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HOME TRUTHS AND UNCOMFORTABLE SPACES: SWISS HOTELS AND LITERATURE OF THE 1920s

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ABSTRACT

Switzerland was at the centre of the European grand hotel scene, geographically and discursively. This article considers Swiss hotel literature and life in the 1920s, a decade in which the country's hotel landscape became politicized and, relatedly, was often portrayed in popular literature. Against the backdrop of more canonical and intellectual hotel literature set in Switzerland, the following reads Meinrad Inglin's *Grand Hotel Excelsior* (1928) as a response to a contemporary 'culture war', and as an attempt at centrist cultural criticism. Drawing especially on magazine and other archival evidence, this essay also uncovers the promotion, sponsorship, and discussion of hotel literature by the Swiss hotel lobby, which was concerned with increasing the commercial viability of hotels after the First World War, and improving their image at a time of polarized debates about the direction of Swiss society. Thus Inglin's novel occupies a centre ground not only in its argument, but in a formal sense as well. *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is a literary means of mediating the problems of Swiss culture in the 1920s, manifest in hotels as actual spaces or subjects, rather than a novel written for, or adaptable to, vested interests, or a work that employs – in the vein of Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse – the hotel as a material setting to explore abstract ideas.

Keywords: hotel industry; Switzerland; hotel novel; Meinrad Inglin; Konrad Falke; Hermann Hesse; Erich Kästner; Robert Jakob Lang; Thomas Mann.

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Rural Switzerland is central to the cosmopolitan story of grand hotels. In the late nineteenth century, César Ritz left the country, having worked as a hotel waiter, to find his fortune abroad. By the turn of the twentieth century, he was the world's leading hotelier: investing in hospitality establishments across Europe – including his native Switzerland – and Africa, and giving his name to grand hotels in Paris, London, and Madrid. In the word *ritzy*, his surname came to describe glamour itself; and the far-reaching fame of his British signature hotel was immortalized in Irving Berlin's song about New York, *Puttin' on the Ritz* (1929). Meanwhile, the Swiss hotel industry continued to train and export staff for high-end establishments on the continent and further afield. In Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), the liftboy at the

Venetian Bäder Hotel is Swiss. The novella's Prussian protagonist, Gustav Aschenbach, had decided against 'eine kleinweltliche, geschlossen österreichische Hotelgesellschaft', opting for Italian flair over provincial Austria.[1] But Switzerland might have suited him equally well – despite its lack of Dionysian symbolism at the time – for it too hosted the Western world's tourists, hence the international demand for Swiss waiters and liftboys.

Indeed, in 1913 the Swiss writer Konrad Falke noted that church services in the Alpine village of Wengen catered for both German Protestants and French Catholics, and mass was also said in English. A 'Fremdenkolonie' occupied around thirty hotels in the area.[2] *Wengen. Ein Landschaftsbild* paints an Alpine landscape that had been developed into a tourist resort within just two decades, and Falke walks along paths that are mapped out by reference to landmark hotels. He remarks that land prices in Wengen had risen to fifty francs per square metre, and that almost 200,000 people travelled on the settlement's mountain railway each year. More generally, over 40 'Bergbahnen' were built in 1912.[3] By 1914, there were 22 million overnight stays in Swiss hotels, with guests arriving in increasing numbers for pleasure and outdoor pursuits rather than for health tourism.[4] (Visitor statistics would not return to this high peak until after the Second World War.) It is thus unsurprising that when Mann decided to write a counterpart to *Der Tod in Venedig* in 1912, he chose Switzerland's Davos as its setting. The work became *Der Zauberberg* (1924), about a changing Europe and its cosmopolitan elite; and although the events take place within a sanatorium, the residents keep company with the town's transient high society temporarily resident in its grand hotels. The sanatorium was metaphorically useful for evoking a 'sick' society. But as Mann explained to his students at Princeton in 1939, Alpine tuberculosis cures were already falling out of fashion in the early twentieth century, and the majority of Swiss sanatoria were re-branded as 'Sporthotels'.[5]

If the eve of the First World War saw tourism become particularly profitable and Swiss hotels become packed, the 1920s were the age of plenty for hotel literature. The decade saw the rise of the hotel novel in Central Europe, but in Swiss society the genre was especially contested – not least because grand hotels, which dotted almost every Alpine panorama, themselves symbolized a conflicted culture. Literary prose set in Switzerland portrays hotels or hotel settlements, such as spas, as places of acute contrast. *Der Zauberberg* describes the streets of Davos in which the ill walk alongside the healthy, foreigners jostle with locals, and sledgers bump into pedestrians. Mann's narrative irony oscillates between opposing camps and ideas. The subsequent year, in 1925, Hermann Hesse published an autobiographical story of hotel life, *Kurgast. Aufzeichnungen einer Badener Kur*, following his

annual stay at Baden's Hotel Verenhof. His subject concerns more the conflict between body and mind than issues of culture at large. Mann and Hesse are but two canonical, and especially intellectual, examples.

Whereas Falke had praised residing in a Swiss hotel as living life to the full in the 1910s – guests would push themselves to their limits in nature by day, and enjoy all the comforts of cultural life in the evenings – ten years later, Hesse represented a new, and now commonly held, authorial pessimism. Both Falke and Hesse depict hotel experience as bodily. But for Hesse, boredom, laziness, and decadence characterize those who frequented Swiss spas around 1925. He criticizes the mechanical enjoyment of roulette, which purports to gratify the mind and soul without the need for thought, the imagination, or meditation. Hesse emphasizes the importance of these alternative, elevated endeavours by invoking a corporeal metaphor: 'so ist das ungefähr dasselbe, wie wenn man für seinen Körper zwar Bad und Masseur in Anspruch nimmt, auf eigene Leistung, auf Sport und Training aber verzichtet.'[6] In other words, even without a turn to abstraction the body can keep itself in check, if only one puts in some work. Pleasure and effort must be kept in balance, rather than one being embraced to the exclusion of the other. The ageing Hesse, afflicted by rheumatism and gout, was unable to see the world in any straightforward way, and says of himself: 'daß er Sinn und Achtung hat für die Antinomien, für die Notwendigkeit der Gegensätze und Widersprüche'.[7] He acknowledges that life's contradictions have a deep philosophical basis (as first revealed by German Romanticism), but for him spa and hotel life in Baden expresses the core antinomies of existence in a material sense. The designer of the town's benches, for example, was 'ein tiefer Philosoph und Ironiker' inasmuch as they were made of iron, and so, with a shot of cold to the rear, sciatic patients were reminded to remain active as well as to rest.[8] Hesse's turns of phrase hint that his work, though superficially about bodily complaints, is indebted to a German intellectual heritage, and the German Romantic outsider Jean Paul in particular. Hesse reads Jean Paul in Baden, and explicitly aligns his own work with Jean Paul's *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* (1809) in the preface to *Kurgast*.[9] Jean Paul extolled an idea of luxury that is regulated by the body (a 'Magen-Luxus'), and admonished a vain sort of decadence governed by both our visual sense and society, which Hesse disparagingly describes as a bulky luxury of marble and mirrors.[10] Thus Hesse in his chosen form of cultural reflection is ultimately more similar to Thomas Mann than Konrad Falke: the latter wrote for the Swiss and German holidaying public at large, publishing his work in Zurich and Leipzig as a corrective to typical travelogues which, like advertising copy, can be scant on truth.[11] Hesse's *Kurgast*, by comparison, is quite an intellectual intervention. And if Thomas Mann became

known for using his narrative irony as a means to carve out a centrist critical position between opposing views of the world, Hesse advocates, in an ironic spirit and calling upon literary precedent, individual, corporeal balance.

