

The Seducer's Diary Study Guide

The Seducer's Diary by Søren Kierkegaard

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Contents

The Seducer's Diary Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
April.....	6
May.....	8
June.....	10
July.....	12
August Part I.....	13
August II.....	15
September.....	17
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	21
Themes.....	23
Style.....	25
Quotes.....	27
Topics for Discussion.....	28



Plot Summary

While *The Seducer's Diary* is a work of non-fiction, great 19th century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard often writes like a novelist. His philosophical points made under guises, where he takes on multiple personalities and perspectives. He largely asks questions and raises issues to bring his reader to a higher level of consciousness, rather than imposing a view himself.

The Seducer's Diary is part of Kierkegaard's first major work, *Either/Or*, a two-volume collection of papers. It appears to concern issues of a personal nature in his life. Just prior to the writing of much of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard has ended a year-long engagement with a woman named Regine Olsen, a decade younger than he was. Everyone thought they were happy from the outside and their marriage was to unite two wealthy Copenhagen households.

When Kierkegaard first met Regine, he soon thereafter decided to stalk her and this information is recorded elsewhere in his work. Kierkegaard had met Regine when he was twenty-four and she was fourteen. He watched her for three years and at twenty-seven he made an abrupt proposal to her, which she rejected; but her father consented later.

The engagement was difficult because Kierkegaard suffered from a violent sort of depression and eventually he gave her back her right, although Regine resisted. The engagement lasted two more months, but with the request of her father, Regine finally ended the engagement. A year later, to Kierkegaard's horror, Regine married and he never forgave himself.

The Seducer's Diary is Kierkegaard's attempt to make things right. The diary is an attempt to paint himself as a bad man and make the break-up easier on Regine. It would have 'clarify her out of the relationship' or to repel her. The book has a deceptive purpose. Kierkegaard represents himself as Johannes and Regine as Cordelia Wahl.

The Seducer's Diary covers a shorter period than the relationship, April to September. Many of the entries are sequential, but towards the end the diary entries fade out. In the very beginning a few letters from Cordelia are enclosed but this is only from the man who finds the diary in the story. The vast majority of the book is the observations of Johannes on how to seduce Cordelia and how he brings his plan to fruition. Then, it presents him ending the engagement for bizarre reasons.

Throughout the book, Kierkegaard paints himself as obsessed with the abstract, with manipulating Cordelia such that she falls perfectly in love with him and he even used a friend, Edward, to bring this about. During their engagement, he writes her letters to teach her about the nature of the erotic and continually comments on the nature of love, relationships and the like. All in all, it is hard to keep track of which events in the *Seducer's Diary* represent something real, which represent something false, and which represent something in between. That said, it is, overall, a book intended to deceive.



Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

The book opens with a man who has found a collection of essays in a locked drawer in Kierkegaard's house. He writes in the first person and expresses deep anxiety at finding the work that is about to begin and the sultry details within it. He is also afraid that Kierkegaard might pop in on him. The man points out that the work is a diary fully of falsehood; Kierkegaard intended to live poetically, and so produced a diary not historically accurate or a narrative.

The man wonders whether Kierkegaard intended for it to be published; he notes that there was a real woman in his life named Cordelia, but her name was not Cordelia Wahl, as it is in the book. He notes that Kierkegaard was more at home in a world beyond this one, and had an exacerbation of the brain. Life was not stimulating enough for him.

The girl's story comprises most of the diary; Kierkegaard appears interested in using the diary to paint himself as a seducer, and the man is under this illusion. He notes that Kierkegaard broke off the engagement despite loving the girl very much. The girl, Cordelia, was greatly hurt and a victim. It is odd to think that this man seduced her, given who he was.

The man speculates that Kierkegaard did not intend to lead Cordelia astray but did so in any event; in the same way, the man predicts, he will lead himself astray. He feels sorry for Cordelia; she will have trouble finding peace despite her forgiving nature. She sees herself as having broken the engagement; he deceived her into this. It will be more terrible for Kierkegaard in the end, because he isolated himself and lived in secret.

Cordelia sent the man a collection of letters between the two of them; he reconstructs the dates of the letters but the diary becomes sparse as time progresses. He had to look for guiding clues to divide them up by dates and then he notes the techniques he used. He then notes that Cordelia gave him a packet of letters she wrote to him but that he never opened. He then proceeds to reproduce some of these letters.

It should be noted at this point that Kierkegaard is the author writing from the perspective of a man who has come upon the letters of a man named Johannes, who Kierkegaard intends to represent himself. In fact, the point of *The Seducer's Diary* is for Kierkegaard to paint a portrait of himself to deceive his real life love, Cordelia, that he is a bad person so that she can get over him after their engagement is broken off. The events he describes are largely true, apparently. From here, understand that 'Johannes' is 'Kierkegaard' and 'Cordelia Wahl' is the real 'Cordelia.'

In the first letter, Cordelia notes that Johannes has never really been hers and that she has been punished for thinking so. She calls him hers anyway, but only her seducer,



deceiver, etc. He is her curse for eternity. She tells him that she will not pursue him and encourages him to flee. She then proclaims that she is his, but his curse as well.

