the essay: Carolyn See. Isak Dinesen on Free Love, Marriage, in *Los Angeles Times* 05 01 1987 (retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-05/news/vw-2250_1_isak-dinesen). It seems that the author of the review has misunderstood both Blixen's text and the afterword

by Frank Egholm Andersen, as she claims that Blixen was interested in Social Darwinism. As Egholm Andersen emphasises, Blixen was a neo-Lamarckian and "a true romantic" (see his afterword: "On Modern Marriage" and the Twenties, in Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, p. 127), which is something completely different.

4 In the original, the word *leg* (play) is used here (see Karen Blixen. *Samlede Essays*. Gyldendals Tranebøger, 1992, p. 41). However, the fact that Blixen speaks of laws, rules and goals that seem to be obligatory in order for a relationship (and, as we will see later on, also art) to acquire the status of play, perfectly justifies the use of the word 'game' in this context. Nevertheless, the focus of the essay seems to be on playfulness – the ability to demonstrate a creative, innovative and even rebellious spirit.

5 'Doom of the gods', the end of the cosmos in Old Norse mythology. Blixen starts her discussion of play with the image of the *Aesir* (the highest Scandinavian gods) playing. According to Norse mythology, the new world begins after Ragnarok, with the *Aesir* once again finding the golden tables (or golden dice ("*guldterninger*") as in Blixen's essay, see Blixen (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 41) they had played with at the dawn of time. This image of the gods at play, according to Blixen, must have epitomised for the Old Norsemen the idea of perfect and eternal happiness, in contrast to their own lives of constant hardship (see Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, p. 78).

6 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens – A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 32.

7 Friedrich Schiller. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Trans. Reginald Snell. Dover Publications, 2004, p. 80, original emphasis.

8 See Chapter 2 of the Introduction.

9 This is especially true of his main argument that living organisms develop the characteristics which they need (a classic illustration is the long neck of the giraffe) and which can be passed on, which was strongly criticised. However, although for many years his name has been "a term of abuse," his ideas have now begun to be re-evaluated, see Bruce H. Lipton. *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles*. Hay House, 2008, p. 20.

10 It is probably not accidental that Blixen finds inspiration for her neo-Lamarckian ideas in Bernard Shaw (see Egholm Andersen (1986) *op. cit.*, pp. 124–126), for whom Lamarck's theory of "creative evolution" must also have contained poetic significance as a metaphor expressing the importance of will and consciousness for the development of human beings (cf. Julian L. Ross. *Philosophy in Literature*. Syracuse University Press, 1949, p. 209).

11 *Maria di Rohan*, 1843.

12 According to Egholm Andersen, Blixen is still not a "free lover," as, according to her conceptualisation, free love can also exist within the bonds of marriage. See Egholm Andersen (1986) *op. cit.*, p. 126.

13 Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 159.
14 Isak Dinesen. *Winter's Tales*. Penguin Books, 1983, p. 23.
15 Ibid., p. 17.
16 Ibid., p. 18.
17 A number of details associate this figure with the art of Romanticism: the pink carnation in his buttonhole "that looked romantic," the presence of sky-blue wallpaper and the scent of violets (which can be associated with Novalis' "blue flower") in his mistress' room and the symbolic "Blue story" told by Charlie as a result of the encounter.
18 Ibid., p. 34.
19 Ibid., p. 35.
20 Ibid., p. 33.
21 Ibid. Robert Langbaum quotes this passage in order to illustrate his point that Charlie's fate is to write about other people's passions without fulfilling his own: "Charlie is to be, as God points out, the man who, when he has beside him the lady of the sky-blue room, jumps out of bed to seek his happiness at the end of the world" (see his *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, p. 158). The parallels to the dialogue in the *Book of Job* leave, however, little doubt that God's words are to be read as an accusation, and not only as a postulation of the artist's tragic destiny.
22 Dinesen (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 218.
23 Cf. ibid., p. 23.

## PART I · CHAPTER FOUR

1 Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, pp. 312, 314. All the subsequent citations will be to this edition with page numbers indicated in square brackets.
2 "But he was a judge of art, and realized [sic], as quickly as anybody else could have done, that he was no poet" [314].
3 See, for example, Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 65.
4 See, for example, the following introduction of the game: "It [ombre] is said to partake of the gravity which has been considered the peculiar character of the Spanish nation. It is called *Et Hombre*, or the man, and was so named, says Bullet, 'on account of the deep thought and reflection it requires, which render it a game worthy the attention of man'" (Samuel Weller Singer. *Researches into the History of Playing Cards; with Illustrations of the Origin of Printing and Engraving on Wood*. T. Bensley and Son, 1816, p. 264).
5 See Chapter 1 of Part 1.

6 A keen chess player would probably dismiss this argument by claiming that every game of chess contains millions of possible moves and that the best players also win because of their creativity and intuition. Consider, for example, Boris Gelfand's words: "Intuition is what reveals itself in crucial positions, where neither a clear-cut plan nor a forcing continuation exist" (Alexander Beliavsky & Adrian Mikhalchishin. *Secrets of Chess Intuition*. Gambit Publications, 2002, pp. 8–9). However, no one would doubt that chess requires great analytical effort (cf. the opinion of Gelfand: "It is possible to develop one's intuition through careful study of all aspects of chess," ibid.) and possesses a formulaic quality: it is possible to memorise some 'smart' strategies, which can help you to defeat your opponent.

7 My emphasis.

8 Orig. *Hermann und Dorothea*, 1797. Robert Langbaum seems to be the first to point out this parallel, as well as the parallel to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, see his *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, p. 112.

9 Orig. *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774.

10 Orig. *Wally, die Zweiflerin*, 1835.

11 Karl Gutzkow. *Wally, die Zweiflerin / Wally the Skeptic* (ser. *Germanic Studies in America*, 19). Trans. Ruth-Ellen Boetcher-Joeres. Herbert Lang, 1974, pp. 110–111. As for the parallel between Blixen's and Gutzkow's views on the representation of reality, it should be noted that Gutzkow's theory has a political aspect to it and thus is different from Blixen's. The highest form of representation for Gutzkow is the "truth" [*Wahrheit*], or the ideas that should constitute the reality of tomorrow – a model set by the author for people to follow. For more on Gutzkow's theory see Daniel Frederick Pasmore. *Karl Gutzkow's Short Stories, a Study in the Technique of Narration*. University of Illinois, 1918, pp. 24–29; Norbert Trobitz. *Der Literaturkritiker Karl Gutzkow*. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, 2003, pp. 65–66 (retrieved from http://www.burschenschaftsgeschichte.de/pdf/trobitz_karl_gutzkow.pdf).

12 The text tells of how Mathiesen is the cause (perhaps consciously) of his own wife's insanity and even death [316–317]. See also Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 66 for more evidence of sadistic traits in this character.

13 The depiction of his death, as Langbaum has observed, bears Biblical connotations: Fransine smashes Mathiesen's head with a stone, which alludes to God's words addressed to the serpent: "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3: 15, see Langbaum (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 116). The serpent, however, is an important symbol in Blixen, representing, amongst other things, the art of storytelling (this will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis of "Babette's Feast"). Thus, the extinction of the 'serpent' by another artist figure in "The Poet" seems to signify a conflict between different aesthetic conceptions.

14 It is difficult to find a character in Blixen's texts who is absolutely spared from the narrator's irony, however, the irony can differ. In Mathiasen's case, it borders on satire, whilst, for example, in the case of Miss Malin, as will be demonstrated later, it is more akin to friendly (auto)caricature.

15 Literally: "There is a ring of lovely tales surrounding the name of the little Danish town of Hirscholm." Karen Blixen. *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1992, p. 335.

16 The Danish text, as Brantly points out, is especially dense with intertextual allusions to Danish literature; see Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 65. It is obvious, nevertheless, that Mathiesen prefers German Classicism.

17 See Isak Dinesen. *On Modern Marriage and Other Observations*. St. Martin's Press, 1987, p. 83.

18 Mathiesen does, however, contemplate shortly before his death the originality of a text he had once written. Yet, the argument he formulates produces an ironic effect since it proves the opposite of what he has tried to convince himself: "There were reminiscences of the Geheimrat's own *Faust* in it; still there was also some imagination. The imaginary cross, which his Ahasuerus had been carrying through the world on his long weary road, that was not without effective power" [359].

19 Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Seabury Press, 1975, p. 92.

20 It should be noted that the interpretation offered in this section rests on metatextual analysis and does not aim to give an exhaustive explanation of this highly complex work, which can be read from many different perspectives. See, for example, Robert Langbaum. *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, pp. 57–72; Susan Hardy Aiken. *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*. Chicago University Press, 1990, pp. 84–111; Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 16–27; Grethe F[ogh] Rostbøll. *Længslens Vingeslag: Analyser af Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1996, pp. 58–71.

21 Isak Dinesen. The Deluge at Norderney, in Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 134. All subsequent citations will be to this edition, with page numbers indicated in square brackets.

22 Miss Malin is not the only character in this text who tells stories. However, her role is the most active. She tells more than just one story and comments happily on the stories of others. She also stages the evening storytelling session. This makes her the storyteller figure *par excellence*, whilst other characters may be seen as performing the symbolic function of representing her artistic material and audience.

23 The game is also called "Cup and Ball" or "Bilbo Catcher" in English (*Bilboquette* in French).

24 The set consists of a ball tied to a handle and the aim of the game is either to catch the spinning ball in the cup on the one end of the stick or to pin it on the spike on the other. See Bilboquet: Cup and Ball or Ring and Pin Games (retrieved from http://www.gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/VirtualExhibits/bilboquet/pages/index.html), or Bilbo Catcher (Bilboquette) and Cup & Ball (retrieved from http://www.ushist.com/victorian_toys-and-games_f.shtml).

25 As soon as Miss Malin has heard Jonathan's story, she produces a counter-story, or as soon as the Cardinal mentions the pyramids, she immediately shares an anecdote about the Holy Family's wandering in Egypt.

26 This paradox of the carnival has been observed by Umberto Eco who claims that even revolutions create their own, revolutionary, rules in order to install their new social model. See Umberto Eco. The frames of comic "freedom," in Thomas Albert Sebeok (ed.). *Carnival!* Monton Publishers, 1984, p. 7.

27 Brian Edwards. *Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction*. Garland Publishing, 1998, p. 27.

28 "Nat- og- Dag" means "Night and Day" in Danish.

29 See Michail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. H. Iswolsky. Indiana University Press, 1984, pp. 81–82; V[yacheslav] V[sevolodovich] Ivanov. The semiotic theory of carnival as the inversion of bipolar opposites, in Sebeok (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 17.

30 See Susan Hardy Aiken. Dinesen's "Sorrow-Acre": Tracing the Woman's Line, in *Contemporary Literature*, 25/2 (1984), p. 174.

31 Bakhtin (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 368.

32 Like, for example, when she provides the Cardinal with her garter so that he could fasten the loose door of the loft with it, frivolously declaring the loosening of a garter to be the zenith of its carer [132].

33 For, example, the anecdote that Miss Malin tells about the wanderings of the Holy Family in Egypt, is a fine example of *parodia sacra* (cf. Bakhtin (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 14). It ironises over the idea of the Immaculate Conception and portrays the sexually frustrated Joseph who addresses Mary with the words: "Oh my sweet young dear, could you not just for a moment shut your eyes and make believe that I am the Holy Ghost?" [183]. Miss Malin also finds proof of her 'lechery' in the Holy Scripture: "She had the word of the Bible /…/ that a multitude of young men had indeed committed it [adultery] with her" [139].