David Clay Large rightly observes in his history of Central European spas that Hesse's *Kurgast* has 'nothing to say about political and social tensions' in Baden. He wryly – but wrongly – supposes that this absence was thanks to the work being set in Switzerland: 'Had the writer gone to *Germany* for his treatment, he might have been less bored'.[12] In fact, Switzerland in precisely this period was engaged in fierce political and cultural debate, not least about the place of hotels in its economy and society. This article turns to archival sources, mostly contemporary magazines and newspapers, as well as a serialized story from 1925 by Robert Jakob Lang, to summarize the historical context. It then reads a popular novel that stages the Swiss culture war on and over hotel territory: Meinrad Inglin's *Grand Hotel Excelsior* (1928). Historicising literature in this way shows its efficacy in a particularly polarized decade of twentieth-century Swiss society, and examines contributions made to constructive, contemporary cultural criticism by fiction that are either forgotten by scholars (such as Lang's story), or studied in a specifically and restrictively literary vein – as is the case for Inglin's novel.

Like Mann and Hesse, Inglin adopted an intermediary position when writing cultural critique. But unlike his more famous peers, Inglin's literary purpose was more pragmatic than intellectual – although he was as inspired by *Der Zauberberg* (1924) as he was by *Kurgast* (1925). Hesse and Inglin corresponded a few times, and on 17 May 1939 Inglin was prompted to write to Hesse after reading the latter's memories of the Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck in *Gedenkblätter* (1937). Inglin reminisces how once he and Schoeck had shared their love of Hesse's works – and the first of the three that Inglin mentions is *Kurgast.*[13] Such hotel literature set in Switzerland and published in the 1920s formed the literary basis for Inglin's *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, together with the works of the Russian nineteenth-century authors Lev Tolstoy, and especially Fedor Dostoyevsky. But Inglin's novel – his fourth – is less remarkable when read as a response to literary tradition; indeed, he excluded it from his literary estate in his final will (along with his second novel, *Wendel von Euw*, from 1925). Inglin's *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is rather a document of cultural history, a sort of sceptical sequel to Falke's *Wengen.*

Swiss Hotels in the 1920s: Cultural Contests and Political Policies

The immediate aftermath of the First World War adversely affected the Swiss hotel market, despite the country's neutrality. The situation for hoteliers speaks to that of Switzerland as a whole. The Swiss were afflicted by economic woes like other nations, and Germany's hyper-inflation had knock-on effects on its small neighbour. Supplies were scarce for a while. Foreign tourists from the Old World stayed at home, because of both their depleted finances and domestic political upheaval. Grand hotels and spas seemed out of place in straightened times. However, Switzerland – and its hotel industry – recovered in the mid-1920s. Indeed, the economy picked up where it had left off before the war: the turn of the century's transformation of Switzerland from a country of crops to one of dairy farming and, above all, tourism and banking now continued at pace.[14]

So, too, did the *Zivilisationskritik* of the time around 1900. As Switzerland experienced its second industrial revolution in those earlier decades, some intellectuals and other *avant-garde* counter-culturalists doubted that a widespread increase in material wealth led to societal and individual enrichment. Their arguments were shared by many pessimistic philosophers and artists across the continent, who were concerned about technological progress. But the Swiss found a potent example of the cultural malaise in their native, flourishing hospitality sector. When Carl Hilty reflected on happiness and industriousness in 1901, he asked why Michelangelo or Titian could be so productive without the need for visiting 'Bäder und Kurorte' year on year.[15] Organisations were established to protect the nation's authentic homeland, or *Heimat*, in 1905 and its natural landscape in 1909. And at the heart of such cultural critique was a paradox. As Jakob Tanner observes: 'Je mehr man die Natur beherrschen lernte, desto erhabener wurde sie. Und je erhabener und schöner sie wurde, desto akuter schien sie wiederum durch ihre technisch-wissenschaftliche Eroberung gefährdet.'[16] Thus as the grand hotels were modernized and made ever-more magnificent in the mid-1920s, the dissenting voices became louder.

Whereas around 1900 the movement that imagined a future Switzerland blessed more with natural rather with material plenty was both elitist in tone and on the periphery of social and political discourse, in the 1920s it became mainstream. The decade was one of general social and political contestation and change. The *Landesstreik* of 1918 led to nationwide political reforms, above all the introduction of proportional representation the following year. This shift from a previously 'first past the post' electoral system was the death knell to the hegemony of classical liberalism – although the liberals (or radicals, as they were known) remained the largest party. Proportional voting and referendums encouraged the polarization of conservative and socialist positions on how to rebuild society after the war, and brought the

discursive fringes into the centre of cultural debate. Hotels exemplified the state of the era's economic health and its policy measures, and they also served as 'stress tests' of social cohesion.

In an effort to help existing hoteliers during the initial post-war downturn, the Swiss federal government introduced legislation on 2 November 1915 that allowed hotel owners to delay either the interest they owed or their capital repayments in circumstances where loans were financed on the assumption that guests would arrive from abroad. Moreover, Article 27 of 'die Verordnung betreffend Schutz der Hotelindustrie gegen Folgen des Kriegs' banned both the establishment of new hotels or guest houses, and the expansion or redevelopment of old ones – unless permission was granted by parliament. Change of use into additional accommodation for foreign visitors was also forbidden. This law was known from 1920 onwards as the 'Hotelbauverbot', and continued in various forms until a referendum in 1952. However, the original ruling of 1915 was relaxed in 1925, as the hotel industry began to recover and it was questioned whether such support for a specific sector was in fact constitutional. By the middle of the decade, extensions to properties especially became much easier to pass by the authorities, though they were still subject to individual approval. Hoteliers had to prove a market need in order to obtain consent, but their arguments and evidence were often creative.[17] Planning cases for bigger and better hotels were also usually predicated on speculative logic. In other words, a consensus formed that hotels must be re-modelled and enlarged in order to stimulate demand. The changing fashions with which hoteliers had to contend included a continental migration to beach resorts – the *St Galler Tagblatt* later summarized succinctly in 1929, 'daß das Meer ein erfolgreicher Rivale der Alpen geworden ist'.[18] But the gap could be filled by appealing to well-heeled American visitors. The US were the new world leader in luxury accommodation and innovation, so Americans would expect the most modern of conveniences and the grandest of palaces if they were to holiday in Switzerland. The age of post-war Swiss hotel expansion, therefore, was not actually an answer to any absolute rise in guests at all. And it came at a social cost. Fresh, imposing facades became symbols of an age of speculation, and a more Americanized spin on the Swiss economy. As such, they were rhetorical targets for counter-culturalists.