In the second letter, Cordelia tells a story of a rich man and a poor maiden, the one had many lambs and the other only one. The rich man ate her lamb. Johannes was the rich man, eating her only love.

In the third letter, Cordelia pleased with Johannes that there be hope that they will love again. She claims that she will wait for as long as it takes for him to tire of loving others. She wants to wait for his love to resurrect. She realizes her love is a burden but she knows he will return.

The man then notes that Cordelia's range of feeling did not match that of Johannes, but she did have a range.



April

April Summary and Analysis

Here begins Johannes's diary. Johannes discusses his thoughts at seeing Cordelia step out of a carriage, which he notes is a 'decisive step.' It is important not to leap but to be careful to preserve one's self so that accident should be avoided. It is clear here as it will be for most of the diary that Johannes is stalking Cordelia, watching her from afar. He continues to worry that Cordelia's dress will catch. He observes the light shining in her eyes, her blush and her bosom. He then continues to describe her, with remarks like "Her countenance is like a fruit" and "Her head is a Madonna head." This goes on at some length.

Johannes watches her as she goes into a store and speaks with the clerk; he watches her cheerful conversational skill. He notices that she is not engaged and he worries whether she still has a sweetheart.

The entry of April 5th begins. He likes being alone in the evening on Østergade. He watches her servant and is happy that she is not walking alone. However, he wants her to be aware of the figure with her; she is rushing when she need not be. Johannes then speculates as to why she is moving about so quickly and discretely and admires her beauty again, particularly her beautiful teeth.

The diary jumps to April 7th, and Johannes notes that he has heard her say that she will be at the exhibition on Monday at 1 p.m., so he decides to arrive 15 minutes earlier. On the Saturday before, Johannes decides to visit his well-traveled friend Adolph Bruun in Vestergade, but Johannes cannot find him. It was on this visit that Johannes overheard where Cordelia would be.

Johannes is at the exhibition, hoping that Cordelia will arrive early. He looks forward - intensely - to their rendezvous, and sees a rendezvous as a beautiful moment for lovers. He then gives a brief aside about a rendezvous with another girl (this to imply that he is not a mere stalker, but a seducer, a perverse man). By 2:00 Cordelia has arrived but no man is with her.

Johannes speaks to her after seeing her pass by a fifth time, telling her that her family may be in a room she is unaware of. He notices that eventually she stops looking for her family; she cannot find them and is sad. Eventually, however, a man shows up to accompany her and Johannes decides to try and use this to his advantage and will look him up in the police census records.

On the ninth, Johannes wonders if he has become blind; he cannot recall her image. Apparently the thought of her has vanished despite having seen her recently. Yet he can remember a girl's face that made no impression on him. On the eleventh, Johannes



notes that he is still in the same situation, unable to recall her face after seeing her yet again. He cannot bear the inaccuracy of his eyes.

The fourteenth comes and Johannes claims that he hardly knows himself, describing his mad as a roar of thoughts akin to a turbulent sea "in the storms of passion." He cannot find a foothold for his emotions.

When the twentieth arrives, Johannes proclaims that limiting one's self is the precondition of enjoying things. He desperately wants to learn more about Cordelia but must control himself to enjoy the emotion of desire and its sweetness. He compares this emotion to lying on a lake in a boat and letting the waves rock it. Yet on the twenty-first, Johannes has still made no headway; other girls delight in him but he is not interested in them, only Cordelia. He has accomplished less than he could at that moment with women, but he had his eyes on someone that mattered more.



May

May Summary and Analysis

May begins and Johannes blames chance, cursing it because it has not recently gone in his favor. He then pleads for chance to come back to his side. This occurs on May 5th; on the following day, Johannes notes that spring has come and that everything blossoms, including young girls. He is intent on inquiring more into who Cordelia is but worries that he will discover that she is engaged. He also wants to know where she lives.

On the twelfth, Johannes discovers the glory of having a young girl come upon you in the rain and describes the best way to conceal and then reveal yourself in conversation. He then considers feigning a chance encounter with Cordelia where he will offer her his umbrella. On the fifteenth he thanks chance, because he was able to find Cordelia. He encountered her and brought her out of herself in conversation. The event occurred on the path between Nørreport and Østerport at half past six. The sun was setting. Johannes saw her alone and preoccupied. He admired her but then feared he would miss her. When he went after her, however, he bumped into another woman and lost sight of her.

The sixteenth comes and Johannes notes that it is beautiful to be in love and interesting to know that one is on love. He describes the wide range of emotions one feels. Johannes speculates on how interesting it would be if one could discern ahead of time what was to occur and then see what love was like.

On the nineteenth, Johannes discovers Cordelia's name, which he had not known before. He had heard it while overhearing her talking with a friend. He thinks her name splendid. When the twentieth comes, he notes that she disappeared into a house owned by a widow with three daughters. He found out that Cordelia's full name is Cordelia Wahl, the daughter of an office in the Royal Navy. Both of her parents were dead and Cordelia lives with her aunt. Johannes is aware that Cordelia will have understanding of the dark side of life and is happy that it has not warped her.