34 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 206.

35 Cf. Bakhtin (1984) *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 316.

36 Ibid., pp. 25–26. See Aiken (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 256.

37 She is described as looking like "a corpse of twenty-four hours" [167], or "a scarecrow in a field" [130], and her head is a reminder of "that death's head by which druggists label their poison bottles" [187].

38 My emphasis.

39 The intertext of Calypso and the subversion of the patriarchal narrative has been analysed in detail by Aiken (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 102–108.
40 Ibid., p. 68.
41 Ibid., p. 69.
42 Ibid.
43 See, for example, Susan Gubar & Sandra Gilbert. *The Madwoman in The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 221–247; Susan Wolstenholme. *Gothic (Re)Visions – Writing Women as Readers*. State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 16, 66–72; or Cannon Schmitt. *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 8–10.
44 My emphasis.
45 It may not be accidental that the word 'parody' originates from the Greek *parodia* [παρῳδία] and means a 'counter-song' (see Linda Hutcheon. Parody without Ridicule: Observations on Modern Literary Parody, in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 5 (1978), p. 201, retrieved from https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10261/3/TSpace0172.pdf), and the name Calypso, with its Homeric connotations, may also refer to the song culture of the Caribbean slaves (cf. Harcourt Thorne. Calypso and the Calypsonians, in *The Crisis*, 64/8 (October 1957), pp. 479–480).
46 It can be assumed that Jonathan who is nicknamed Timon of Assens represents the idea of the wandering intertext, a sign with shifting reference. Such interpretation is suggested by the character's allusion to Shakespeare (he relates not only to Timon of Athens, but also to Hamlet), as well as by his social status: according to Aiken, the bastard represents "a sign cut off from any *proper* referent" (Aiken (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 93, original emphasis).
47 The carnivalesque character of this scene becomes even more obvious considering that the ceremony was carried out by an impostor cardinal.
48 Neither Jonathan, nor Calypso takes any initiative to participate in this dialogue. Whereas Jonathan tells his story and answers questions directed at him, Calypso remains silent all the time except to whisper "yes" during the wedding ceremony.
49 Bakhtin (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 207.
50 As Blixen suggested, Kasparsen and the Cardinal are one and the same person. See Aage Henriksen. Karen Blixen, in his *Litterært testamente: Seks kapitler om kærlighed*. Gyldendal, 1998, p. 219.
51 "*À ce moment de sa narration Schéhérazade vit paraître le matin, et, discrète, se tut*" [188]. [At this moment of her narration, Scheherazade saw dawn breaking and fell silent, discretely].
52 See, for example, Aage Kabell. *Karen Blixen debuterer*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968, p. 163; Susan Hardy Aiken. Isak Dinesen on the Edge, in *Karen Blixen – Out of*

*Denmark*. The Danish Literature Information Centre, 1998, p. 73. Aiken draws an interesting parallel between Malin and Blixen before her death, when the writer was "elaborately staging herself as a speaking text."

## PART II · CHAPTER ONE

1 By, for example, Robert Langbaum (see his *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964) and Eric O. Johannesson (see his *The World of Isak Dinesen*. University of Washington Press, 1961).

2 By, for example, Hans Brix (see his *Karen Blixens Eventyr*. Gyldendal, 1949); Marianne Juhl & Bo Hakon Jørgensen (see their *Dianas hæv: To spor i Karen Blixens forfatterskab*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1981) and Kirsten Rødder (see her Karen Blixen: Genrer og motiver i et 50-årigt forfatterskab, in *Perspektiv*, 6 (1959), pp. 7–13).

3 In her letters, for example.

4 Langbaum seems to be an exception in this respect among the older Blixen scholars. Although he calls Blixen's texts "stories," he unhesitatingly refers to them as mainstream modernist literature: see Langbaum (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 2.

5 Annemette Hejlsted. Kvindelig orden og mandlig uorden. Om køn og genre i Karen Blixens "Skibsdrengens Fortælling," in *Synsvinkler*, 13 (1996), p. 59.

6 Bo Hakon Jørgensen. Historien som orfisk forklaring på spørgsmålet: Hvem er jeg? – eller sanselighedens metafysik i KB forfatterskab, in his *Symbolismen – eller jegets orfiske forklaring*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1993, p. 165.

7 As noted by Aage Henriksen (see his Karen Blixen and Marionettes, in his *Isak Dinesen / Karen Blixen: The Work and the Life*. St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 18). One of the most radical claims in this direction was made by Richard Gandrup, who criticised Blixen's writing for being "backwards" and linked it to a tradition that had "gone to the grave" with her (see Hans Holmberg. *Glæde over Danmark, II: Om Karen Blixen*. Högskolan i *Kristianstad*, 1986, p. 167).

8 See, for example, Johannesson (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

9 Ibid., p. 26.

10 Hans Hertel. Karen Blixen Superstar, in *Information* 8.3.1985, 28.2.1986 and 14.3.1986, later included in his *Karen Blixen Superstar: Glimt af det literære liv i medialderen*. Nørhaven og Forening for boghaandværk, 1996, pp. 228–231.

11 However, the situation in Kenya, where the Blixen boom had also reached, as described by Hertel, has changed quite radically since then. In 2006, an anti-Blixen campaign was started by Dominic Odipo who put back on the agenda a 20-year-old critique of Blixen by the famous Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o (for more on this event and the issues of colonialism in Blixen's scholarship, see Lasse Horne Kjældgaard. En af de farligste bøger, der nogen sinde er skrevet om Afrika?: Karen Blixen og kolonialismen, in *Tijdschrift voor*

*Skandinavistiek*, 30/2 (2009), pp. 111–135). Ironically, however, Blixen's name is still widely used to promote tourism in Kenya.

12 Judith Thurman. *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller*. St. Martin's Press, 1982.

13 One can only wonder which of Blixen's roles will be the focus of the biopic *Tanne* that Regner Grasten and Bille August have started working on.

14 See, for example, Lasse Kjældgaard. Myter og masker – Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen, in Klaus P. Mortensen & May Schack (eds.). *Dansk litteraturs historie 1920–1960*, 4. Gyldendal, 2006, pp. 242–247, and the introduction to Blixen's authorship by Thorkild Borup Jensen in his *Karen Blixen – en kanonforfatter*. Dansklærerforeningens Forlag, 2009. Blixen's life in Africa was full of dramatic experiences, and after coming back to Denmark, she often shocked the public with her provocative statements, constant role-playing, extravagant outfits and manners, and even a 'harem' of younger authors whom she liked to surround herself with. For more biographical details, see Thurman's biography (*op. cit.*), which remains the most exhaustive account of Blixen's life.

15 See, for example, Dag Heede, who with a certain amount of disdain calls the biographical approach to Blixen "narcissistic 'anthropology'" (see his *Det umenneskelige: Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001, p. 16). It is true, however, that the interest in Blixen as a person has, at a point, reached the grotesque dimensions of "literary necrophilia," as it was described in Sven H. Rossel's article Hun har faktisk også skrevet bøger. Betragtninger over nekrofili som litterært fænomen: Karen Blixen 1885–1962, in *Nordica*, 3 (1986). Odense Universitetsforlag, pp. 9–21.

16 See Thurman (1982) *op. cit.*, p. 331 and Thorkild Bjørnvig. *Pagten: Mit venskab med Karen Blixen*. Gyldendal, 1974, p. 131.

17 This is quoted from Thurman (1982) *op. cit.*, p. 265.

18 Isak Dinesen. *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*. Vintage Books, 1989, p. 218

19 See Merete Klenow With. Om Karen Blixen og hendes forfatterskab, in Karen Blixen. *Et Udvalg*. Ed. Merete Klenow With. Gyldendal, 1964, p. 213.

20 Quoted from Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 2.

21 The Danish Radio has broadcasted at least 12 of Blixen's storytelling sessions: see Liselotte Henriksen. *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999, p. 253.

22 Equivalents to the stories incorporated in, respectively, "Peter and Rosa," "The Deluge at Norderney" and *Out of Africa*. There are also recordings of Blixen's stories being 'told' by her in English and originating from Blixen's USA tour, among them "The Wine of the Tetrarch" and "The Blue Eyes" (see Liselotte Henriksen (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 253).

23 Else Cederborg. The works of Isak Dinesen from childhood and early youth, in *Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen: Tradition, Modernity, and Other Ambiguities (A University of Minnesota International Symposium, April 17–20, 1985): Conference Proceedings*. University of Minnesota, 1985, p. 105.
24 Isak Dinesen. *Winter's Tales*. Penguin Books, 1983, p. 182.
25 Storytelling as an act of social exchange and Blixen's opposition of the story to the novel connects Blixen's poetics with Walter Benjamin's theory, and Blixen scholars have discussed this parallel extensively. According to Benjamin, storytelling is social by nature, as it functions as a means of transmitting collective experience. Therefore, it is cardinally different from the art of the novel, which is born within a lonely, despairing individual who is no longer able to give or receive counsel (see Walter Benjamin. Der Erzähler, in *Illuminationen*. Suhrkamp, 1977, p. 457). For some more recent discussions on this issue which also show that the parallel between Benajmin's and Blixen's conceptions is not problem-free, see Charlotte Engberg. *Billedets ekko: Om Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 2000, pp. 102–106 and Annemette Hejlsted. Analyseeksempel: Karen Blixen: Den udødelige Historie, in her *Fortællingen – teori og analyse*. Forlaget Samfundslitteratur, 2007, pp. 227–235.
26 Isak Dinesen. *Last Tales*. Penguin Books, 1986, pp. 23–24.
27 Original emphasis. Ibid., pp. 24–26.
28 Ibid., p. 104.
29 Ibid., p. 100.
30 For a more exhaustive analysis of these two paradigmatic texts, see Tone Selboe. *Kunst og erfaring: En studie i Karen Blixens forfatterskap*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1996, pp. 88–99; Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 27–63; Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 154–149 and 160–163.
31 Langbaum (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 25.
32 Ibid.
33 A detailed lexical and stylistic analysis of the oral vs. written variants of "De blaa Øjne ("The Blue Eyes") has been performed by Ragna Lorentzen. Karen Blixen: De blaa Øjne, in her *Fortællesprog, talt og skrevet*. Gyldendal, 1973.
34 There will be more on the complex composition of Blixen's texts in the chapter dealing with the relationship between Blixen's texts and the architext of the novella.
35 The Roads of Life, in Dinesen (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 241–243.
36 The story that the Cardinal tells does not allow the reader to determine which of the two twins – the one which the parents decided would have a future as an artist or the one who was supposed to become a priest – he is, and instead shows that he is actually them both. For more on the discursive, non-essentialist subjectivity of Blixen's storytelling characters, especially in relation to "The Cardinal's First Tale" (and thus the difference between her stories and

Benjamin's model): see Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 105 and her Fortællingen til døden, in *Ny Poetik*, 4 (1999), p. 42.

37 This is Linda Hutcheon's term: see her *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980.

38 The Dutch scholar André Jolles has thus identified fairytales as a preliterary form of narrative in his *Einfache Formen* (1922), see Mary Beth Stein. Simple Forms, in Donald Haase (ed.). *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairytales*, 3 (Q-Z). Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 864.

39 Roland Barthes. The Death of the Author, in his *Image, Music, Text*. Fontana Press, 1977, p. 146.

40 In this context, not only the famous example of "The Revenge of Truth" and "The Roads Round Pisa," but such text-pairs as the essay "On Modern Marriage" and "A Consolatory Tale," or "The Dreamers" and "Echoes" can be mentioned.