An article in the bilingual national magazine of the hotel industry, *Schweizer Hotel-Revue / Revue Suisse des Hôtels* on 7 February 1920 supposed that American tourists would flood a few select spas, notably those in the most naturally stunning locations. However, its author, Hans Biengraeber, notes that 'die Gästeflut aus Amerika' was not yet in evidence, and that a new clientele needed to be found for hotel resorts which were not in the most desirable

of destinations. He was thus aware that the envisaged – or for the sceptic, fantasised – American market was not a 'one size fits all' solution. What is more, he also had his finger on the pulse closer to home, appreciating that at times of civil unrest, businesses and liberals needed the support of the middle classes. The column complains that staying at a spa had become excessively costly for the majority of ordinary, professional Swiss people, because of the 'unnatural' international economic climate. As a result, spa cures were now the preserve of the rich, and middle-of-the-road hoteliers lost out on custom. Biengraeber tables a solution that shows that the hotel industry in this decade was not entirely homogeneous in either its social bias or business strategy. He reasons that since the working classes had received financial assistance with healthcare when they were in need, it was now time to extend help to the middle classes – and thereby assist smaller and less salubrious Swiss hotels in getting back onto a sustainable financial footing. He proposes that a handful of spas which are easily accessible should be selected, and these areas could be designated as places for affordable cures, 'ohne dass dadurch die Oeffentlichkeit oder der Kurort und der Hotelier belastet oder durch zu grosse Kurkosten die wirtschaftliche Existenz der Familie des Kurgastes gefährdet wird'.[19] The initiative should start in the summer, given the high price of coal. Biengraeber asserts that his plan had been reported in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* already, and the editors of *Schweizer Hotel-Revue,* which also served as the newsletter for members of the Schweizer Hotel-Verein, appealed for readers' reactions. The proposal was debated for the rest of the year, but was never realized. As an article from 21 April 1927 recalls, the envisaged price of 5 to 6 francs a night was considered too little by everyone (charges usually started at 8 francs for a basic single room).[20] More fundamentally, it was a defining feature of spa towns that they offered the full range of hotel accommodation, such that hotel owners objected to any measure that would have levelled the playing field in a single location. The column of 1927 acknowledges a 'Popularisierung des Reisens' in the 1920s, especially among civil servants, salesmen, and other representatives of the (lower) middle classes. But it concludes that the more modest, erstwhile grand hotels had adapted to become 'Mittelstandshotels' of their own accord. The interventionist idea of 'Mittelstands-Spezialkurorten' proved to be a non-starter. Classical liberalism, and at times cut-throat competition with neighbouring hotels, won out.

The only alternative successful concepts that applied to entire resorts were those that preserved price differentiation. Co-ordinated, regional advertising campaigns were par for the course. More substantially, Large observes that from the mid-1920s onwards, spas across Central Europe embraced the hosting of conventions as an additional source of income to cures. In Germany, Bad Homburg became the market leader.[21] In Switzerland, it was Davos.

The *Internationale Davoser Hochschulkurse* ran for four summers, from 1928. According to Peter E. Gordon, Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924) offered a 'ready-made script' for holding intellectual debates in the town's hotels.[22] The keynote speakers for the 1929 session were Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer, who were both put up in the Grand Hotel Belvedere, while Davos's other hotels were filled to capacity by visiting students.[23] Since Mann's novel set a precedent for understanding Davos as the site for a culture clash, Heidegger's and Cassirer's exchanges and their opposing philosophical convictions were quickly embedded, as Gordon elucidates, into a mythical struggle between conservative and liberal cultural thought, and between Analytic and Continental philosophy.

Heidegger, of course, was a cultural pessimist and – in his writings – no fan of the 'Urlaubsindustrie': in his essay *Die Frage nach der Technik* (1954), he criticizes industrialization for turning the Rhine into a banal tourist attraction.[24] But although he liked to philosophize in his legendary forest hut, Heidegger had no complaints about staying in grand hotels such as the Belvedere. He was not alone: in the late 1920s, the German financier Eduard von der Heydt built a hotel in the Bauhaus style on Switzerland's Monte Verità (one of a couple of exceptions to the 'Hotelbauverbot' as an entirely new construction) in part because of the location's counter-culturalist, artistic heritage as a home of the 'life-reform' movement around 1900.[25] Yet by the third decade of the twentieth century, similarly radical, alternative ideas had become popular among those who did not – or could not – reside in such places. Swiss hotels of the 1920s did not only house controversy, therefore. They were in themselves controversial.

Following the war, public resentment of foreigners – as tourists or seasonal workers – reportedly increased. The word 'Überfremdung' was common parlance. One commentary from 1918 in a journal devoted to social democracy, *Neue Wege. Blätter für religiöse Arbeit*, calls out the injustice of newspapers whipping up anti-foreigner fervour, while promoting the hotel industry with gloss and glamour: 'Es geht doch nicht an, daß man in den großen Schweizerblättern die Fremden ob ihrer Nasen und abstehenden Ohren, ob ihres angeblichen Müssiggangs angreift und in denselben Blättern in großen Sonderbeilagen die Hebung des Fremdenverkehrs zu fördern sucht.'[26] In the course of the country's modernisation, from the 1880s through to the 1920s, Switzerland had changed from being a nation of emigration to one of net immigration. Hotels, like other service sectors, employed foreign labour, and they relied on clients from abroad. Hence hoteliers could be portrayed as hypocrites if they shared widespread Swiss, anti-foreigner sentiment. The author in *Neue Wege*, himself an immigrant, lambasts Swiss society but lays special blame at the doors of hotel owners and directors. For

they proudly welcomed 'Palace-Hotel-Bewohner' if these guests were petty princes from the Old World and drove their own cars around the countryside, yet at the same time they resented foreigners who travelled by tram alongside everyday Swiss people. Hotels became symbolic of an inherent social contradiction and unequal, unethical hospitality. Such charges were levelled not least by the political left and religious, particularly Catholic groups.