Johannes finds out where she lives on the twenty-first, which is near the embankment; she has few neighbors to ask about her. He also sees the room which must be her bedroom. On the twenty-second, Johannes sees her at Mrs. Jansen's and was introduced to her; she did not pay much attention to him. They were alone in the room together for a few moments and they exchanged some casual words. He concealed his love. To show that he didn't care much, he made sure he passed by Cordelia and Mrs. Jansen without acknowledging them.

The twenty-third rolls around and Johannes is trying to figure out how to get into their house but he thinks he is prepared to figure it out. On the twenty-seventh he has decided that Cordelia is an isolated person; Johannes finds this sad. He notes that



women should become self-sufficient in their use to make good wives but becoming self-sufficient is isolating.

Next Johannes wonders why nothing corrupts young women more than spending time with other young women. He realizes that time with women causes them to reflect on their status in life, which makes them worldly and not good company. He imagines that the ideal girl would be by herself. Johannes is pleased that she has been brought up strictly and appears to live in a fantasy world.

The thirtieth comes and Johannes is crossing paths with Cordelia all the time. That very day he ran into her three times. He knows where she goes and when she goes there and has calibrated his reactions to her so as to seduce her. He focuses on how thoroughly he will enjoy her when he seduces her, and believes that he will not waste her on a few encounters. Johannes sits at home practicing saying her name.



June

June Summary and Analysis

On June 2nd, Johannes notes that Cordelia is proud; the chatter of her cousins bores her. He finds that she has imagination, spirit and passion. On June 3rd, however, he cannot make up his mind about how to understand her; this is the reason he stays quiet around her. He realizes that his conception of her has changed over time but he notices that this has been to the good. He is desperate to know her feelings and believes she has not been in love. He wonders whether her womanliness will reflect itself reliably in her behavior.

Johannes points out that he has learned new skills for new women, that he is willing to modify himself for love to draw women in. He has chosen to be prosaic rather than poetic around her, which he thinks will attract her.

For their first encounter, Johannes notes that he doesn't need to go far. On the fifth, she visits Mr Baxter the wholesaler. Mr. Baxter's son Edward is in love with her. Johannes does not regard him as a serious competitor, not knowing the ways of life. He pities him.

Johannes has decided to befriend Edward to get closer to Cordelia; they generate a beautiful intimate friendship due to their observations about Cordelia. Edward is afraid to encounter her. Johannes advises Edward to rely on him, to show him how to get a woman; this way, Cordelia will not suspect Johannes's intention.

Johannes prepares for conversation with Cordelia. He is getting in good with her aunt, who she sees him as a good person who is pleasurable to interact with. One day Edward and Johannes visit Cordelia's Aunt Jansen. When Cordelia comes in, he tries to pretend to take no notice of her, but has a hard time of it. He talks about interesting things but nothing that will indicate his interest in her and lets Edward pursue her.

Edward observes that there is little to his relationship with Cordelia at this point. He pretends to be uninterested and tries not to arouse suspicion. He simply wants to be seen as dependable but his admiration of her continues to grow. His aim is to get her to hate him, and will pretend to be a confirmed bachelor to do so. Pretending to be a confirmed bachelor enrages women because they have no power over such a man.

As time goes on, Johannes sees Cordelia but doesn't talk to her, instead speaking with Aunt Jansen in front of her. He continues to stalk her in secret. He hopes that she is "willing to understand herself." If she is, he is the man for her.

As the days pass, Cordelia becomes tired of listening to Edward and focuses on the conversation between Johannes and her aunt. Johannes appreciates the order. She can't participate in the conversation, which should outrage her by making her feel like a child. Johannes starts to feel sorry for Edward but he really is pretty boring.



The text then breaks into a series of interrupted sentences that seem to be telling a story, yet it is not clear what it is. Johannes seems to be imagining the path that he will take towards winning her over, stopping to describe steps in his complicated plan. After it ends, Johannes comments that many will think it impossible to plot the development of a psyche like Cordelia's. But Johannes believes that it is within his power to bring this about.

Johannes has now begun his attack, closing "in on her gradually" when he will then make a direct attack. He has a detailed plan to bring about success; he must allow her love to develop of her own free choice, otherwise it is not love. As time goes on, Johannes worries that he is weakening in his assault due to his feelings for her.



July

July Summary and Analysis

The date is July 3rd. Johannes notes that Edward can have no complaint about him on the third. After all, he wants Cordelia to fall in love with Edward so that she will grow tired of plain and simple love and seek something more. He also believes that Cordelia both hates and fears him because of his intellect. As a woman she hates him because of his uninterested masculinity and as a talented woman she fears him. He remains cold and distant.

Johannes will read trivial matters aloud to Cordelia from time to time. Edward lends her books and Johannes reads them to her from time to time. Johannes notes that he has seen Cordelia sleep for the first time. He wants Edward to leave so that he can declare his love to her.

Later, Johannes describes his relationship with Cordelia as taking a dramatic course, as Johannes no longer wants to wait and let the relationship slip away. He wants to surprise her with his love. He then considers various methods of surprising her, say through an erotic storm. He prefers a 'plain and simple engagement.' However, he finds the ethical nature of it boring, despite having respect for it. He might also consider getting her engaged to Edward, becoming a family friend, but this won't work because engagement to Edward will diminish her.