41 See the discussion in Chapter 4 of Part 1.

42 Danish original: "en begejstret boltren sig i hele verderns kulturhistorie, et orgie af referancer" (Heede (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 245).

43 Linda Hutcheon explains in these terms the postmodern concept of the text, which both asserts the structuralist idea of its aesthetic autonomy and undercuts it by returning the text back to the "world," which, however, is not "the "world" of ordinary reality," but "the "world" of discourse" (see her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1989, p. 125).

44 Consider, for example, the analyses of "The Poet," "The Deluge at Norderney," "Babette's Feast," or "The Heroine."

45 Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, p. 102. In addition, "The Dreamers" provide the foreground for the aspect of oral transmission, which secures the constant transformation of the story: having listened to Lincoln's story, Mira Jama recognises in it one he himself has once created (Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 307). "The Immortal Story" even uses the impossibility of confining an orally-transmitted story to a uniform, rigid shape as its key theme.

46 Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, p. 104.

47 Ibid., pp. 104–105.

48 Ivan Ž. Sørensen and Ole Togeby explore this issue mathematically, producing three possible explanations for the story: either the bride was not a virgin on the wedding night, or she kept the bridegroom at a distance, or the bridegroom was impotent or unable to consummate the marriage for some other reason (see their *Omvejene til Pisa: En fortolkning af Karen Blixen "Vejene omkring Pisa"*. Gyldendal, 2001, p. 13). Theoretically, there seem to be other possibilities (there could have been no princess at all, or the white sheet could have been hung by someone as a sign of protest against the old tradition, which had once been long-standing, but at the moment of narration had already been

dead for many years). It is this impossibility of 'knowing for sure', as well as the invitation to relate the mystery to our own experience, that seems to be the most important message of the image.

49 Literally: "the page on which nothing is (yet) written".

50 The words used in the Danish version are: "I hvilken evig og urokkelig troskab imod historien er ikke dette lærred blevet indføjet i rækken" (Karen Blixen. *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1. Gyldendals Tranebøger, 1993, p. 119). In the English version, it is clear from the context that it is "loyalty to the story" which the storyteller is preaching here.

51 Dinesen, (1986) *op. cit.*, pp. 104–105.

52 Ibid., p. 3.

53 Ibid., p. 25.

54 The stories that are of oral origin – the tales of Leander and Hera, of Cupid and Psyche and that of Aladdin – also relate to classical literature and remain recognisable in different formations. They appear, for example, in the epic poem *Hero and Leander* (c. 1593) by Marlowe, *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius and the drama *Aladdin* (1805) by the Danish Romantic author Oehlenschläger respectively.

55 See Chapter 3 of Part 1.

56 Cf. "It is important to develop one's skill in reading between the lines, in understanding the half-composed song." Danish original: "Det gælder om at gøre sig dygtig til at læse mellem linjerne, til at forstå en halvkvædet vise" (Sørensen & Togeby (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 13).

57 See Wolfgang Iser. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Becket*. The John Hopkins University Press. 1978, p. 280. Blixen was, of course, not the first writer to explore the poetics of silence, and she seems to be especially indebted to the great poet of silence, Stéphane *Mallarmé*.

58 See Roland Barthes. *S / Z*. Cape, 1975, p. 4.

59 See Chapter 2 of Part 1.

60 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, pp. 143, 185.

61 Ibid., pp. 219–220.

62 A narrative is isochronous when we need more or less the same amount of time to read it as is required for the narrated events to take place (equality between the duration of a situation or event and the duration of its representation): see Gerald Prince. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press, 2003, pp. 47, 84.

63 The performative character of Blixen's stories has also been exemplified by numerous successful cinematic adaptations and theatre productions of her texts, including the films *Babettes Gæstebud* (1987) by Gabriel Axel, *L'histoire immortelle* (1968) by Orson Welles and *Drömmare på besøk* (1978) by Georg

Oddner and the operas *Drømmerne* (1949) by Ebbe Hammerik and *Ringen* (*The Bond*, 1979) by John von Daler and Bo Holten, to mention but a few.

64 Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 17.

65 Danish original: "På samme måde optræder stederne også altid som metaforer for tid; hvad enten der er tale om klostre, parker, gamle herregårde eller diskret tilbagetrukne borgerhuse – for at nævne nogle lokaliteter, som hører til Blixens absolutte favoritter – er disse i reglen håndgribelige, konkrete resonansrum for det fjerne" (ibid., pp. 13–14).

66 Giovanni Boccaccio. Day the First. The Fifth Story, in *The Decameron* (retrieved from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700-h/23700-h.htm#THE_FIFTH_STORY).

67 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Paladin, 1970, p. 167.

68 Original title: *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, 1921.

69 Like, for example, the previously discussed reflections on the art of the story.

70 José Ortega y Gasset. The Idea of Theatre, in *Phenomenology and Art*. Trans. Philip W. Silver. W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1975, pp. 177–178.

71 "Art is Divine play. Both these elements are of equal value. It is Divine, as it is what approaches man to God, making him into a real and full-right creator. At the same time, art is play because it remains art as long as we do not forget that the actor is not being killed on the stage, in other words, as long as horror and disgust do not prevent us from believing that we, readers and spectators, participate in an artistic and involving game. As soon as this balance is destroyed, we become aware that it is a cheap melodrama that is unfolding on the stage, and in the book – soul-freezing murder more befitting a newspaper" (Vladimir Nabokov. *Lectures on Russian Literature*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 106).

## PART II · CHAPTER TWO

1 However, he entitled his book "Karen Blixen's Fairytales" (*Karen Blixens Eventyr*, Gyldendal, 1949).

2 See Mogens Brønsted. Karen Blixen, in his *Nordens Litteratur efter 1860*. Nordisk forlag, 1972, pp. 371–374. However, he also calls Blixen's texts "*historier*" (stories), "*fortællinger*" (tales) and "*arabesker*" (arabesques), see ibid.

3 As in, for example, the following works: Ivan Ž. Sørensen. *'Gid De havde set mig dengang': Et essay om Karen Blixen's heltinder og Tizians gudinder*. Gyldendal, 2002; Dag Heede. *Det umenneskelige: Analyser af seksualitet, køn og identitet hos Karen Blixen*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001. It would be incorrect, however, to claim that the terms *fortælling* and *historie* are used only seldom today. Although the distinction between the Danish terms *fortælling* and

*novelle* seems not to be clear-cut (except that the former certainly has stronger implications of the reminiscences of oral delivery), one can assume that the international term better reflects the cultural context that scholars today associate with Blixen's works, namely the (post)modern European tradition, while the terms *fortælling* and *historie* seem to have better corresponded with the older reception of Blixen as "a great anachronism" in Danish literature.

4 See, for example, Gerard Gillespie. Novella, Nouvelle, Novelle, Short Novel? – A Review of Terms, in *Neophilogus*, 51 (1967) for a survey of related terms in different European traditions throughout time. As far as the Lithuanian term is concerned, it is usually applied to short prose texts, while a text of 50–100 pages, as is typical of Blixen's stories, would be called *apysaka* (~ tale) – the Lithuanian equivalent of the Russian *povest'*. The stories in *Anecdotes of Destiny* have indeed been classified as *apysakos* by the Lithuanian publisher. However, there are qualities that seem to be more important for defining the genre of *novelė* than the size criterion. The principle quality of a *novelė* is considered to be the mastery of composition, while *apysaka* is characterised as being less structured, and sometimes even amorphous (see Kęstutis Keblys. Romanas išeivijoje, in Kazys Bradūnas (ed.). *Lietuvių literatūra svetur. 1945–1967*. Į laisvę fondas lietuviškai kultūrai ugdyti, 1968, p. 87; Vytautas Kubilius. *Lietuvių literatūra ir pasaulinės literatūros procesas*. Vaga, 1983, p. 292; Jūratė Sprindytė. *Lietuvių apysaka*. Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1996, pp. 15, 27–28).

5 Thomas Bredsdorff. Documentarism as a Formal Category in Nineteenth-Century Danish Literature – Structure and Rhetoric in the Classical Novella, in Poul Houe & Sven Hakon Rossel (eds.). *Documentarism in Scandinavian Literature*. Rodopi, 1997, p. 183.

6 The first theoretical study of the genre is considered to be Francesco Bonciani's *Lezione sopra il comporre delle novelle*, 1574 (see Gillespie (1967) *op. cit.*, p. 121). Theories related to the German *Novelle* were developed by, among others, Goethe, Friedrich von Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Paul Heyse, Edwin Keppel Bennett, John M. Ellis. In Denmark, the *novelle* has received the attention of Søren Baggesen, Aage Henriksen, Thomas Bredsdorff, Jørgen Dines Johansen and Marie Lund Klujeff, among others.

7 See Marie Lund Klujeff. *Novellen: struktur, historie og analyse*. Gads Forlag, 2002, pp. 92–95.

8 Cf. Jacques Derrida. The Law of Genre (trans. Avital Ronell), in *Critical Inquiry*, 7/1 (Autumn 1980, *On Narrative*), p. 59.

9 Cf. Hans Robert Jauss. Theory of Genres and Medieval literature, in his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti. University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 79.

10 See E[dwin] K[eppel] Bennett. *A History of the German Novelle*. Cambridge University Press, 1961, pp. 6, 18; Kubilius (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 293; Ian Reid. *The*

*Short Story: The Critical Idiom*. Methuen, 1977, p. 13; Gillespie (1967) *op. cit.*, p. 126; Eleasar Meletinskij = Елеазар Мелетинский. *Историческая поэтика новеллы*. Наука, 1990, p. 3.

11 As proposed by Friedrich von Schlegel and Arnold Hirsch (see Søren Baggesen. *Den blicherske novelle*. Blicher Selskabet, 1965, p. 12); Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 193.

12 See Baggesen (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 41; Søren Baggesen. *Fire veje til Blichers novellekunst*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2004, p. 46; Aage Henriksen. Johannes-Evangeliet som novelle, in his *Gotisk Tid: Fire litterære afhandlinger*. Gyldendal, 1971; Annemette Hejlsted. *Fortællingen – teori og analyse*. Forlaget Samfundslitteratur, 2007, p. 170.

13 Cf. Goethe's famous description of the *Novelle* as an unprecedented event that has occurred: "eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit" (*Gespräche mit Eckermann*, 29 Jan. 1827; quoted from Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 190); see also Bennett (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 67; Meletinskij (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

14 See B[oris] M[ikhailovich] Ejxenbaum. O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story, in Ladislav Matejka et al. (eds.). *Readings in Russian Poetics*. The University of Michigan, 1978, p. 231; Bennett (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 19.

15 See Bennett (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 11; Gillespie (1967) *op. cit.*, p. 123.

16 See Baggesen (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 42.

17 Cf. Theodor Storm's idea of the *Novelle* as "the sister of the drama" (see Bennett (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 164). See also ibid., p. 12; Henriksen (1971) *op. cit.*, p. 81; Meletinskij (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 168.

18 See Bennett (1961) *op. cit.*, p. 16; Baggesen (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 35.

19 See, for example, Baggesen (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 46; Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 195; Hejlsted (2007) *op. cit.*, p. 171. These authors treat realism, however, in different terms. While for Baggesen and Hejlsted, it means the representation of events in a way which is empirically probable, Bredsdorff makes use of Michael Riffaterre's concept of "performative truth," demonstrating how the effect of truth emerges from the combination of elements within the text, and not from comparing the narrated events "to a reality that one, for the most part, does not know"(Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 195). Realism, in the former sense of the word, seems to be a problematic concept in respect to, for example, the German Romantic *Novelle* with its strong fantastic element. However, one still speaks of its realism, but as realism of the mind rather than that of external reality (see Charles May. The Novella, in Carl Rollyson (ed.). *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*. Salem Press, 2010, p. 5631).