Further, once post-war civil disorder had led to a greater democratization of society and the splintering of a liberal consensus, political discussions were at times unsympathetic to the hospitality industry, on both the left and the right sides of parliament. Hotels had turned Swiss Alpine splendour into profit, but some politicians now doubted whether these establishments were of net national benefit. A popular narrative took hold that a return to hotel building (or rather, expansion and modernization) mid-decade caused rural flight among the working poor. In 1926, the Schweizer Hotel-Verein published a report by A. Th. Pesch entitled *Entvölkerung und Landflucht in der Zentralschweiz*, prompted by parliamentary interventions on the part of conservative Nationalrat Dr Georg Baumberger. The politician had claimed that the hotel sector was detrimental to remote mountain communities. Pesch's study, in contrast, contended that any migration effects from rural regions were instead because of general, modern economic trends; and it argued that hotels significantly supported national agriculture, creating a large domestic market for Swiss produce. The report's estimated figure for the total amount of overnight stays in 1926 was some 20 million, which – if plausible – marks a revival just shy of the pre-war boom.[27] (The number seems optimistic, given that the region of Appenzell, for instance, reported in 1927 that the previous year's season left much to be desired, because of 'die missliche allgemeine Wirtschaftslage'.)[28] *Entvölkerung und Landflucht in der Zentralschweiz* was written and published by vested interests, and was covered multiples times by the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* in its year of publication. Moreover, the study was marketed to members for purchase in every weekly issue for the rest of the decade.

If Swiss hotels were politicized, so too was their portrayal in literature: both non-fiction and novels. For the Schweizer Hotel-Verein realised that during the 1920s, cultural contestation took place in and about hotels not only in real life, but also in the popular imagination. It was therefore important to reinforce the creative power of literature in promoting an advantageous, pleasant image of hotels. Most weeks, the column on 'Literatur' in the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* summarized the latest studies on subjects like rural flight, industry handbooks, and other non-fiction. But fiction that appeared to portray hotel life positively was also enthusiastically recommended to readers. In 1925, the literature section reviewed

the third and fourth volumes of the anthology *Schweizer Bibliothek*, edited by Robert Jakob Lang (1889 – 1946), and the reviewer advised its readers to subscribe to the series. He points out that the fourth volume includes the start of the editor's own novel, published in serialized form. Lang's *Das Hotel „zum Blauen Band"* is suggested holiday reading.[29] The remainder followed in the subsequent two volumes of *Schweizer Bibliothek* that year, available to subscribers. An advertisement in the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* two years later, in 1927, lists the contents for the September issue of a competing, monthly journal likewise marketed at hoteliers: *Hospes.* Curiously, the publication announces as its sixth item: 'Das Hotel „Zum Blauen Band", fröhlicher Hotel-Roman'.[30] The editors of *Hospes* added 'Hotel' to Lang's original subtitle, and it is unclear from their phrasing whether the magazine included a review of the full work or, more likely, republication of Lang's serialized novel as a whole – alongside a practical guide to translating menus, and advice on what an advertising campaign is realistically able to achieve. For Lang's 'Roman' does not otherwise appear to have been published in its own right as a book, or as continuous prose.[31] The volume of *Hospes* that either prints or discusses this happy story about Swiss hotels seems to be no longer extant. In any case, in the 1920s the Swiss hotel lobby became readers attuned to 'hotel literature' that supported the sector.

Reading Lang's novel reveals that it is in fact a fictional and witty re-enforcement of contemporary hoteliers' economic speculation, using twists of the imagination to give their business plans credibility. *Das Hotel „Zum blauen Band"* begins with the resignation in 1924 of a hotel's head waiter, who is nostalgic for the establishment's better times and pities the empty rooms in the present. The local postmaster panics as no mail arrives for Zum Blauen Band, and the season is plagued with bad weather. He has good reason to be worried: he has invested his savings by lending Herr Kron 30,000 francs to buy the hotel. Kron, for his part, has a growing family and no money to repay the mortgage in full on demand, despite his efforts to draft a compelling advertising campaign that proclaims not merely the usual clichés, but an inspiring 'gesteigerte Wahrheit'.[32] He resolves to call his lender's bluff: if postmaster Schlumpf or someone else invested in a scheme of refurbishment, then guests would come and Kron could pay off his debt in one go. Schlumpf, who in fact desires social power more than he wants his savings back, retorts that if Kron can almost fill the hotel within a few weeks, he will provide more capital. These are hard economic times, after all, and so he has no other projects in which he is keen to invest; Schlumpf simply wanted to belittle his borrower. Kron soon employs a new head waiter, and days afterwards – to Schlumpf's surprise and annoyance – a Bohemian princess arrives by car and checks in to the hotel's finest room.

Zum blauen Band then fills with high-society. The elite guests are followed by many others, such that the hotel thrives over the summer months. Given this success, Kron again approaches Schlumpf for a cash injection, falsely claiming to have received competing offers. Schlumpf falls for the trick, but the core ploy becomes clear only at the end of novel (although observant readers will have guessed Kron's strategy already). The head waiter and the most sophisticated guests are in fact a band of actors, paid by Herr Kron. In the end, however, everyone lives happily ever after. For Herr Kron's creative advertising campaign pays off, and the genuine guests demand that the hotel opens for a skiing season over the winter. Kron's duplicity is forgiven because he turns a profit, and one visitor even agrees to invest – meaning that Schlumpf can withdraw his money whenever he likes. The cunning hotelier, though, is content to leave the timescale to his baffled original lender – and is pleased enough at being able to take Schlumpf down a social peg or two. In other words, Lang's story is a heartening tale for a hard-hit hotel industry hoping to turn business around, with promising times on the horizon. It is a comic but affirmative version of the capitalist idea that dramatic growth arises from the very representation of grandeur.

The resort of Davos went one stage further than the Schweizer Hotel-Verein's embrace of creative works such as Lang's: the town not only promoted hotel literature, but also funded it. From 1926 onwards, the community advertised its literary, artistic, scholarly, and sporting activities and achievements in a special periodical: the *Davoser Revue / Revue de Davos.* Ten years later, the local Verkehrsverein commissioned its own novel, since it sought a cheerful counter-story to Mann's *Der Zauberberg.* Erich Kästner's *Der Zauberlehrling*, written in 1938, remained a fragment in which a Berlin academic, Prof. Dr Alfons Mintzlaff, is invited to give a public lecture by the Davos art society. The streets are glamorous and cosmopolitan, lined by 'Hotelpaläste', posters for American films screened in the evenings, and shop mannequins adorned with Parisian evening wear.[33] Mintzlaff arrives perturbed to find that someone of his name has been staying in Davos for a week already, and has been accommodated in the Grand Hotel Belvedere with an ensuite bathroom and south-facing balcony. Such product placement did not make it into print until later decades. However, Swiss hoteliers understood that literary representations of the country's hotels had commercial and political, cultural effect.