Johannes says that events at the Wahl house are increasingly momentous. Something important is about to happen. Edward is drunk with love and Johannes is beginning to hate him for it. Cordelia does not express self-confidence in Johannes's presence.

The twenty-third arrives; Johannes has floated a rumor that he is in love with a young girl. Edward has helped it to reach Cordelia's ears and she is interested but will not ask. Johannes starts to speak to the aunt about his rumored engagement and refuses to say who the woman is, all within Cordelia's presence.

Johannes must decide whether to talk to the aunt in writing and ask for Cordelia's hand or not. Nothing can really stop him now. He knows, though, that his declaration of love must be unique and must be simulated before done. The moment must not be erotic and it must be something that happens to her, not something she chooses.

On the thirty-first, Johannes has written a love letter for a third party and enjoys the experience, in part as practice.



August Part I

August Part I Summary and Analysis

August 2nd has come and the aunt and Edward are away; Cordelia is home alone. Johannes visits the house, catching Cordelia off guard, but she makes a powerful impression on him with her beauty. Johannes remains dispassionate. After a few short comments, Johannes draws close to her and proposes. Cordelia was surprised, remarking that she did not know him well and referred him to her aunt. The aunt gave her consent and Cordelia follows. Johannes knows it is not poetic, but philistine and bourgeois.

The third comes and Johannes proclaims that he is engaged. Cordelia knows nothing more of it and will not even know if she loves him. Edward is furious and wants to tell Cordelia of Johannes's cunning but Edward will look unshaven and crazy if he does so.

Johannes's plan is to organize the engagement so as to (a) break it off but (b) use it to secure a more beautiful and significant relationship. However, for this time he should simply enjoy her beauty. He is deeply happy. In legitimate possession of Cordelia, Johannes aims to make the relationship last; he wants more than mere legal possession, but something much deeper.

When Johannes sees her, Cordelia knows that their relationship must change but she is not sure how. Yet he finds his being in harmony with hers. He is happy to take her to his uncle's house. He is also not bothered by the time Cordelia costs him, due to the long preparations their meetings require. He wonders what to talk about with her other than boring matters about combining each other's families. Johannes wishes to grow closer but he must increase her confidence first. Cordelia has pride but does not understand the erotic.

As time progresses, Cordelia begins to stand at the window and wait for him. Johannes uses this to his advantage, only giving her part of the attention she desires in order to drive her crazy. He wonders if he is a bad person but justifies his actions on the grounds that they will increase Cordelia's ability to love him. This begins the 'first war' with Cordelia where he engages in an emotional back and forth of pursuit. He decides to fight for her love freely, however. He is determined to bring her to love him by loving her.

Johannes begins to plot his emotional movements with respect to Cordelia. They start to exchange letters and Johannes decides he must inject a deep erotic element into them. He then reproduces some of his letters. He describes his love for her in detailed, flowery, powerful terms. They continue to grow closer; Johannes says that she is devoted to him, but is not his in full yet. Her feelings are not yet love. Johannes worries about whether his seduction makes her love unreal, but he thinks not. He continues to focus on increasing the erotic quality of their relationship and is determined to stir and



agitate her soul as much as he can. Johannes then describes his various attempts to agitate and frustrate her.

Johannes then reproduces more romantic letters to Cordelia. He wishes to be free to be with her, to live with her; he is constantly impatient. He describes to her his dreams of whisking her away to a faraway place where they can be alone. The letters, he believes, are developing her mentally if not erotically. He then reproduces three letters intended to display his attempts to get her to think about the potential depth of their love. He then wishes he could replay their conversations.

A change is occurring within Cordelia. She seems to be in a state of 'pantheistic boldness.' She wants to experience the extraordinary at every moment, always looking for something to marvel at. Johannes believes that she owes him nothing; he has orchestrated all of this. He then reproduces four brief letters where he declares his obedience and duty to her, that he loves talking to her, that his time with her is always too short, and that he is in love with her. He then expresses his love for Cordelia in his diary.

Johannes attempts to place himself wherever Cordelia looks, in order to keep her interest. In the next two letters he reveals, he expresses his inability to forget her and that he is so in love with her that he sees his very being as wrapped up in hers. Johannes notes after the letters that he was afraid the process of building love would take too long. He maintains that true romantic love cannot proceed by means of the highway; it must be done in the middle of the king's highway - as seriously and profoundly as possible. Thus, in his six letters, he displays this melodramatic quality, saying that he only needs her, everything he has and is belongs to her, he is a simple narrator describing her life, his love for her is everything, her love consumes him and his soul loves her so much that it reflects her image like a river.

Typically, Johannes notes, such melodrama is not needed. Sometimes, however, an intense ride is just what is called for. In an imagined trip to the top of a mountain, Johannes tries to take an impartial perspective on his love but finds this difficult.

August II

August II Summary and Analysis

The entry continues with Johannes noting that Cordelia's aunt through a party the previous evening. In her knitting, Johannes has placed a note expressing his love for her. He notes that erotic love has its own 'dialectic.' He sees Cordelia everywhere he looks; everything reminds him of her. He also thinks erotic love has gradations and that Cordelia is making progress in this regard. At the present time, however, he sees her passion as naïve. He is eager to help it mature such that she will find her freedom in their love. Then he will break the engagement, re-rally her passion, and own her forever.