20 This is understood as both "a style of language" and in "a more metaphysical sense of the lyrical as a disposition towards the world" (see John Kenny. Inside out: a working theory of the Irish short story, in Hilary Lennon (ed.). *Frank O'Connor: New Critical Essays*. Four Courts Press, 2007 (retrieved from http://

aran.library.nuigalway.ie/xmlui/handle/10379/789). See also Jens Krusse & Ole Storm. *Tyve Mesterfortællinger*, 1. Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1963, p. 8, for the discussion of the poetic moment in the *Novelle*.

21 See, for example, Lund Klujeff (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 18–29; Hejlsted (2007) *op. cit.*, pp. 170–172; Erik Skyum-Nielsen. Striden om stokken: Den danske novelle og dens teori, in *Reception*, 53 (2004), pp. 3–8.

22 Baggesen relates his theory to the tradition which "flourished in Germany in the 19th century" (Baggesen (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 14) and, of course, to the works of the Danish 19th-century writer Steen Steensen Blicher, which constitute the ultimate object of his study. However, his analyses also include Boccaccio.

23 Danish original: Novellen er en fiktionsform, som indbyder til anvendelsen af en etableret fortællerpersonlighed inden for fiktionen. Denne fortællerpersonlighed kan variere fra en rent mekanisk størrelse til en egentlig individualiseret fortæller, og i sidste fald opstår der en dialektisk vekselvirkning mellem fortæller og fortælling, som kan føres ud til et dialektisk spil mellem fortælling og læser. Fortælleren som mellemled mellem begivenheder og læser forhindrer under alle omstændigheder en identifikation med de optrædende personer. Men det centrale i fortællerbegrebet er selve den fiktionsform, som kan betyde fortællerens konkrete tilstedeværelse inden for fiktionen, men ikke nødvendiggør den: adskillelsen mellem fortællertid og fortalt tid, fiktionen om et faktisk afsluttet forløb, som berettes (Baggesen (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 41).

24 Baggesen's study shows that even in the case of the impersonal narrator, the presence of the narrator is strongly felt through the artistic and chronological design of the novella and should be taken into account when interpreting the story as a whole (see his analysis of "Die Marquise von O…" by von Kleist, ibid., pp. 21–22).

25 Danish original: Det irrationelle i tilværelsen kan være led i en metafysisk tilværelsestolking, og begivenheder opfattes da som de ekstrahumane kræfters indslag i menneskelivet. Men dette behøver ikke at være tilfældet, det irrationelle kan godt være rene tilfældigheder eller i og for sig rationelle handlinger, blot koncentreres så ikke om de handlende mennesker og deres handlingers motivation, men handlingerne opfattes som irrationelle indslag i andre menneskers liv (ibid., p. 43).

26 Therefore, it in some ways parallels the notion of epiphany, the sudden insight, which the short story theoreticians operate with.

27 Danish original: Disse to punkter kan falde sammen, og vi får da den egentlige pointe, som på en gang bestemmer udvalget af de skildrede begivenheder og uddrager den overraskende konklusion af dem. Men de to punkter kan lige så vel opfræde hver for sig. I så fald bliver determinationspunktet i egentlig forstand determinationspunkt, idet alle de efterfølgende begivenheder har deres udspring i det, mens tolkningspunktet kun samler trådene for at åbne

novellens perspektiv, men ikke har nogen bestemmende indflydelse på forløbet. Tolkningspunktet kan falde helt bort, idet så novellens perspektiv åbner sig ved et samspil mellem de begivenheder, novellen skilder, uden at disses løse tråde samles i en enkelt begivenhed (ibid., p. 44).

28 Henriksen (1971) *op. cit.*, p. 80–81.

29 Ibid., p. 81. The English translation quoted from Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 186–187.

30 See Thomas Bredsdorff. Stuktur og retorik i den klassiske novelle, in Thomas Bredsdorff & Finn Hauberg Mortensen (eds.). *Hindsgavl rapport: Litteraturteori og praksis*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1995 and Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*

31 Bredsdorff (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 184.

32 Ibid., pp. 184–185.

33 Ibid., pp. 188–189.

34 Ibid., p. 198.

35 Ibid., p. 190, Bredsdorff's emphasis.

36 Ibid., pp. 190–193.

37 Ibid., pp. 193, 197.

38 The only conspicuous flashback being the old shepherd's short recount about a sheep thief.

39 An audacious (re)construction of the details of their intercourse is offered by Sørensen and Togeby in their sharp-witted intermedial reading of the novella (see Ivan Ž. Sørensen & Ole Togeby. *Omvejene til Pisa: En fortolkning af "Vejene omkring Pisa."* Gyldendal, 2001, p. 145). They also discuss in detail Hans Brix's famous misinterpretation of the "Story of the Bravo" (ibid., pp. 259–265).

40 It is obvious that she has decided to play an active role in the life of the young family, pushing the young husband to the part of "the youngest Magus of the adoration," and taking upon herself "the part of Joseph" (Isak Dinesen. *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 50)

41 Ibid., p. 237.

42 Ibid.

43 See the discussion of Blixen's implied poetics of art as play in Chapter 3 of Part 1.

44 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 239.

45 As Bo Hakon Jørgensen's demonstrates, Lincoln's narrative is different from the narrative tradition represented by Mira Jama (*viz.* the type of stories exemplified by *Thousand and One Nights*), the latter being devoid of temporal and spatial references and dealing instead with archetypical figures ("kings" and "heroes"). Lincoln's story belongs to the "sad" (*sørgelig*) type which contains "names, places and life in the countries where it happened," and Jørgensen sees a model for it in the narrative literature from the turn of the 20th century, in the tales by Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad (see his *Siden hen – om Karen Blixen*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1999, p. 23). The story that

frames Lincoln's story, which is the story told by Blixen's overall narrator with all the framed stories included, is, no doubt, at least one step further ahead in terms of literary development, as it reads as a self-reflective text, which exhibits a high degree of narrative self-consciousness by playing different literary traditions against each other and making the laws and ways of literature one of its central topics.

46 In the following, I draw a great deal from Charlotte Engberg's analysis of the story, as presented in her *Billedets ekko: Om Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 2000, pp. 159–180 and Fortællingen til døden, in *Ny Poetik*, 4 (1999), as well as from Tone Selboe's paper "An Unexpected Strange and Alarming Close": Eros and Poetics in Blixen's Tales, in *Karen Blixen – Out of Denmark*. The Danish Literature Information Centre, 1998.

47 Brooks claims that the reading process is driven by narrative desire, which arises from two major instincts: pleasure-seeking, but also the quest for death, with the tension arising between the reader's will to consummate this desire and to delay it in order to increase the pleasure when it is eventually consummated. On the one hand, the reader wants to reach the end, hoping that having finished reading, he or she will see the meaning of what he or she was reading (and will be granted retrospection of the narrative). On the other hand, the reader does not want this 'death' to come too quickly, and therefore his or her narrative desire must be incited by manipulation of the plot, and "deviance from the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end – which would be the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death" (Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 104).

48 Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 41.

49 Brooks (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 23. This passage is also quoted by Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 48.

50 For, as Brooks claims, "yet still we read in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read" (Brooks (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 23).

51 Selboe (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 80.

52 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 271.

53 Brooks (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 22.

54 Her name is a play on the Latin word for *pilgrim*, with all its connotations of wandering: see Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 165; Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 44.

55 According to Engberg, Pellegrina as the metaphor for the text foregrounds the tension between the postponement of the final conclusion as the principle mode of the narrative and the almost irresistible longing for its end (see Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 47). The metafictional implications of Pellegrina's character are also suggested by the sign of the snake on her body (the snake,

as a symbol of the story, will be discussed in the analysis of "Babette's Feast" in the following chapter).

56 Brooks (1992) *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95. It is obvious that Marcus' story grants only partial closure to Lincoln's narrative, and to the text as a whole. By shedding light on Pellegrina's identity, Marcus helps the reader to reconstruct the fabula of Lincoln's tale. However, there are things that still remain enigmatic and need to be investigated in order to produce a semantic interpretation of the text: for example, how one can associate the different temporal and spatial frames of her idiosyncratic incarnations or interpret her ties with her 'shadow' Marcus – a character of strong intertextual charge. The complex narrative structure of Lincoln's discourse also contributes to the opacity of Pellegrina's character: her secret is revealed by Marcus, but it is Lincoln who incorporates this story (as well as those of Pilot and the Baron) into his discourse, 'filtering' its events through his own consciousness or creating them from nothing. Lincoln appears to be a highly unreliable narrator, as both on board the ship heading to Zanzibar and in the hotel in Andermat he is intoxicated. That this might be his constant state is suggested by his nickname *Tembu* – which, according to the overall narrator, "may mean either ivory or alcohol" (Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 237). In other words, the reader, in order to 'capture' Pellegrina more firmly, will have to undertake a challenging interpretative task without, however, being able to possess her for definite. This is suggested by her premortal brawl, which, as Engberg puts it, nobody understands and by which she encloses herself within her own mystery (Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 47).

57 See, for example, Poul Behrendt. Tekst, historie og samfund i Karen Blixens fortælling "Sorg-Agre," in *Kritik*, 41 (1977), p. 95, or Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 106.

58 According to Behrendt, this story, although portraying events that stretch over less than one day and night, in a stylised form covers a period of more than a thousand years: see Behrendt (1977) *op. cit.*, p. 94.

59 The time is established according to the year when the tragedy "The Death of Balder" by Johannes Ewald, which is discussed in the text, was published: see Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 106.

60 Isak Dinesen. *Winter's Tales*. Penguin Books, 1983, p. 181.

61 Ibid., p. 192.

62 Ibid., p. 193.

63 Ibid., p. 186.

64 See Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 109.

65 See Leif Søndergaard. På grænsen mellem liv og død – en analyse af Karen Blixens "Sorg-Agre," in Clas Zilliacus et al. (eds.). *Gränser i nordisk litteratur / Borders in Nordic Literature*. Åbo Akademis förlag, 2008, p. 526.

66 See Else Brundbjerg. *Kvinden, kætteren, kunstneren*. KnowWare, 1995, p. 105.

67 Critics have argued over whether the old lord has arranged it himself that his wife should sleep with Adam in order to secure the heir that the old lord himself cannot produce, but there is little doubt that at least he should have been aware of the fact, as is also testified by Blixen's own comment (see Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 110). In any case, the irony directed at this character cannot be discarded. However, as Susan Hardy Aiken has demonstrated in her feminist reading of the novella, Adam is not spared from the narrator's irony either: the text ridicules both men's longing for continuity, and with the help of the two female characters (Anne-Marie and Sophie Magdalena), as well as variations in the narrative design, it subverts the primacy of masculine dominance – both as a social and a textual phenomenon (see Susan Hardy Aiken. Dinesen's "Sorrow-Acre": Tracing the Woman's Line, in *Contemporary Literature*, 25/2 (1984), pp. 156–186).

68 Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 214–215. According to Engberg, the text warns against engaging in the events it portrays, especially through the theatrical performance of the characters which "transfers them into another world of exaggerated dimensions" (Danish original: "fører dem ind i en anden verden af forstørrede dimensioner"), and which allows the interpreter to read the story in metafictional terms as a meeting point for different artistic traditions; not only literary traditions, but the conventions of 18–19th c. pictorial art as well.