Grand Hotel Excelsior: Centrist Cultural Criticism

It is within the context of this historical Swiss situation that *Grand Hotel Excelsior* (1928) should be read. Among scholars, the novel has been discussed in studies of the grand hotel

literature of Central European writers, thanks in large part to the work of Cordula Seger; and it has been examined in volumes or theses on Inglin's works as a whole.[34] Both bodies of work are fully justified: author-based studies are the backbone of literary scholarship, and on first publication the book was glossed as 'ein schweizerischer Hotelroman' in the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* – a specifically Swiss spin on something of an accepted genre.[35] Nonetheless, the cultural politics and pragmatism of Inglin's literary purpose in *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, and especially its contemporary currency, become all the clearer when the work is read alongside the above archival evidence and the forgotten, contemporary work of Lang. Historical detail, the day-to-day trivia of the time, is left out of too many literary studies that instead seek to place Inglin alongside canonical, continental authors, or debate the developments within his *œuvre*. He started work on his narrative about Swiss cultural controversies on 28 October 1918; by the time he was finished ten years later, a hotel novel set in Switzerland and cultural commentary appeared to go hand in hand. Indeed, the ideological framework of Lang's 'fröhlicher Hotel-Roman' from 1925, if not the text itself, was surely as important for Inglin's mode of cultural intervention as Central European intellectual classics with a Swiss setting. Inglin's story resonated with readers throughout Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. Three early editions were printed, and in 1929 *Grand Hotel Excelsior* was awarded a prize of 1,000 francs by the Schweizerische Schillerstiftung.

In the opening pages, the head of the Sigwart household Peter senior dies, and his large guesthouse near a lake passes to his sons Eugen and Peter junior, his daughter Johanna, and his brother Jakob. Eugen is keen to build a 'Fremdenhotel' with the help of two or three investors.[36] Since 1925, the government's ban on hotel building had been relaxed, after all. Concerned about potential competition moving in on the Sigwarts' prime site, Eugen has already purchased land that adjoins the family's existing plot and overlooks the water. Whereas Johanna is indecisive and Jakob withholds judgement – he runs the nearby dairy that provides the Sigwarts' business with milk and cheese, as well as eggs and meat – his brother Peter is aghast at the proposal. Peter understands a grand hotel not as a monument to its time, such as a factory might be, but rather as the object of unconscious desire for the industrial age, its 'unbewußtes Wunschbild'.[37] Eugen appears, in Peter's mind, as an 'entseelte[r] Zivilisator und babylonische[r] Turmbauer'.[38] In this fraternal pair, Inglin characterizes, even caricatures, the culture war of the 1920s in Switzerland that weaponized the hotel sector: a struggle between the liberal economy's vision for society and its heterogeneous opposition from the periphery, which in *Grand Hotel Excelsior* unites in Peter junior as the antagonist of the age.

Even the novel's title is of its moment. 'Grand Hotel Excelsior' is the name given to the expanded and modernized Kurhaus Sigwart, but it is first mooted mockingly by the brother sceptical about the plans. The younger Peter Sigwart says of Eugen's vision that it should be called:

> irgend etwas Großartiges, Phänomenales... Grand Hotel – weiß der Teufel, wie man ihm sagen könnte... National, Palace, Europa, das ist alles zu abgedroschen, zu kleinlich für dieses Hotelwunder... Himalaya geht nicht, Mont Blanc ist wieder zu gering... aber vielleicht gloria mundi oder so etwas, auch Excelsior ginge zur Not noch, Grand Hotel Excelsior...[39]

The irony of Peter's sarcastic suggestion is that 'Excelsior' was actually a common name for the era's grand hotels. Montreux's Hotel du Grand Lac Excelsior was built in 1907; the following year, a Hotel Excelsior was completed in Berlin which, once magnificently modernized in the subsequent decade, inspired Vicki Baum's novel *Menschen im Hotel* (1929). Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* had already mentioned a 'Hotel Excelsior' in the Italian city.[40] The Swiss local press in late spring of 1929, moreover, reported on the death of Alfons von Pfyffer, an emigrant from Lucerne who had lately run both the Grand Hotel and the Hotel Excelsior in Rome.[41] As Dominik Müller states, the contemporary popularity of this name, among German speakers, anyway, stemmed from Ferdinand Freiligrath's translation of the nineteenth-century poem 'Excelsior' by American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. What is more, 'Excelsior' had been the working title of Gottfried Keller's unfinished novel *Martin Salander*, as became public knowledge in 1897.[42] Hence Inglin's work is indicative of a pan-European phenomenon – the rapid (re-)building of grand hotels in the shadows of new American splendour – and is particularly indebted to literature of and about Switzerland. Above all, though, *Grand Hotel Excelsior* narrates a highly politicized contemporary, specifically Swiss society.

Peter junior is depicted as a radical counter-culturalist. But he is more of a reactionary than a revolutionary. As he tours the newly re-modelled and freshly named Grand Hotel Excelsior, he is amused that the piano is out of tune – because this image fits into his conception of an opulent yet philistine residence, pretending to be a house of culture. Peter shares Hermann Hesse's comic sentiment in *Kurgast* (1925) that hotel clientele must be the sort who enjoy whipped cream with their classical music, but Peter is in fact unable to play the piano himself. He is a hypocrite, and portrayed ironically. He aspires to authentic high art, and yet

he also extols the virtues of the strong and simple farmer. He stands for a Nietzschean vitalism that was common before the outbreak of the First World War, fused with potent post-war, socialist symbolism. He professes compassion, but demonstrates aristocratic condescension towards bourgeois concerns, finding money worries distasteful. (Eugen tries in vain to talk Peter through the house finances, about which Peter is uninterested so long as he receives enough to live on each year.) Peter converses politely with noble northern Germans, and keeps personal company with revolutionaries. One of his activist acquaintances is the Russian Mastakowitsch, whose insight about Peter is the most penetrating. He judges that the frustrated heir is fascinated in him only in a literary sense, as an idea and almost as a character from one of Dostoyevsky's novels. In Mastakowitsch's assessment, Peter is too wealthy, too well-dressed, and too sensible to genuinely want to be friends. Mastakowitsch concludes that Peter is destined to remain loathing hotel life, rather than really ever rebel. In this vein, the novel ends dramatically yet ambiguously, with the burning of the Grand Hotel Excelsior. Although Peter had planned an arson attack, he appears surprised when the building goes up in flames. He finds Mastakowitsch in the cellar, but the supplies stashed ready to ignite the hotel are untouched. Peter does not attempt to extinguish the fire, yet it is not clear that he caused it – even though he says he is to blame when, to his rage, Eugen appears unconcerned by the slow pace and ineffective efforts of the fire brigade. Such ambiguous behaviour is typical of the junior Peter Sigwart. He asserts that he is cultured without showing true commitment to the arts; and he presents himself as an intellectual, albeit without a coherent idea of how the world should be. He embraces equality, and yearns for elitism. And Peter aspires to change, but is not obviously a man of action. He stands in, therefore, as a catch-all figure for society's critics who fetishize authenticity and are convinced that, whatever real culture might be, it is not housed in a hotel.