Johannes discusses visiting the park in the summer along with the house servants; he also goes to Frederiksberg Gardens, which he prefers. He enjoys viewing the scenery, seeing beauty there. He describes the scene and recounts a conversation he had which is of little significance.

Johannes wishes he could watch Cordelia react as she reads his letters so that he could learn more about how to stimulate her erotically. He wonders if he could become jealous of her, and he admits that in a sense this is so. He wonders about their age gap, and he also considers how to bring about their first kiss and then discusses what sort of kiss it should be. And in a letter, he mentions kissing obliquely so as to pique her interest. Then Johannes discusses the distinction between types of eroticism and that he prefers to develop within Cordelia the mental sort. He is glad no one else is directing her development.

Most of the time, Cordelia does not respond to his letters; he believes this is so as not to pester him. He recounts being at dinner with Cordelia and having a servant deliver one of his letters to her at dinner as if it were someone else's. The letter was meant to bring about increased eroticism.

Next, Johannes comments on breaking the engagement. There are various modes of bringing it about. He begins to tell Cordelia stories about broken engagements that he knew of, which brought tears to her eyes. He then tries to discuss with her when an engagement should be broken. He observes in her fear and notes that fear and love are tied together, much like fear and hate.

Through this use of a fear, Johannes now believes that Cordelia is his; he keeps the secret to himself. She begins to drop hints that she grows tired of engagement and wishes to be married. He resists her requests and suggests that love can only be perfect when others believe that the two individuals hate one another. He also continues to debate whether he should break of the engagement with himself. Johannes is happy that Cordelia dislikes engagement and wishes to be married; he finds engagement absurd and excessively conventional and so agrees with her view.



Johannes finds that he can endlessly contemplate the subject of woman. He does not understand those who have no interest in such thinking. He is so drawn to feminine beauty and the uniqueness of it between women. Johannes imagines touching Cordelia's beauty; he thinks of her skin as warm, representing her warmth below. He sees woman as characterized by pure virginity but that the idea of virginity is mere abstraction. He also sees female existence as an ideal gracefulness, reminiscent of the flower. He sees irony in this analogy, however. Woman is conquered by man; men propose and women choose. Men question and women answer. She exists for the other and it is this 'being-for-other' that is the truest form of virginity.

Johannes appreciates his practice with respect to Cordelia the more he thinks about it. He thinks of woman essentially as existing for others, unlike men. Women have a relative being but men must have their individuality. He discusses visiting a family with Cordelia at their summer home. They played a game together, and then he and Cordelia played a game alone. This delights Johannes. He sees it as a gentle interplay.

Another topic comes to Johannes's mind. He wonders which is more modest: a young girl or a young wife, the inexperienced girl or the experienced one. He wonders who should have more freedom as well. Married women have two periods in which they are of interest - early youth and very much older age. The elder stage commands greater honor. Johannes then imagines Cordelia in this stage.

Cordelia has wholly preoccupied Johannes, but he is still planning to end their engagement. His soul will need refueling. He is sad that her beauty will only last a short time; when women devote themselves wholly, their beauty is finished. They have been used up and lost their symbolic virginity.

Another question arises: which moments are most seductive? Johannes thinks it depends on the situation. Next he wonders if he has been faithful in his pact with Cordelia, a pact with is aesthetic and makes Johannes strong. He sees the relationship as having continued interest. He still aims to end the engagement, however; but now he wishes her to do it to cause her to "soar into a higher sphere."



September

September Summary and Analysis

The next dated entry is September 16th. By this time, the bond has been broken. Johannes likens it to his freeing a bird. He notes that the aunt was shocked by the news but would not force Cordelia to maintain the engagement. Cordelia leaves to spend time in the country. The two keep us some communication through letters, but he wishes to stay distant so that she can engage in the necessary hatred of men.

He then reproduces a letter. In it, he asks Cordelia to imagine what everyone is saying about them. He encloses a portrait for her and practically asks her to hate it.

Johannes is happy that their engagement ended in autumn; it is a sad time, for which sad matters are appropriate. The season will harmonize with Cordelia's soul. This harmonization would be undone if he were with Cordelia. He then reproduces more letters. In the first one, he continues to maintain that she is his and that their freedom consists in belonging to one another. In the second letter, he argues that his grief over their break-up will make him able to love her more. And in the third letter, he states that again she will be his.

Johannes is worried that in his absence, Cordelia will think too much about the future and perhaps imagine it without him. He also believes that thinking about the future inevitably reduces erotic sentiment. However, she will still admire the memory of him; she has not yet forgotten anything. In these times, Johannes primarily isolates himself, thinking of Cordelia. He argues that true erotic love desires infinity, transcendence, whereas it fears boundaries. He then has his servant Johan leave a book at the Wahl house in her absence - Amor and Psyche, so that she will read it. He then writes her a letter about how they should overcome their fears and be together again.