69 Brantly (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 111–112.

70 Ibid., p. 112.

71 In the narrator's impartial (and sometimes even cool) relationship with the characters, which is limited to the recording of their behaviour, thoughts and speech and refraining from any explicit judgment, Blixen's novellas resemble those by Anton Chekhov, despite great differences in the two authors' styles (cf. Chekhov's laconic structure and focus on everyday life situations vs. the intricacy of Blixen's narratives and the demonstrative artificiality of her characters and situations).

72 In, respectively, "Supper at Elsinore," "The Cardinal's Third Tale," "The Deluge at Norderney" and "The Monkey."

73 In, respectively, "The Cardinal's Third Tale," "The Cardinal's First Tale" and "The Deluge at Norderney."

74 In, respectively, "The Caryatids," "Babette's Feast" and "The Deluge at Norderney."

75 Dag Heede. Gender Trouble in Isak Dinesen's "The Monkey," in *Karen Blixen – Out of Denmark*. Danish Literature Information Centre, 1998, p. 107.

76 Danish original: "/…/ *ingen normale Mennesker findes* /…/ Mænd elsker deres Søstre, Tanter deres Niecer, enkelte af Personerne er forelsket i sig selv, og unge Kvinder *kan* ingen Børn faa, eller *vil* ingen have, en fransk Grevinde slynger sin Elsker i Ansigtet, at han ikke er forelsket i hende, men i hendes

Mand /…/ *Morten de Coninck* er forelsket i sit Skib „Fortuna", Baron Brackel og Grev Boris nærer Følelser henholdsvis for en Hjerneskal og et helt Skelet" (quoted from Sørensen & Togeby (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 257).

77 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 206.

78 The book tells us that Blixen used to be addressed as "Lioness Blixen" by her Somali gunbearer Ismail: see Isak Dinesen. *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*. Vintage Books, 1989, p. 67.

79 This is by no means to say that other readings are not justified. However, almost all of Blixen's stories seem to invite metafictional readings, as has also been noticed by Engberg: "the true protagonist in Blixen is – the *story*" (Danish original: "den egentlige hovedperson hos Blixen er – *fortællingen*"): see Engberg (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 48.

80 Boccaccio is, of course, not the only writer who has used the model of the framed narrative. Stories told by different narrators are united in a cycle in *L'Heptaméron* (1558) by Marguerite of Navarre, and in *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (1795) by Goethe. The model can still be applied by modern authors, as it has been in, for example, a joint project by a Danish group of writers who produced *September-fortællinger* (1988). However, it was Boccaccio who introduced this model into Western European literature, and many of the later novella cycles have borrowed from the situational and structural patterns of *Il Decamerone*.

81 "The Bridal Couple is Expected." The introductory story and some of the novellas that, according to the original plan, had to be part of the cycle, such as "Den Dødes Stævnemøde," "Johannes Qvists historie" and "Familien de Cats" were published in the collections *Kongesønnerne* (1985) and *Karneval og andre fortællinger* (1994). The English version of "Familien de Cats," "The de Cats Family," is included in *Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales* (1977): see Frans Lasson. Efterskrift, in Karen Blixen. *Karneval og andre fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1994, p. 467.

82 Some of these novellas, such as "The Cardinal's First Tale," "The Cloak," "Night Walk" and others were included in *Last Tales* (1957).

83 See Ulla Albeck. Karen Blixen and the Thousand and One Nights: Albondocani, an Analysis, in *Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen: Tradition, Modernity, and Other Ambiguities* (*A University of Minnesota International Symposium, April 17–20, 1985*)*: Conference Proceedings*. University of Minnesota, 1985, p. 168.

84 "/…/ though it tends to define the particulars of locality and costume with precision, it is content to do so in general terms, in accordance with the rules and habits of thought of a cultivated society, in which it (the Novelle) has its origin and home" (quoted from E[dwin] K[eppel] Bennett. *A History of the German Novelle*. Rev. H. M. Waidson. Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 9).

85 As, for example, is done by Aage Kabell in his reading of Miss Malin (who relates Calypso's story and whose thoughts are summed up by the impostor cardinal) as "Karen Blixen herself in a modern age" (Danish original: "Karen Blixen selv i en moderne alder"): see his *Karen Blixen debuterer*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968, p. 163.

86 Else Cederborg. Introduktion til Karen Blixens forfatterskab, in Karen Blixen. *Det drømmende barn og andre fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1979, pp. 269–271. Blixen's spiritual aristocrat seems to unite the nobleman of the Renaissance for whom storytelling is a way to keep death at bay, the Romantic artist for whom storytelling offers an escape from the triviality of life, and the man of modernity for whom storytelling is often a path to self-awareness.

87 Baron von Brackel is an exception in this respect.

88 Issues of sexuality are the focus of the book by Heede (2001) *op. cit.*

89 As has been demonstrated by Tone Selboe, the topos of *coitus interruptus* also reads symbolically as a signature of Blixen's own storytelling patterns, see Selboe (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 80–82.

90 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 14.

91 Frans Lasson & Tom Engelbrecht (eds.). *Karen Blixen i Danmark. Breve 1931–1962*, 1. Gyldendal, 1996, p. 85. According to the editors, Blixen herself wrote the draft of this letter in which the American writer was asked for help with presenting Blixen's first book to a publisher (ibid., p. 83).

92 Blixen's relationship with the Romantic tradition has been described, among others, by Merete Klenow With (see her Om Karen Blixen og hendes forfatterskab, in Karen Blixen. *Et Udvalg*. Ed. Merete Klenow With. Gyldendal, pp. 182–184) and Annelies van Hees (see her Et romantisk kvindebillede hundrede år efter, in *Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie*, 19 (1991)).

93 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 122.

94 Eric O. Johannesson *The World of Isak Dinesen*. University of Washington Press, 1961, p. 20.

95 Dinesen (1963) *op. cit.*, p. 49.

96 Especially his novella cycle *Chimera* (1972), with its postmodern replay of *The Arabian Nights* and the figure of Scheherazade – one of Blixen's favourite intertexts.

97 For bibliographical information, see Liselotte Henriksen, *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999, pp. 34–35, 41 and 280.

98 See, for example, Robert Langbaum. *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, pp. 272–279; Marleen Barr. Food for Postmodern Thought: Isak Dinesen's Female Artists as Precursors to Contemporary Feminist Fabulators, in Libby Falk Jones et al. (eds.). *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*. University of Tennessee Press, 1990, pp. 21–33; Bruce Bassoff. Babette Can Cook: Life and Art in Three Stories by Isak Dinesen, in *Studies in Short Fiction*, 27/3

(1990), pp. 385–389; Grethe F[ogh] Rostbøll. *Længslens vingeslag: Analyser af Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 1996, pp. 276–282; Tone Selboe. *Kunst og erfaring: En studie i Karen Blixens forfatterskap*. Odense Universitetsforlag, 1996, pp. 105–119; Frantz Leander Hansen. *Babette og det aristokratiske univers: Om Karen Blixens forfatterskab*. C. A. Reitzel, 1998; Ervin Beck. Dinesen's "Babette's Feast," in *Explicator*, 56 (1998), pp. 210–213; Charlotte Engberg. *Billedets ekko: Om Karen Blixens fortællinger*. Gyldendal, 2000, pp. 219–236; Susan Brantly. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, pp, 186–188; and, more recently, Jørgen Stormgaard. Babette i Berlevaag, in his *Guds plan: Karen Blixen og kristendommen*. Haase & Søns Forlag, 2010, pp. 15–65.

99 According to the so called "Lanser's rule," when a text does not contain any indication of the narrator's sex it is assumed to be the same as the author's (see Susan Sniader Lanser. *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Fiction*. Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 166). As further analysis shows, this rule is absolutely justified in the case of "Babette's Feast."

100 Isak Dinesen. Babette's Feast, in *Anecodotes of Destiny*. Penguin Books, 1986, p. 24. All further citations are to this edition with page numbers indicated in square brackets.

101 My emphasis.

102 This suggests that Blixen could have been involved in Claudi's translation.

103 Neither does it seem to be accidental that the year of the feast in the Danish text (1885) is the year Blixen was born, see Selboe (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 105.

104 Ibid., pp. 111–112. Selboe here makes use of Genette's term which signifies the narrative tempo, in which the "story time" and the "narrative time" coincide (see Gérard Genette. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 95). In simple words, we call a narrative fragment a scene when it takes more or less the same time to read it, and for the narrated events to take place.

105 See the quote on page 148.

106 "Udenfor dens *tre* Vinduer med de smaa Ruder laa den store Verden" (Karen Blixen. *Skæbne-Anekdoter*. Gyldendal, 1958, p. 56; my emphasis).

107 See James Woods. *The Iresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel*. Picador, 2004, p. 6.

108 *Liovenhjelm* means "Lion's helmet" in Danish.

109 Hans Christian Andersen. The Steadfast Tin Soldier, in Ernest Rhys (ed.). *Fairy Tales from Hans Christian Andersen*. J. M. Dent & Co. / E. P. Dutton & Co., 1907, p. 95.

110 Blixen (1958) *op. cit.*, p. 33.

111 Hans Christian Andersen. Den standhaftige tinsoldat, in his *Eventyr og Historier*. Sesam, 1999, p. 203.

112 Andersen (1907) *op. cit.*, p. 93

113 See Selboe (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 108.
114 See ibid., pp. 109–110; Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 229.
115 As observed by Selboe (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 110.
116 Wendy M. Wright. Babette's Feast: A Religious Film, in *Journal of Religion and Film*, 1 (2), 1997, [21] (retrieved from http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/BabetteWW.htm).
117 As with the earlier mentioned transformation of wine (champagne) into water (lemonade) in the minds of the old brothers and sisters, see Selboe (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 110.
118 Isak Dinesen. H. C. Branner: The Riding Master in her *Daguerrotypes and Other Essays*. The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 172.
119 Ibid.
120 Danish original: "forfatterens tekst bliver selve det evangelium som læserne skal frelses af"; "Fortællingens personer er dem der fortælles om, ikke noget læserne skal tro på" (Ivan Ž. Sørensen & Ole Togeby. *Omvejene til Pisa: En fortolkning af Karen Blixen "Vejene omkring Pisa."* Gyldendal, 2001, p. 32).
121 In the film however, her remark is altered so that she admits having done so both for the others' and her own sake.
122 Danish original: "kunstneren besidder noget af Guds transcendens – nemlig evnen til at forandre" (Engberg (2000) *op. cit.*, p. 229).
123 See Kiril Koroliov = Кирилл Королев (ed.). *Скандинавская Мифология. Энциклопедия* [*Encyclopaedia of Norse Mythology*]. Издательство Эксмо, 2004, p. 33. See also John Lindow. *Handbook of Norse Mythology*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, Inc., 2001, p. 66.
124 Mircea Eliade. *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*. Princetone University Press, 1974, pp. 9–10.
125 Ibid., p. 110.
126 Like, for example, the dissolution of temporal and spatial boundaries, the spirit of communion, the element of sacrifice, the succession of wines and dishes as a replay of the 'sacred' order of the gourmet dinner.
127 This model is especially distinct in Nordic mythology, according to which the world is being born out of ice and fire that meet in the abyss of Ginnungagap, as, for example, told by Snorri Sturluson in "The Deluding of Gylfi" (see Lindow (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 141).
128 Cf. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed [each other]" (Psalms 85:10, retrieved from *King James Bible*, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Psalms-85-10).
129 Cf. "Miskundhed og Sandhed mødes /…/. Retfærd og Fryd skulle kysse hinanden" (Blixen 1958) *op. cit.*, p. 34 and "Miskundhed og Sandhed mødes, Retfærd og Fred skal kysse hinanden" (Salmerne 85:10, retrieved from *Biblos.com*, http://da.bibelsite.com/psalms/85-10.htm).