Although Eugen is hardly portrayed sympathetically, as the narrative progresses readers become more aware of the fragility of his financial situation and business strategy. His original proposal to his brother, sister, and uncle had been to build a brand new hotel; his compromise was to extend the existing Kurhaus, such that it matched or exceeded what the region's other grand hotels had to offer. For in line with the discussion in the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* about the difficulties of securing a sustainable clientele in the early 1920s, Eugen is concerned that his guests are 'mittelmäßig […] Amerikaner kommen überhaupt nicht hieher.'[43] His plan for more rooms, bathrooms, running water, and an imposing facade is speculative, in the hope of tempting especially tourists from the US. Once the Grand Hotel Excelsior is built, however, American visitors continue to prove elusive. Towards the end of the

novel, Eugen despondently prepares his hotel accounts, and must acknowledge a loss. The reason, the narrator surmises, is neither the fine Alpine, waterside location nor the hotel's marketing campaign, but rather the short season and, more fundamentally, the relatively small number of rooms given the hotel's grandeur. Eugen admits to himself that too few rooms had been the problem with the former guesthouse. In his grand hotel he had raised prices, but the reputation of the Excelsior was not yet sufficiently established for that measure to secure a sufficient return. And so Eugen looks back, angrily, to the original architectural plans for his dream on which he had compromised, and which resulted in this 'Bastard von einem Grand Hotel'.[44] Eugen is characterized as philistine, anguished, and arrogant – as a man yearning to hold court over a world-renowned and splendid residence, but fearful that his project will turn out to be a failure. Significantly, although the narrative depicts Eugen's thinking at length, his business sense is never confirmed as sound – unlike the narrative assumption of Robert Jakob Lang's serialized story, which supports hoteliers like Eugen. The 'hotels race' of the 1920s is described by Inglin, but no instance of a profitable hotel that conforms to this model is presented to readers. More neutrally, Eugen is portrayed as a man struggling to make ends meet, with the conviction that ever-grander alterations in excess of his current means would solve his problems. In this approach, he feels thwarted by his family.

Ironically, the fire that Peter envisages as civilisation's final reckoning is just the opportunity for commercial renewal that Eugen had been longing for. Peter imagined the destruction of the temple to the soulless and decadent enthusiasts of ersatz authenticity, but it is Eugen's vision for the ultimate modern hotel (or, more likely, a compromised version of a new, outlandish scheme) that will arise from the ashes. Eugen's plan had a recent historical precedent in Swiss society: when two hotels collapsed in a village fire in Mürren in 1926, they were replaced by a bigger and better 'double hotel': the Hotel Alpina und Edelweiss, designed by Arnold Itten.[45] As Eugen looks on at the flames in *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, Peter is surprised at his brother's composure. Yet as readers are already aware, Eugen had insured the property handsomely – and he had even expressed his worry that his brother would set the place on fire. Eugen is the clever, worldly wise, and economically liberal hotelier, whereas Peter embodies a form of reactionary cultural criticism that in the German tradition is understood as a longing for some imagined, original homestead, or *Heimat*. As Peter Blickle writes: '*Heimat* is a kind of toothless German critique of modern Western civilisation. It is imaginistically structured, close to primary processes; it is an irrational wish-fulfillment.'[46]

The ironically ineffectual fire that does not undermine Eugen's business, but instead underscores his very strategy despite destroying the building itself, indicates that Inglin's novel does not side with Swiss social movements against the hotel industry in any straightforward way. At the same time, it evidently opposes the assumptions and new norms of the hotel lobby.

Inglin's argument in *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is centrist, but in its closing image the novel is nevertheless tinged with nostalgia. A resident of the Sigwarts' hotel, the author Jean Jouanique, loses his year's work to the flames. In it he had dedicated himself to capturing, 'zum erstenmal nicht die Gesellschaft nur der Hauptstadt, sondern der internationalen Zivilisation […], wie sie in den großen Kulturhäusern Europas auftritt'. He had understood the attraction of grand hotels, charted their changes, and – crucially – struck the 'melancholic' tone of someone truly acquainted with them.[47] As Cordula Seger puts it, the ruins at the close of Inglin's novel symbolize a banal and disenchanted world.[48] Inglin knew the sort of feeling from his own personal history. The hotel of Inglin's family, Hotel Axenstein, had burned down on 29 December 1900. The grand hotel had been built in Morschach by his maternal great-grandfather, Ambros Eberle, and was so impressive that on completion in 1868 it was visited by Queen Victoria.[49] Biographer Beatrice von Matt describes Hotel Axenstein as the young Inglin's playground, in which as a relation of the hotel director he enjoyed an almost aristocratic sense of freedom.[50] It was a business that, in time, he stood to inherit. When the *Briger Anzeiger* reported that the hotel had been engulfed in flames, it added that the hotel was insured for around one million francs.[51] And similar to the Grand Hotel Excelsior of Inglin's fiction, Hotel Axenstein was rebuilt grander than before, with 250 instead of 200 beds.[52] Inglin returned to this – for him, epochal and traumatic – event in his 1949 novel *Werner Amberg*, in which the Grand Hotel Freudenberg, the establishment of the protagonist's great-grandfather, Bartolome Bising, is consumed by fire. However, Inglin changes the date to the eve of the twentieth century, such that one century giving way to another was equated with disaster and scorched, 'brandrot', in his memory.[53] The final fire of *Grand Hotel Excelsior* reflects Inglin's own nostalgia, but this feeling is frustrated by the inadequacy of the flames at bringing closure to the present, problematic times. Such sentiment seeks some acknowledgement as it lingers between the lines, yet it is defused critically by the narrative all the same.