September 24th is the penultimate entry. It is night, 11:45 p.m. The people sleep in peace but not in love. He feels that "everything is a metaphor" even himself. He proclaims that Cordelia was beautiful by nature and he thanks nature for her, for how unspoiled she was. The final entry is written on September 25th. Johannes wants the night to last. He never wants to see Cordelia again and believes she has given all her love away. She no longer resists him and no love is beautiful when this occurs. Cordelia has lost her 'fragrance' and he finds her suffering meaningless. He leaves without saying goodbye. The last thing he wants to know is whether she is proud enough to convince herself that she had become bored with the relationship; he considers this an interesting ending with which he could 'furnish' his 'erotic observations'.



Characters

Johannes

Since *The Seducer's Diary* represents - to an extent - the real-life relationship between Soren Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard represents himself as Johannes, a dashing, young seducer bent on making Cordelia his own. Johannes, like Kierkegaard, is a well-to-do bachelor from a rich family in Copenhagen, Denmark who has heretofore remained single. When he meets Cordelia he immediately falls in love and decides quickly to embark on a long, extended plot to win Cordelia's love and hand in marriage.

Johannes is the protagonist of *The Seducer's Diary*, as well as the Seducer of *The Seducer's Diary*. As such, all the diary entries are his. Rarely does anyone else even have speaking lines. Instead, Johannes almost exclusively portrays his comings and goings alongside his observations and thoughts rather than the actual conversation that transpires.

The first part of Johannes's plot is to discover how Cordelia lives and what sort of girl she is. He follows her around in secret, at first trying to discover her name and where she lives. He then begins to arrange to run into her seemingly at random so that she will be dimly aware of his existence. Next, he uses his friend Edward to gain entry into Cordelia's life and when Edward has fallen in love with Cordelia, Johannes goes beyond his back and secures Cordelia's hand in engagement.

After an increasingly romantic and erotic relationship, Johannes plans to break off the engagement and reinstate it in order to increase the intensity of their love, but once the engagement is broken he quickly loses interest, believing her love to have been spoiled.

Cordelia Wahl

Cordelia Wahl is the second main character of *The Seducer's Diary*. Cordelia is a young, fourteen year old girl. Her mother and father are dead, Johannes eventually discovers. Instead, she lives with her wealthy Aunt Jansen and her three cousins in a nice home in a better part of Copenhagen.

While Cordelia is young, Johannes finds her to have the beautiful feminine qualities of a grown woman. He sees her as perfectly virginal, but she is not wholly naïve in a bad way. She is often tired by the inane chatter of her aunt and cousins, and instead appears to him as wanting something deeper in life.

However, he fundamentally regards her as a girl who needs to be taught how to love and so he orchestrates their meeting, growing relationship, engagement and growing passion so as to teach her how to deeply appreciate erotic love and grow increasingly mature before they wed. One of Johannes's main goals is to teach Cordelia about the



nature of erotic love and he pursues this through writing her letters of various kinds with themes tied to particular lessons he wants her to grasp.

Johannes most wishes for Cordelia to freely give him her heart and realizes therefore that all that he does cannot be used to manipulate her into loving him. Much of the relationship must be left in her hands, therefore. Even after significantly manipulating her, Johannes still decides to end the engagement in order to intensify their love. Cordelia is destroyed but eventually finds herself led to end the engagement after Johannes has first attempted to end it. He leaves her in emotional tatters, without saying goodbye.

The Narrator

The introduction of *The Seducer's Diary* is written by a man who runs across the diary after breaking into Johannes's house.

Edward

Edward is Johannes's friend who is obsessed with Cordelia. Johannes uses him to get close to Cordelia.

Aunt Jansen

Cordelia's Aunt Jansen is her guardian. Johannes charms her effectively and uses their relationship to secure Cordelia's engagement to him.

Cordelia's Cousins

Aunt Jansen has three daughters with which Cordelia spends a lot of her time, although apparently not wholly to her liking.

Johannes's Uncle

Johannes's Uncle has an empty home where Johannes and Cordelia have many private moments.

Johannes's Old Loves

Johannes often speaks of women that he has seduced in the past.



Johan

Johannes's servant, Johannes uses him to send letters to Cordelia.

Various Friends

Throughout the diary, Johannes mentions various friends and acquaintances of his; he sometimes uses them to spread rumors.



Objects/Places

Denmark

Kierkegaard's country of origin and the setting of *The Seducer's Diary*.

Copenhagen

The city where *The Seducer's Diary* is set.

Østergade

One of the largest walking streets in Copenhagen, where Johannes would often spy on Cordelia.

Vestergade

Another of the largest walking streets in Copenhagen, where Johannes would often spy on Cordelia.

Aunt Jansen's House

Cordelia's home, Johannes spends a lot of time there. It is where much of the story takes place.

Johannes's Uncle's House

Johannes's Uncle has an empty home where Cordelia and Johannes often spend time alone.

The Embankment

Where Copenhagen meets the water; Johannes enjoys spending time there alone.

Johannes's Carriage

Johannes is fairly well-to-do and has a carriage that takes him across town; he does much of his thinking in the carriage.



Seduction

Johannes conceives of himself as a master of seduction.

Stalking

Johannes stalks Cordelia through much of the early part of the book.