130 The formulation is borrowed from the title of Aiken's book, see Aiken (1990) *op. cit.*

131 See, for example, the following interpretations: Sara Stambaugh. *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen: A Feminist Reading*. UMI Research Press, 1988, pp. 79–81; Aiken (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 254; Barr (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 19–33.

132 One, especially if she or he is not a Frenchman, can wonder why Blixen has chosen to speak about art in culinary terms. The story goes that Blixen followed her friend Geoffrey Gorer's advice to write about food, a topic that could interest the American audience (see Stormgaard (2010) *op. cit.*, p. 15). One can also speculate that this parallel saves the text from pathos which typically accompanies the Romantic concept of the artist as a divine creator. One can also find here an element of wordplay: Babette is a "chef," (the word is used both in the Danish and the English text) and the dinner is, of course, her work, which evokes association with the French word *chef-d'œuvre*, a masterpiece, the best that an artist can create.

133 Dinesen (1979) *op. cit.*, p. 191. My emphasis. Frantz Leander Hansen seems to be the first who has elucidated upon the relevance of this quote for "Babette's Feast," see Hansen (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 111–114. The importance of this quote for the understanding of Blixen's poetics of the art of the story is also discussed by Sørensen & Togeby (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 31.

134 Both Mt 7, 9-11 and Psalm 42 (by substituting the myth for God).

135 "The serpent symbolizes [sic] chaos, the formless and nonmanifested"(Eliade (1974) *op. cit.*, p. 19). In Nordic mythology, the serpent Jormungand encircling the Midgard represents a threat to the order of the world and plays a crucial role in Ragnarok – the Doom of Gods.

136 Wolfgang Iser. Fictionalizing Acts, in his *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. The John Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 1–21.

137 Is 1:18.

138 "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," 1939.

139 The latter applies both to the characters who experience opposite things than they have expected, and to the reader who is not allowed to find out for sure what is happening inside the characters' minds and hearts.

140 According to some authors, "The Dead" should be considered a novella rather than a short story (see, for example, Tom Loe. The Dead, in Andrew Maunder (ed.). *The Facts of File Companion to British Short Story*. Facts On File, 2007, p. 105). In the context of the present book, however, this text by Joyce is especially important for its employment of epiphany, which by a number of short story theoreticians is considered to be a major distinctive feature of the short story genre (there will be more on epiphany as a literary convention in the next chapter).

## PART II · CHAPTER THREE

1 Andrew Gibson. *James Joyce*. London: Reaktion books, 2006, p. 73
2 The plot similarities of the two texts have also been discussed by Frantz Leander Hansen, see his *The Aristocratic Universe of Karen Blixen: Destiny and the Denial of Fate*. Trans. Gaye Kynoch. Sussex Academic Press, 2003, pp. 87–88.
3 See David Lucking. Distant Music. Symbolic Polarisation in Joyce's "The Dead," in *Tempo e scrittura: studi in memoria di Bert Charlton*. Barbara Wojciechowska Bianco et al. (eds.). Congedo Editore, 1989, pp. 132–134.
4 See, for example, Florence L. Walzl. The Liturgy of Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce, in *PMLA*, 80/4 (September 1965), pp. 449–450, and especially Lucking (1989) *op. cit.* The opposite interpretation is, however, offered by Brewster Ghiselin, see note 27 below.
5 See, for example, Lucking who analyses the gradual convergence of the symbolic antitheses in the text: living vs. dead, East vs. West, light vs. darkness, speech vs. music, and claims that "this movement corresponds to the process by which Gabriel overcomes certain alienating dichotomies in his own personality and outlook" (Lucking (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 130). On the convergence of dichotomies in Blixen's text, see the previous chapter.
6 Isak Dinesen. *Anecodotes of Destiny*. Penguin Books, 1986, p. 63. All further citations in his chapter are to this edition with page numbers indicated in square brackets.
7 Eric Bulson. *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 45.
8 On the geography of "Babette's Feast," see Ulla Albeck. Karen Blixen og Nordland, in *Edda*, 1 (1977), p. 2 and Tone Selboe. Babettes gave, in Ivan Ž. Sørensen & Gunver Skytte (eds.). *Karen Blixen og billedet*. Edizioni Polistampa, 2005, pp. 45–46. On the geography of Dublin in Joyce, see Don Gifford. *Joyce Annotated: Notes for Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. University of California Press, 1982, pp. 23–26.
9 It must be said, however, that at the centre of Joyce's later texts, especially *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916), or *Ulysses* (1922), one finds the artist, "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (James Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Penguin, 1963, p. 221) – a concept much akin to Blixen's.
10 Linda Hutcheon. Parody without Ridicule: Observations on Modern Literary Parody, in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 5 (1978), p. 202 (retrieved from: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10261/3/TSpace0172.pdf).
11 James Joyce. *Dubliners*. Jonathan Cape, 1950, p. 227.
12 This possibility is justified by the way Joyce depicts her singing: "Her voice, clear and strong in tone, attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish

the air and though she sang very rapidly she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes" (Joyce (1950) *op. cit.*, p. 220), contrasting it to that of Bartell D'Arcy who for Gabriel "seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice"(ibid., p. 240). Curiously enough, the situation is reversed in the cinematic interpretation of the story by John Huston, see Irving Singer. The Dead: Story and Film, in *The Hudson Review*, 56/4 (Winter 2004), pp. 660, 664.

13 Jorge Luis Borges. Kafka and his Precursors, in his *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New Directions, 1964, p. 201; original emphasis.

14 See Robert Langbaum. The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature, in *New Literary History*, 14/2 (Winter 1983), p. 339. Langbaum, however, points out that Emerson had already given the term the same psychological meaning in 1838.

15 James Joyce. *Stephen Hero*. New Directions, 1963, p. 211.

16 Langbaum (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 336.

17 Ibid., p. 339.

18 Nicholas Vazsonyi. Of Genius and Epiphany: Schlafes Bruder, Das Parfum, and Babette's Feast, in *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 23/2 (Summer 1999), p. 342.

19 See Langbaum (1983) *op. cit.*

20 Short story theoreticians, such as Anthony Burgess and Charles E. May even claim that the presence of an epiphany is more important in calling a text a short story than its length, see Norman Friedman. Recent Short Story Theories: Problems of Definition, in Susan Lohafer & Jo Ellyn Clarey (eds.). *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Louisiana State University Press, 1989, pp. 21–22.

21 Langbaum (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 346.

22 See Umberto Eco. *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*. Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 25.

23 See Walzl (1965) *op. cit.*, p. 450, Gibson (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 73.

24 Joyce (1950) *op. cit.*, p. 255.

25 Ibid.

26 See Lucking (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 128. The implications of rebirth extend, however, beyond the central character in the text. Walzl ((1965) *op. cit.*, p. 449) argues that Gabriel's epiphany also signals the possibility of rebirth for all the Dubliners. According to Jack Foran's interpretation, the movement westwards symbolises Joyce's own repudiation of his own repudiation of Ireland and his decision to commence works concerned with Ireland and the Irish, first of all – *Ulysses* (Jack Foran. The Strange Sentence in "The Dead," in *MLN*, 113/5 (December 1998), p. 1157).

27 Brewster Ghiselin. The Unity of Dubliners, in Morris Beja (ed.). *James Joyce: Dubliners and a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Macmillan, 1978, p. 104; see also pp. 107 and 108.

28 Langbaum (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 341.

29 Eco (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26. As Eco points out, Joyce, at the point when he writes *A Portrait*, "abandons the word "epiphany" for it suggests a moment vision in which *something shows itself*" (ibid., p. 25). Original emphasis.

30 Langbaum (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 337–341.

31 Gérard Genette's term, meaning an earlier text A upon which a later text B is grafted, see his *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky. University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 5.

32 Singer (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 655.

33 In her texts where epiphany formally takes place, it does not allow to 'read' the experiencing person's consciousness. The 'illumination' is either not supported by the person's further actions (remember Carlotta from "The Roads Round Pisa" who in spite of her epiphany goes on manipulating the lives of others), or it is not revealed what the essence of the epiphany is. One can hardly find a more obscure epiphany than that befalling the newly married Lise in "The Ring" upon her encounter with the stranger in the forest: "They remained like that, she knew not how long, but she felt that during that time something happened, things were changed" (Dinesen (1986) *op. cit.*, pp. 242–243).

34 Richard Ellmann. *James Joyce*. Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 249.

35 Lorens' words, taken out of context, will certainly sound too high flown for the modern ear and somewhat of a cliché. However, trivial things are usually true, otherwise people would not keep reiterating them. To render trivial (*viz.* generally accepted) things without ending up being banal is art, and Blixen seems to have mastered this to perfection. The comic situation in which the General's words are uttered saves them from banality, but does not deny their validity. One has after all to reckon with the importance of fate in Blixen's writings, especially in the collection entitled *Anecdotes of Destiny*.

36 See E[dwin] K[eppel] Bennett. *A History of the German Novelle*. Rev. H. M. Waidson. Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 7.

37 Jon Thiem, for example, has analysed the parallels of the second of the *Florentische Nächte* by Henrich Heine and "The Old Cavalier" by Blixen (see his Isak Dinesen and Her Precursors: The Case of Heine, in *Karen Blixen / Isak Dinesen: Tradition, Modernity, and Other Ambiguities* (*A University of Minnesota International Symposium, April 17–20, 1985*): *Conference Proceedings*. University of Minnesota, 1985, pp. 23–28). Yvonne L. Sandstroem has read Blixen's "A Country Tale" against the background of a novella by Heinrich von Kleist and a novel by H. C. Andersen (see her The Subverted Plot: Kleist's *Michael Kolhaas*, Andersen's *The Two Baronesses*, and Dinesen's *A Country Tale*, ibid., pp. 29–33).

38 The text was first published in *Les Soirées de Médan* (1880; *Evenings at Médan*).

39 See, for example, Robert Langbaum. *The Gayety of Vision: A Study of Isak Dinesen's Art*. Ghatto & Windus, 1964, p. 167; Aage Henriksen. Mellem kunsten og kirken, in his *Svanereden*. Amadeus, 1990, p. 83; Lisbet Holst. Ak, hvor dog kvinderne altid plejer at volde de største mænd størst fordærv: Heloise og Heloise, en intertekstuel læsning, in *Spring*, 9 (1995), pp. 113–127; Ivan Ž. Sørensen. *'Gid De havde set mig dengang': Et essay om Blixens heltinder og Tizians gudinder*. Gyldendal, 2002, p. 24.

40 Isak Dinesen. *Winter's Tales*. Penguin Books, 1983, p. 73. All further citations are to this edition and appear in square brackets in the text.

41 For instance, in "La Parure" ("The Necklace") the crucial information, that the diamond necklace which Mathilde had borrowed from her friend, lost, and for the replacement of which she had sacrificed 10 years of her life, was in fact an imitation is revealed only at the very end. In other short stories, such as "La Chambre 11" ("Room No Eleven"), "Un Million" ("A Million"), or "La Serre" ("The Conservatory"), the surprise effect is achieved by leaving it to the reader to fill in the central ellipsis of the text, and thus read "the second story" which is not recounted in the text, but is easily reconstructable (see Armine Kotin Mortimer. Second Stories, in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Susan Lohafer & Jo Ellyn Clarey (eds.). Louisiana State University Press, 1989, pp. 276–286).