Hotel fires are a familiar trope in hotel novels. Joseph Roth's *Hotel Savoy* (1924) also ends in this way, as a testament to a lost era.[54] Ironically, however, by this time the image of a burning hotel was itself one of a bygone age. An earlier passage in *Grand Hotel Excelsior*

explains that Eugen had long been cautious and had never minded high insurance premiums, shaped by the years in which he had learned his profession as a youth. His hotel had not always been made of steel and concrete – presumably, the joists and probably the Alpine-style facade of the former Kurhaus Sigwart had been wooden. By implication, the risk of accidental fire in the modern structures had decreased, and so insurance was now a racket (or 'Gaunerbande').[55] While hotel fires are a staple of hotel literature into the 1920s, in the arts as in real life they were more regular occurrences around the dawn of the new century. Examples from art, literature, and empirical history are easily found. The exhibition for summer 2019 at the Alpines Museum der Schweiz in Bern, *Schöne Berge. Eine Ansichtssache*, opened with a painting by Adolf Kromer from 1895, entitled 'Giessbachhotel am Brienzersee vor dem Brand'. Jakob Christoph Heer's novel *An heiligen Wassern* (1898), set in an Alpine village, has as its climax the fire of 'Pension und Hotel zum Bären' by arson. And Hotel Axenstein was engulfed as the twentieth century got underway. Newspaper archives confirm a fall in reports of hotel fires in the 1920s, and the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* advertises new technologies by companies such as Siemens that are designed to speed up the emergency response – hoteliers are advised to purchase a 'Selbsttätige Feuermelder', for example.[56] All in all, then, the hotel fire is a literary device in Inglin's work and his decade that ironically expresses nostalgia for a world order in the late nineteenth century and until the First World War. While the fictional event calls into question the idea that modern hotels are buildings less susceptible to fire (little does civilization consider the possibility of social antagonists in a more advanced age), in its old-fashioned imagery a hotel fire in a literary work of the 1920s actually recalls a time of frequent calamity. And so although Inglin may harbour some personal nostalgia for hotels at the turn of the century, he holds it in check with an ironic hint that history has always had its tragedies. Furthermore, the planned arson attack on the Grand Hotel Excelsior – regardless of whether that was the true cause of the novel's closing catastrophe – cannot be understood as any original plan on the part of the junior Peter Sigwart: once again, and ironically, his radicality is in fact outmoded.

Indeed, overall *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is critical of a reactionary attitude. Less clear, though implicit, is Inglin's understanding of a constructive, positive response to contested conceptions of culture, made manifest at or about grand hotels of the contemporary Swiss landscape. Only later in his life and work did he argue in favour of concrete political solutions, for example by supporting liberal democracy, including proportional representation, in his historical novel *Schweizerspiegel* (1938) set in the years 1912 to 1918. Even then, Daniel Annen suggests that Inglin's literary politics in this work take their inspiration from classical

German conceptions of *Bildung,* and from Enlightenment ideals of nature and reason, rather than from any particular party position.[57] Inglin's writing never put forward a manifesto, nor does it work through abstract ideas. While most critics assume that in the 1920s Inglin was still simply a sceptical individualist, Eva C. Wiegmann-Schubert contends that 'schon in dem Roman *Grand Hotel Excelsior* reflektiert Inglin den Ersten Weltkrieg als epochale Katastrophe und beginnt das polarisierende Schwarz-Weiß-Muster zugunsten einer Position der ‚Mitte' aufzugeben.'[58] In this interpretation she is broadly right, and instrumental for the present analysis: in the course of the narrative Inglin moves from characterizing, even caricaturing, social positions to carving out an intermediary position on hotels and Swiss society. Yet Wiegmann-Schubert reads the structure of *Grand Hotel Excelsior* as a sort of Hegelian, dialectical synthesis. This description gives the errant impression of a high-minded work, whereas Inglin wears his learning lightly and is pragmatic in his composition. Hegelian thought only really expresses itself in the language of Peter junior's conversations with his cousin Josef, about the spirit of their age and its antithesis – and in any case, the phrasing turns comic as Josef gently pokes fun at Peter.[59] *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is hardly heavy philosophy. Hence the question becomes what practical means or institutions instead might engender the cultural centre ground that Inglin advocates.

The first of two positive contributions to a centrist cultural position in *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is education. Eugen enlists Dr Dubois, doctor-in-chief at 'Sanatorium Altenberg', to certify Peter as insane. The name of Dubois's medical establishment ('Old Mountain Sanatorium') is a nod to an erstwhile, now outdated driver of the Alpine tourist economy: cures for tuberculosis. Dubois possesses professional integrity, and even some sympathy for Peter's ideals: Peter is a man of profound insight at times, but a misdirected soul. Although Dubois emphasizes that he is appalled by what might come of Peter's logic, and that he would do anything to prevent Peter acting on his more rebellious objections to contemporary society, he also refuses pre-emptively to withdraw Peter's agency by declaring him mad.[60] In other words, it would seem reasonable to agree with aspects of Peter's position, but he should be neither be empowered nor restrained as a precaution. Ideally, reason alone leads to moderate individual behaviour, provided it is deployed with pragmatism and goodwill.

The second institution that might establish greater cultural consensus and stability seems surprising, given the thrust of the narrative: inheritance. Indeed, Peter's destructive condition is in part enabled because he is a man of sound financial means, thanks to his inheritance rights and his brother's efforts. He has no need to apply himself to anything; his suggestion at the start of the novel is to sell the estate in its entirety. Thus inheritance may strike

readers as an odd and jarring way to keep the rampant onward march of modernity at bay, and perhaps it appears to be an ironic ideal. But a contemporary audience was primed to see a more positive side to inheritance. In 1922, for instance, a national referendum that proposed one-off, progressive and scaled taxation on all individual wealth, once adjusted for outstanding debts and monies invested into land or shares, was defeated by a massive 87% of voters.[61] It was an early sign that in Switzerland, left-wing politicians should leave personal property alone. Against the backdrop of the glowing embers at the end of Inglin's novel, Eugen secures a backer for a new grand hotel in place of the old: Mr Barker, the sole American guest to have stayed at the Sigwart residence. Barker invests $50,000, on the condition that on his death Johanna, Eugen's sister, inherits his shares – and she must not be told of the arrangement for another year. Johanna is promptly described as having a newfound confidence, though she does not know of her imminent financial independence. She realises that 'das eigene Selbst' is more important to her than familial relationships, a husband, bearing children, or, indeed, 'die Beziehungen zum elterlichen Hause'. As she looks around her, she decides that an age falling away makes room for another, and the new era will be a time for women: 'Deutlich erhob sich in ihr das Gefühl, daß diese Welt, die da rings um sie zugrunde ging, eine Welt und Wirkung des Mannes gewesen sei'.[62] Although inheritance by definition preserves an old order, it also — in this instance, anyway – allows for discussion and collective decision-making, if assets are shared within the family. Readers can assume that Johanna will be an independently-minded yet positive counterweight to Eugen's vision for grandiose and ever-greater growth. For Johanna will have a substantial stake in whatever project is realized. She must – in contrast to Peter – use it constructively, which is more likely because of her comparatively serene, and now calmly self-assured, temperament.