Plans

Johannes plans obsessively to win Cordelia's love.

Letters

Johannes often uses letters to manipulate Cordelia's emotions.

Engagement

Johannes looks toward engagement with Cordelia in anticipation. When he achieves it, he makes the most use of it until setting it aside.

Marriage

After engagement, Cordelia wants to get married but Johannes resists.

Erotic Love

Johannes is interesting in plumbing the depths of erotic love and aims to teach Cordelia about its true power.

Themes

Inner Turmoil

Soren Kierkegaard is widely known as a man with a complex and dark emotional life. This is not to imply that his emotions were particularly evil; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary. However, his emotional troubles often sent him reeling into depression and caused him to approach life in a deeply dramatic fashion. One imagines that due to his inner turmoil, Kierkegaard's relationship with Regine was, despite appearances, something of a roller coaster. In fact, Kierkegaard ended the relationship for reasons that are not entirely clear, save that he deemed himself unworthy and that his emotional state made him disagreeable.

This turmoil is somewhat directly reflected in the text. Johannes does not seem to be in a state of emotional turmoil. Instead, he exhibits a high degree of emotional stability and focus. Perhaps in Johannes Kierkegaard reflects a quality that he lacked in himself, that of a calm, plodding, focused individual.

However, turmoil comes out in other ways. Edward experience great grief and anxiety during the build up and course of his short relationship with Cordelia. And Cordelia, from what the reader can tell, appears to be in a variety of complex emotional states, if Johannes is to be believed. Further, the reader can tell from the introduction that Cordelia was emotionally distraught over losing Johannes. Thus, while Johannes does not exhibit the emotional turmoil characteristic of Kierkegaard - even though his feelings of love and hope are quite intense - emotional turmoil comes through at various other points in the book.

Seduction and Deception

The Seducer's Diary is, of course, about seduction. Johannes's understanding of himself is as an experienced seducer of women. He alludes without describing in any detail his past seductions of women and the lessons that he has learned from them. The entire book is based around his seduction of Cordelia, which he plots and plans as methodically as anyone could. In fact, the level of planning and control Johannes engages in is so intense that it is beyond belief.

Everything that Johannes does is deceptive. His kind, amiable relationship with Aunt Jansen is simply a show to spend time with Cordelia. He befriends Edward and encourages him to pursue Cordelia only to prepare her emotionally to love in a deeper way. He constantly deceives Cordelia and handcrafts their encounters so as to produce certain emotional reactions within her.

However, the book exhibits deception at an even deeper level. Some have speculated that Kierkegaard wrote The Seducer's Diary in order for it to be found by Regine Olsen, his former lover, that she might believe the story reveals Kierkegaard's dark character.



He wants her to believe that his character is bad so she does not regret ending the relationship. Further, Kierkegaard fictionalizes much of the account, making up thought process, plans, etc. meant to reflect real life events and add an element of darkness and subtlety that was probably far beyond Kierkegaard's true abilities.

Perfect Love and Perfect Freedom

Johannes is not interested in any ordinary love from Cordelia. He wants her to love her him with a perfect love. This is one of Johannes's main aims in *The Seducer's Diary*, to built his relationship with Cordelia slowly and methodically enough that the sort of bond she develops with him is of the sort that can express the most deep and profound range of human emotion. For instance, Johannes has picked someone for whom he will be her first love and he intends to do everything he can to perfect it.

However, Johannes faces a temptation in the book. He sees himself as a master of seduction, but seduction is a form of manipulation. Johannes goal, though, is to get Cordelia to love him with a perfect love. On Johannes's view, perfect love can only flow out of a free choice. For this reason, his seduction must be light and indirect and he must let Cordelia make the important moves in her own way and at the right time. In this way, love and freedom are tied.

Love and freedom are, however, tied in another way as well. Johannes believes that only in perfect love of another is there perfect freedom. The human goal of living the freest possible life is only possible when one shares a profound erotic love with another. Thus, the salvation of both Johannes and Cordelia lives in the intricacies of their emotional attachments to one another.

Style

Perspective

The Seducer's Diary has three perspectives, one quite minor and the other two comprise the book. The first perspective is that of the narrator in the first several pages who has come upon Johannes's diary and is telling the reader about its contents and the events surrounding the diary. He also discusses what of Johannes and Cordelia's relationship was known to the public.

The primary perspective is that of Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century philosopher and theologian. Soren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855) was born and raised in Copenhagen, Denmark to a rich family in his area. He was widely recognized in his time and thereafter as a critic of the dominant German-language philosophy of the day, Hegelianism, following G.W.F. Hegel.

Kierkegaard's work tended to cover religious matters, such as faith in God, Christian ethics and so on. He is also seen as a precursor to modern existentialism. He continues to be influential to this day and was known as a constant pseudonymous writer. Further, he was widely known to be depressed and full of emotional turmoil.

The point of The Seducer's Diary is to work through Kierkegaard's tragic relationship with Regine Olsen, a relationship he first started to form when he was twenty-four and she was fourteen. The relationship had grown into an engagement but it had ended when Kierkegaard's emotional problems got in the way. He left Regine who later married and never quite got over her. The book was written that Regine might find it and believe that he was a dark, manipulative seducer who was no good for her anyway.