42 The text is by no means devoid of irony, and Blixen has proved to be a very sensitive reader constructing her text on the ironic and erotic implications in her precursor's text which point towards the officer's sexual appeal to other women in the company and their jealousy of his interest in Elizabeth.

43 Guy de Maupassant. Ball of Fat, in *Necklace and Other Short Stories*. Ed. Stanley Appelbaum. Dover Publications, 1992, p. 30. Despite the focalisation being the protagonist's, there is little doubt that the narrator sympathises with Elizabeth's feelings.

44 The surprise ending is even called Maupassant's "trademark" (see Robert Combs. The Short Story in the Age of Anxiety in Leonard J. Schmidt & Brooke Warner (eds.). *Panic: Origins, Insight, and Treatment*. North Atlantic Books, 2002, p. 205).

45 B[oris] M[ikhailovich] Ejxenbaum. O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story, in Ladislav Matejka & Krystyna Pomorska (eds.). *Readings in Russian Poetics*. The University of Michigan, 1978, pp. 231–232.

46 See, for example, John Gerlach. *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*. University of Alabama Press, 1985; Thomas Leitch. The Debunking Rhythm of the American Short Story, in Lohafer & Clarey (1989) *op. cit.*, pp. 130–147; Susan Lohafer. Preclosure and the American Short Story, in her Reading for Storyness: Preclosure Theory, Empirical Poetics, and Culture in the Short Story. The John Hopkins University Press, 2004, pp. 55–70.

47 Susan Lohafer. Introduction to Part III, in Lohafer & Clarey (1989) *op. cit.*, p. 109.
48 Ibid., p. 114.
49 Ibid., p. 109.
50 Langbaum (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 169.
51 Danish original: "Hun kunne ved hin lejlighed, hendes beskæftigelse taget i betragtning, såre let have betalt prisen og endda sikret sig en triumf" (Johannes Rosendahl. *Karen Blixen*. Gyldendal, 1968, p. 39).
52 Danish original: "[P]ointen er jo, at den ære, som "folket" har sat deres liv på spil for, den kunne Heloise have givet bort for en slik, eller for slet ingenting – for hun bestiller i sit liv ikke andet" (Holst (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 117).
53 Maupassant (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 23.
54 Søren Baggesen. *Den blicherske novelle*. Blicher Selskabet, 1965, p. 44. See also Chapter 2 of Part 2 in this book.
55 A misguiding hint, a term used by Peter Hutchinson to denote one of the forms of literary games that take place between the author and the reader, see Peter Hutchinson. *Games Authors Play*. Methuen, 1983, p. 102.
56 Langbaum (1964) *op. cit.*, p. 170.
57 Both Lisbeth Holst (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 121 and Ivan Ž. Sørensen (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 50 make this point, although their interpretations of the story, as we will see, differ.
58 Elizabeth W. Bruss. The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games, in *New Literary History*, 10/1 (Autumn 1977), p. 154. Bruss, drawing on Thomas Schelling's classification of games into those of zero-sum competition, games of pure coordination and mixed motive games, claims that literary games also can range from full cooperation between the author and the reader to full competition between them. In the latter case, the game "may bristle with false clues and random details designed to frustrate the search for any ulterior design," ibid., p. 160.
59 Ibid., p. 159.
60 That this is a common phenomenon in Blixen's scholarship has also been observed by Susan Brantly who makes a review of contradicting interpretations of "Tempests," see her *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 192.
61 Danish original: "Snarere handler den om, hvad der sker med manden – ganske af sig selv – når han nøjes med på afstand at beskue kvinden i hendes nøgenhed" (Holst (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 124).
62 Danish original: "Der er langt mere sand etik, ja der er simpelt hen mere nosser i kirkefædrenes forsorne klagemål over den syndige kvinde, end der er i en hvilken som helst Abélards eller Fredericks litterære bodsøvelser," ibid., p. 127.
63 Sørensen (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 97–98.

64 Holst (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 120.
65 See Sørensen (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 43–46; 73.
66 See ibid, p. 94.

## CONCLUDING CHAPTER

1 This development has been well captured by R. Rawdon Wilson who draws on the example of the short film *Square* by István Szabó in which children's play activities are shown "constantly changing and shifting into new movements" (R[obert] Rawdon Wilson. *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory*. Northeastern University Press, 1990, p. 77.
2 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer. The Relevance of the Beautiful, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Trans. Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 23.
3 See Isak Dinesen. *On Modern Marriage and other Observations*. Trans. Anne Born. St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 80 and in the discussion in Chapter 3 of Part 1 in this book.
4 A statement by David Richter, see his Covert Plot in Isak Dinesen's "Sorrow-Acre," in *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 15/ 1 (Winter 1985), p. 88.
5 Cf. Isak Dinesen. The Deluge at Norderney, in *Seven Gothic Tales*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 170.

# List of Karen Blixen's texts mentioned in the book

Bibliographical information is taken from Liselotte Henriksen. *Blixikon*. Gyldendal, 1999 and Aage Jørgensen. *Litteratur om Karen Blixen: En bibliografi 2010*, retrieved from http://blixen.dk/images/stories/blixen_bibliografi_2010_med_nye_tilfjelser.pdf. For the translations of Blixen's texts into Lithuanian, see Note 57 to Chapter 1 of the Introduction.

## STORIES

| | |
|---|---|
| **"Babette's Feast"**<br>First published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1950. Part of the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958. | **"Babettes Gæstebud"**<br>First published in 1952 in a translation by Jørgen Claudi. Blixen's own Danish version is part of the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter*, 1958. |
| **"Blank Page, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957. | **"Det ubeskrevne Blad"**<br>Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957. |
| **"Blue Eyes"**<br>Part of "Peter and Rosa."[1] | **"De blaa Øjne"**<br>Part of "Peter og Rosa."[2] |
| **"Bridal Couple is Expected, The"**<br>No English version of the text exists. | **"Brudeparret ventes"**<br>First published in 1, 1981. Included in the collections *Kongesønnerne*, 1985 and *Karneval og andre fortællinger*, 1994. |
| **"Cardinal's First Tale, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957. | **"Kardinalens første Historie"**<br>Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957. |

1 The oral, altered, version of the story was recorded during Blixen's USA tour in 1959.

2 The oral, altered, version of the story was recorded on a gramophone record in 1960.

**"Cardinal's Third Tale, The"**
Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957.

**"Carnival"**
Included in the collection *Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales*, 1977.

**"Caryatids, The" (An Unfinished Tale)**
Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957.

**"Cloak, The"**
First published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1955. Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957.

**"Consolatory Tale, A"**
Part of the collection *Winter's Tales*, 1942.

**"Country Tale, A"**
First published in *Botteghe Oscure* (Rome), 1957. Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957.

**"de Cats Family, The"**
Translated by P. M. Mitchell & W. D. Paden. Included in the collection *Carnival*, 1977.

**"Kardinalens tredie Historie"**
Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957.

**"Karneval"**
Translated by Clara Selborn. Included in the collections *Efterladte fortællinger*, 1975, *Kongesønnerne*, 1985 and *Karneval*, 1994.

**"Karyatiderne" (En ufuldent Historie)**
First published in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* (Stockholm), 1938. Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957.

**"Kappen"**
Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957.

**"En opbyggelig Historie"**
Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942.[3]

**"En Herregaardshistorie"**
Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957.

**"Familien de Cats"**
First published in *Tilskueren*, 1909. Included in the collections *Osceola*, 1962, *Efterladte fortællinger*, 1975; *Kongesønnerne*, 1985 and *Karneval*, 1994.

3 The latest, annotated, edition of the collection, with text commentaries by Peter Olivarius and Henrik Blicher and an afterword by Poul Behrendt, was published in 2010 by the Society for Danish Language and Literature and the Gyldendal publishing house.

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| **"Deluge at Norderney, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934 | **"Syndfloden over Norderney"**<br>Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935. |
| **"Diver, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958. | **"Dykkeren"**<br>First published in *Vindrosen*, 1964. Part of the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter*, 1958. |
| **"Dreamers, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934. | **"Drømmerne"**<br>Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*,1935. |
| **"Echoes"**<br>Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957. | **"Ekko"**<br>Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957. |
| **"Ehrengard"**<br>Published as a separate book in 1963. Its shortened version, entitled "The Secret of Rosenbad," was published in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1962. | **"Ehrengard"**<br>Translated by Clara Svendsen and published as a separate book in 1963. Included in the collection *Karneval*, 1994. |
| **"Fish, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Winter's Tales*, 1942. | **"Fra det gamle Danmark"**<br>Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942. |
| **"Grjotgard Aalvesøn and Aud"**<br>No English version exists. | **"Grjotgard Aalvesøn og Aud"**<br>A version of the story based on a copy by Thomas Dinesen was included into the collection *Osceola*, 1962. A different version, based on Blixen's manuscript, was published in *Blixeniana*, 1985. |
| **"Heroine, The"**<br>Part of the collection*Winter's Tales*, 1942. | **"Heloïse"**<br>Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942. |

**"Immortal Story, The"**
First published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1953. Part of the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958.

**"Monkey, The"**
Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934.

**"Night Walk"**
First published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1955. Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957.

**"Old Chevalier, The"**
Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934.

**"Peter and Rosa"**
Part of the collection *Winter's Tales*, 1942.

**"Poet, The"**
Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934.

**"Ring, The"**
First published in *Ladies Home Journal*, 1950. Part of the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958.

**"Roads Round Pisa, The"**
Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934.

**"Second Meeting"**
Included in the collection *Carnival*, 1977.

**"Den udødelige Historie"**
Part of the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter*, 1958.

**"Aben"**
Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935.

**"Nattevandring"**
Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957.

**"Den gamle vandrende Ridder"**
Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935.

**"Peter og Rosa"**
Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942.

**"Digteren"**
Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935.

**"Ringen"**
Part of the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter*, 1958.

**"Vejene omkring Pisa"**
Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935.

**"Gensyn"**
Translated by Clara Selborn and first published in *Jyllands Posten*, 30 03 1975. Included in the collections *Efterladte fortællinger*, 1975, *Kongesønnerne*, 1985 and *Karneval*, 1994.

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|---|---|
| **"Sorrow-Acre"**<br>Part of the collection *Winter's Tales*, 1942. | **"Sorg-Agre"**<br>Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942. |
| **"Supper at Elsinore"**<br>Part of the collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, 1934. | **"Et Familieselskab i Helsingør"**<br>Part of the collection *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, 1935. |
| **"Tales of Two Old Gentlemen"**<br>Part of the collection *Last Tales*, 1957. | **"To gamle Herrers Historier"**<br>Part of the collection *Sidste Fortællinger*, 1957. |
| **"Tempests"**<br>Part of the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1958. | **"Storme"**<br>Part of the collection *Skæbne Anekdoter*, 1958. |
| **"Uncle Theodore"**<br>Translated by P. M. Mitchell & W. D. Paden. Included in the collection *Carnival*, 1977. | **"Onkel Théodore"**<br>Included in the collections *Efterladte fortællinger*, 1975, *Kongesønnerne*, 1985 and *Karneval*, 1994. |
| **"Wine of the Tetrarch, The"**<br>Part of "The Deluge at Norderney."[4] | **"Fjerdingfyrstens Vin"**<br>Part of "Syndfloden over Norderney." An altered version, entitled "Kong Herodes' Vin," was published in *Hjemmet*, 1966 and *Blixeniana*, 1980.[5] |
| **"Young Man with the Carnation, The"**<br>Part of the collection *Winter's Tales*, 1942. | **"Den unge Mand med Nelliken"**<br>Part of the collection *Vinter-Eventyr*, 1942. |

4 The recorded oral version is included into Christian Braad Thomsen's film *Karen Blixen Storyteller*, 1995.

5 There are two oral versions of the story which both differ from the written ones: "Kong Herodes' Vin" was transmitted on Danish Radio in 1959 and released on a gramophone record in 1960, and "Tetrarkens Vin" was transmitted on Danish Radio and Danish Radio TV in 1960.

## PLAYS

**"Marsk Stig"**
No English version exists.

**"Revenge of Truth, The" (A Marionette Comedy)**
Translated by Donald Hannah. Included into his *'Isak Dinesen' & Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality*, 1971.

**"Rolf Bluebeard's Death"**
No English version exists.

**Marsk Stig**
Fragments published in *Blixeniana*, 1985.

**"Sandhedens Hævn" (En Marionetkomedie)**
First published in *Tilskueren*, 1926. Published as a separate book in 1960.

**Rolf Blaaskægs Død**
Fragments published in *Blixeniana*, 1985.

## ESSAYS

**"H. C. Branner: The Riding Master"**
Translated by P. M. Mitchell & W. D. Paden. Included in the collection *Daguerreotypes and Other Essays*, 1979.

**"On Modern Marriage and Other Observations"**
Translated by Anne Born and published as a separate book in 1986.

**"On Mottoes of My Life"**
First published in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts & Letters* in 1960. Included in the collection *Daguerreotypes*, 1979.

**"H. C. Branner: Rytteren"**
First published in *Bazar*, 1958. Included in the collections *Essays*, 1965; *Mit livs mottoer og andre essays*, 1978 and *Samlede essays*, 1985.

**"Moderne Ægteskab og Andre Betragtninger"**
First published in *Blixeniana*, 1977. Published as a separate book in 1981. Included in the collection *Samlede Essays*, 1985.

**"Mit Livs Mottoer"**
Translated by Clara Selborn. Included in the collections *Essays*, 1965; *Mit livs mottoer og andre essays*, 1978 and *Samlede essays*, 1985.

## AUTOFICTION

| | |
|---|---|
| **Out of Africa**<br>First published in 1937. | **Den afrikanske Farm**<br>First published in 1937.[6] |
| **Shadows on the Grass**<br>First published in 1960. | **Skygger paa Græsset**<br>First published in 1960. |

## LETTERS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Letters from Africa**<br>Translated by Anne Born. Edited by Frans Lasson and published in 1981. | **Breve fra Afrika 1914–31**<br>Edited by Frans Lasson and first published in 1978. |
| **Karen Blixen in Denmark: Letters 1931–62**<br>Not yet published in English. | **Karen Blixen i Danmark: Breve 1931–62**<br>Edited by Tom Engelbrecht and Frans Lasson and published in 1996. |

6 The latest, annotated, edition of *Den Afrikanske Farm*, with commentaries and an afterword by Lasse Horne Kjældgaard, was published in 2007 by the Society for Danish Language and Literature and Gyldendal.

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# Žaidžiantys tekstai
# Apie Karen Blixen kūrybos žaidybinį aspektą


*Santrauka*

Angliškai ir daniškai rašiusios danų klasikės Karen Blixen (1885–1962), dar žinomos Isak Dinesen slapyvardžiu, kūryba pasaulyje yra plačiai nagrinėjama. Šioje monografijoje į ją pažvelgta kiek nauju žvilgsniu – per žaidimo ir žaismo (angl. *game* ir *play*) sąvokų prizmę. Pasitelkta žaidimo teorija leido atskleisti Blixen tekstų ypatybes, tradiciškai siejamas su žaismo fenomenu: priešinimąsi suvaržymams, atvirumą (procesualumą), inovacijas, smagumo elementą, jų socialinį pobūdį. Šios autorės tekstai patys kviečia skaitytoją atkreipti dėmesį į gebėjimą žaisti skleisdami žaismo reiškinį paprastai lydinčius metakomunikacinius signalus. Ryškiausi jų yra įvairios žaidimo ir žaismo figūros, atliekančios svarbias funkcijas jas inkorporuojančiuose tekstuose. Novelėje „Dviejų senų ponų istorijos" piketas, senovinis aristokratiškas kortų žaidimas, tampa teksto naratyvinės struktūros pamatu siūlydamas naujas šio teksto perskaitymo galimybes. Žaismo ir žaidimo metaforos mums atskleidžia Blixen savitą, nors gilias filosofines šaknis turinčią, „pasaulio kaip žaidimo" koncepciją, pagal kurią žmogaus gyvenimą lemia atsitiktinumas ir sąmoningas pasirinkimas, neišvengiama būtinybė ir komiškas paradoksas. Viename Blixen tekstų yra formuluojama žaidimo filosofija, kurią galime sieti ne tik su tiesiogiai tekste aptariamais vyro ir moters santykiais, bet ir po šio socialinio diskurso kauke pasislėpusiu pasakojimu apie meno galimybes. Pagal šiame tekste implikuotą meno tipologiją, idealioji jo forma yra menas kaip žaidimas – toks, kuris sankcionuoja skaitytojo laisvę, laisvai slysta literatūrinės tradicijos vandenų paviršiumi skleisdamas drąsą, humorą ir išmintį. Žaidimai ir žaismas Blixen tekstuose taip pat pasitelkiami kaip personažų kūrimo ir jų tarpusavio kontrasto priemonė, simboliškai apibendrinanti ir šiais personažais išreiškiamas estetines idėjas. Apie visa tai kalbama pirmoje knygos dalyje.

Žaismo fenomenas yra ambivalentiškas ir nuolat keičiantis formą. Vis dėlto antroje knygos dalyje buvo pamėginta susisteminti jo apraiškas Karen Blixen kūryboje, aptariant jos žaidybinį santykį su kai kuriomis literatūros tradicijomis ir jose dalyvaujančiais tekstais. Kalbant apie Blixen tekstų ryšį su archaine žodinio pasakojimo tradicija, su kuria įprasta sieti jos tekstus, galima daryti išvadą, kad jis primena blefuojančio kortų žaidėjo strategiją, kai skelbiama kombinacija neatitinka realiai rankose turimų kortų. Kūrybos giminystė su žodine tradicija yra dirbtinis konstruktas: daugiau tekstų deklaruojama nei realizuojama, ji randasi literatūrinės mimikrijos ar vaidybos strategijų dėka.

Vis dėlto ji yra organiška šio modernaus teatralizuoto diskurso dalis – neatsiejama nuo jo, kaip ant scenos neatsiejami vienas nuo kito yra aktorius ir jo vaidmuo. Nepanašu, kad minėtų strategijų tikslas yra apkvailinti ar suklaidinti kitus žaidėjus, greičiau jos skirtos sužadinti jų smalsumą, intriguoti, praplėsti jų kultūrinį akiratį, ir, kas yra itin svarbu, kalbėti apie tai, kas esminga naratyviniame tekste – ar jis būtų žodinis, ar literatūrinis.

Blixen tekstų santykis su kitu jų tradiciniu architekstu – klasikine novele – yra nemažiau dviprasmis, balansuojantis tarp paklusimo žanro kanonui ir jo karnavalinės pervartos. Blixen tekstai savaip transformuoja tradicines žanro konvencijas, tarsi jos būtų žaislas, kurio formos ir judesiai paklūsta žaidėjo manipuliacijoms. Kita vertus, net ir transformuotos šios konvencijos išlieka teksto struktūriniu stuburu ir transformuota forma pasikartoja kituose tekstuose sukurdamos dinamišką įtampą tarp struktūros peržengimo ir naujos struktūros kūrimo. Šioje vietoje kyla pagunda tiesti paraleles tarp šių žaidybinių modelių (fragmentiško naratyvo vientisumo, nekonfliktiškos kolizijos, netipinių tipų, pseudoepifanijos) ir žaidimo taisyklių, bet vis dėlto knygoje nuo to susilaikyta. Visų pirma dėl to, kad pritariama nuomonei, jog yra klaidinga tapatinti literatūrines konvencijas su žaidimą reguliuojančiomis taisyklėmis (ši problema aptarta knygos teorinėje dalyje). Antra, net jei šios analogijos nebūtų atsisakoma, norint įrodyti šių dėsningumų visuotinį, „privalomą“ pobūdį, būtų reikėję analizuoti kur kas daugiau tekstų, nei aptarta šioje knygoje, idealiai – visus Blixen tekstus, vienaip ar kitaip sietinus su novelės žanru.

Šios knygos struktūra galėjo būti kitokia skirstant ją į skyrius, kuriuose aptariamos vis kitos žaidybinės Blixen tekstų strategijos: žodžių žaismas, stilistinis žaismas, metafikcinis žaismas, žaidimai su skaitytoju ir panašiai. Vis dėlto, gilindamasi į literatūrinio žaismo reiškinį imi suvokti, kad teksto žaismą sunku padalinti į griežtai atskirtas kategorijas, kad vieno tipo žaismas lengvai transformuojasi į kitą ar jį provokuoja, kad žaismas iš tiesų priešinasi suvaržymams ir yra atviras pokyčiui. Pavyzdžiui, šioje knygoje analizuotas Blixen tekstų žaismas su kitais tos pačios žanrinės paradigmos tekstais (J. Joyce'o novele „Mirusieji“ arba G. de Maupassant'o novele „Pampuška“) skleidėsi ir per *intertekstinį* (*hipertekstinį*) dialogą su šių hipotekstų tematika ir ideologija, bet taip pat ir kaip *architekstinė* jų struktūrinių modelių (epifanijos ir „netikėtos pabaigos“) pervarta. Šis žaismas provokavo žaidimą su skaitytoja, kurios lūkesčiai buvo sužadinti ir nepateisinti ir kuri buvo skatinama prisijungti prie teksto žaismo, idant pati suteiktų jam semantinį užbaigtumą atrasdama tekste *metafikcinį* žaismą – jo netiesiogiai teigiamus ir savimi demonstruojamus meno dėsnius. Taigi, šia knyga buvo siekta ne formaliai ir galutinai atskirti įvairias žaismo apraiškas ir strategijas Blixen kūryboje, o priešingai, atskleisti jos dinamiškumą, jos gebėjimą laisvai judėti tarp įvairių žaismo formų, galima net sakyti, žaisti patį žaismą.

Ši knyga taip pat turėtų skatinti keisti vis dar gyvą požiūrį į Karen Blixen kaip elitinę autorę, literatūros aristokratę, kurios tekstai skirti tik išrinktiesiems. Žaismas, savyje natūraliai talpinantis neapibrėžtumą ir daugiaprasmiškumą, pasirodo esąs dominuojantis šios kūrybos bruožas. Tai suvokdami mes natūraliai priimsime jos neapibrėžtumus ir vidinius prieštaravimus nemėgindami jų visiems laikams išspręsti. Juose matysime Blixen kūrybos demokratišką atsisakymą nuo galutinės tiesos patento – pagarbos ir pasitikėjimo skaitytoju, kaip žaidimo partneriu, ženklą. Kita vertus, suvokdami, kad Blixen tekstų žaismas nėra baigtinis ir savitikslis, o toks, kuris visuomet reikalauja „žaisti drauge", mes būsime mažiau arogantiški kitų interpretacijų atžvilgiu ir mažiau įsitikinę neprilygstamu savo įžvalgų genialumu. Žaidžianti Blixen kūryba primena mums, kad kiekviena interpretacija yra tik vienas iš daugelio būdų priartėti prie to paties reiškinio – žmogaus, pasaulio ar teksto.

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