The second major perspective is that of Johannes, the seducer and gentleman that Kierkegaard uses to represent himself and his thoughts and actions. Johannes reflects the personality that Kierkegaard wants Regine to believe that he has and is constantly focused on manipulating and controlling Cordelia through subtle means to cause her to fall madly in love with him.

Tone

The tone of The Seducer's Diary reflects the complex emotional turmoil of its main character, Johannes. His tone is obsessed, plotting, monomaniacal, secretive, deceptive, fantastic and exudes a sense of wisdom about love. The tone is obsessed because the entries outline an elaborate plot to cause Cordelia to fall in love with him. Johannes plans every encounter, every look and glance and every word he speaks to her early in the diary entries. The tone also comes off as plotting because, again, Johannes engages in constant planning in order to bring Cordelia into his arms.



The tone has a monomaniacal element because practically all of Johannes's diary entries are focused single-mindedly on his plot to cause Cordelia to fall in love with him. When he speaks of other events, they are almost always in conjunction with the Cordelia plot. And when he comments on philosophical matters, the issues are always prompted by something event or thought having to do with Cordelia. The tone also comes off as secretive because the vast majority of what Johannes is up to is kept wholly to himself and his diary entries.

The tone has an air of deception on two levels. On the first level, Johannes speaks deceptively to Cordelia because he always is hiding his intentions from her, but the tone is further deceptive because Kierkegaard, the author, aims to ease his conscience over breaking Regine's heart by portraying himself as something he is not. The tone is also fantastic because the attention to detail in Johannes's plot and his lack of error are simply too great to be believed. Finally, the text exudes a sense of wisdom about love because Johannes is always speaking of what he will teach Cordelia about love, erotic love, life, etc.

Structure

The Seducer's Diary has a complex structure due to its complex perspective. Kierkegaard writes from the perspective of Johannes for most of the book. In the beginning of the book however, he writes as a man who discovers Johannes's diary after finding his way into Johannes's house. The narrator - we are not given any significant information about him - discusses Johannes and Cordelia's relationship and reproduces three of Cordelia's letters that were written after Johannes has left town without saying goodbye to her. Thus, the end is given away and the plot outline before the story even begins.

The Seducer's Diary is, as one might expect, structured like a diary. However, its structure changes as time progresses. It begins in April, in an unknown year (though somewhere in the mid-19th century). Johannes makes entries fairly regularly and describes observing Cordelia, becoming obsessed with her and laying down plans to seduce her. Later he is actually able to discover her name, where she lives and observe enough about her character to deem her worthy of his love.

As time progresses, however, the entries seem to become sparser. However, in future months Johannes simply seems to be making sporadic entries and not dating them. The month of August includes an enormous amount of information but only two entries are dated. The structure of the book therefore becomes more mysterious and random as the diary progresses. The climax occurs in August, when Johannes decides to break off the engagement; the diary ends in September as Johannes leaves town without telling Cordelia.



Quotes

"Hid from myself, I cannot; I can hardly control the anxiety that grips me at this moment when I decide in my own interest to make an accurate clean copy of the hurried transcript I was able to obtain at the time only in the greatest haste and with great uneasiness." (Introduction, 3)

"So, Scorn Faithfulness, Regret Will Follow." (Introduction, 15)

"It is very dark; I shall not disturb you. I am simply going to stand under this street light; then you will be unable to see me ..." (April, 18)

"I scarcely know myself. My mind roars like a turbulent sea in the storms of passion." (April, 33)

"Love is full of mysteries ..." (May, 47)

"I hope that soon I shall have brought her to the point where she hates me." (June, 71)

"She must owe me nothing, for she must be free. Only in freedom is there love; only in freedom are there diversion and everlasting amusement." (June, 83)

"... the higher I can elevate him, since he is bound to fall, the better it is, the more it awakens in Cordelia a consciousness of what she disdains, the more intense the presentiment of what she desires." (July, 85)

"... he who laughs last laughs best." (July, 91)

"After all, a girl loves only once." (August I, 106)

"In me, she is seeking her freedom, and the more firmly I encircle her, the better she will find it." (August II, 154)

"My Cordelia, Is an embrace a struggle?" (August II, 164)

"In a certain sense, man is more than woman, in another sense infinitely much less." (August II, 181)

"... but she herself breaks it in order to soar into a higher sphere." (August II, 190)

"The bond has broken—full of longing, strong, bold, divine, she flies like a bird that now for the first time is allowed to spread its wings. Fly, bird, fly!" (September, 190)

"Everything is a metaphor." (September, 198)

"I did love her, but from now on she can no longer occupy my soul." (September, 199)



Topics for Discussion

In your opinion, why did Kierkegaard write *The Seducer's Diary*?

Which aspects of Johannes represent Kierkegaard? Which do not?

What is Johannes's philosophy of romantic love?

What is Johannes's philosophy of women? Is he a sexist? Why or why not?

How successfully does Johannes balance his desire to make Cordelia love him and his desire that she love him freely?

How is love tied to freedom in Johannes's view?

Why does Johannes break off the engagement initially? Why does he keep it broken off? Why are the answers to these two questions different?