One character who combines both potentially positive cultural forces – education and inheritance, depending on how they are applied – is Josef: a cousin of Eugen, Peter, and Johanna. His father Jakob had already acted a mediator as Eugen argued with his siblings on the death of the senior Peter Sigwart. At that time, Josef had stood 'unbeteiligt' by his uncle's deathbed, quiet and aloof.[63] To a certain extent, therefore, his critical but dispassionate stance is portrayed as a character trait. Josef is a university lecturer at the novel's outset, and readers later learn from Peter junior that Josef turns down a professorship, or conventional, bureaucratic career, instead spending his time translating the classics. Josef may seem apathetic towards everyday life; to Peter, he appears condescending. But in Josef's view, there have been cultural pessimists since time began. He accurately recognizes that Peter and Eugen are related not only by blood, but in personality: although they are opposites, their stances are

equally polarized. Peter responds that finding a middle ground between him and his brother is no longer possible, and so Josef resigns himself – with some despondent humour – to the conclusion that chaos is the inevitable outcome.[64] However, their situation is but an insignificant episode in the course of world history; it is the entire weight of the past that matters to Josef, more than any contemporary moment. In dedicating himself to understanding this thrust of history's progress, in somewhat Hegelian fashion, Josef invokes the metaphor of inheritance: 'Man kann das Bildungserbe, das man sich anverwandelt hat, auch gar nicht auslöschen, aber man kann es unter neue Bedingungen stellen, unter reinere Bedingungen, als unsere Zeit sie gewährt.'[65] The problems of the age should prompt us to become more truly historically aware – and not look at the past through the distorted lens of the present. Josef is not only a balanced individual. He is an anti-philistine figure, an anti-nostalgist.

Josef is a marginal character who, in the words of the narrator, was least connected to the Grand Hotel Excelsior. And yet it is with him that the novel closes, and the motto that: 'Er wird bewahren, was des Bewahrens wert ist, und weiter zu bilden versuchen, bescheiden, ohne Ungeduld, nur wach, streng, lebendig'.[66] This statement might be misinterpreted as an appeal to remove oneself from the petty disputes of cultural and political life, and to be concerned only with the most precious and fundamental matters of history. But such a conclusion would be wrong, for two reasons. First, this line need not apply to all people, but in the spirit of the novel's stock types only to those who – like Peter – want to turn their backs in melodramatic, radical fashion. Josef leaves the Grand Hotel Excelsior, and is critical of it; yet he does not reject it as an absolute concept, or with disdain. For those who wish to stay, there is the positive example of Johanna who, readers assume, will likely exert a positive influence – perhaps at the healthy remove of leading her own life. And second, as bookish as Josef appears throughout *Grand Hotel Execlsior*, his apparently disengaged distance from the world is usually Peter's representation of him. Josef is more often described by the narrator as a smiling observer, who lets Peter hold forth. There is a difference between being socially disengaged and critically dispassionate. If Josef has attended to hotel life during his visits and conversations as closely as Inglin's readers have, by the end of the novel these events become integrated into his historicist thought. But unlike Peter, he knows to keep the significance of Swiss hotel life in perspective.

Centrist Cultural Criticism in Polarized Times

Grand Hotel Excelsior takes stock of Swiss society in the 1920s, and especially the country's hotel industry, without critical despair, but with an attempted analytical distance. (Notwithstanding some latent, if ironized, nostalgia). The reactions of many in everyday life, however, were passionate and driven by core beliefs and commercial interests. On the whole, contemporary Swiss reviewers beyond literary institutions or the broadsheet press seem to have understood Inglin's critique of the hotel sector as scathing, and they responded according to their own, polarized biases. The *Schweizerische Kirchen-Zeitung* commented on 29 August 1929 that the novel portrayed the 'grosses moralisches Elend' that is suffered and furthered by the country's grand hotels – or 'Fremdenindustrie'.[67] This *Heimat*-style response contrasts local Swiss people with foreign tourists, and appeals for improvements to pastoral care in resorts and for discussions about how to increase the numbers attending mass. The article then praises brave hotel workers among the laity who acted with their Catholic conscience whenever they witnessed depravity in Switzerland's 'pure' Alpine landscape. There may be some over-generalisations in *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, the reviewer concedes, but the narrative chimes with first-hand experience.

The *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, on the other hand, expressed outrage on behalf of industry insiders at Inglin's depiction of hotel life. The reviewer regrets having to call the accuracy of Inglin's narrative into question: in any grand hotel of the Excelsior's size, there would be far more staff for 230 beds. These professionals would be much politer towards guests in reality, and better trained. The reviewer laments the novel's plot and prose, but above all takes issue with *Grand Hotel Excelsior* on commercial grounds. The reputation of the Swiss hospitality sector appears to be at stake: 'Wer nie in einem Schweizer Hotel gewesen ist, könnte einen üblen Eindruck von einem solchen Werk erhalten.'[68] The reception of Inglin's work in the *Schweizer Hotel-Revue* suggests that the hotel lobby realized the negative capacity of literature in the 1920s to bring the nation's grand hotels into disrepute, as much as it might promote members' businesses. Other famous hotel novels in German published during this decade were also discussed in the magazine. Hence Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* (1929) was reviewed, but more briefly and with less vitriol than *Grand Hotel Excelsior*. Presumably because Baum's subject is a Berlin grand hotel, the reviewer is content simply to criticize the work as strange.[69]

Objections from those invested in Swiss hotels, whether for their profits or for their own mere salary, continued. On 12 February 1930, Inglin received a personal letter from a Basel hotel worker who complained about his portrayal of 'eine der bedeutesten Industrien des Landes, die tausenden und abertausenden direkt oder indirekt Brot verschafft'.[70] Valérie

Frey thought that *Grand Hotel Excelsior* was reprehensible, unfair, and unpatriotic. Inglin replied emphasising his family heritage in the hotel sector. Even aside from his childhood memories in Hotel Axenstein, as a young adult he had trained and then worked as a hotel waiter, from 1910 until 1911. Inglin replied to Frey that he wrote about the world as he experienced it, with an eye for realism – and not as an 'Unterhaltungsschriftsteller', who might touch-up landscapes of contemporary Switzerland.

Grand Hotel Excelsior stands apart from literature that was promoted, and in at least one instance funded, by the hotel lobby. It is also critical of those who shunned Switzerland's hotels altogether, in the name of social change. The novel takes its intellectual cue from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* or Hermann Hesse's *Kurgast*. Both Mann's and Hesse's works are indebted to the German cultural heritage of great literary authors and philosophers. Inglin's, too, shows traces of this legacy – such as in Josef's Hegelian witticisms and historicist thinking. But *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is neither a novel of ideas, nor an acerbic embodiment of cultural criticism, written as an autobiographical account. Instead, Inglin sought to reflect contemporary Swiss society, and especially its concerns about the hotel industry, over the course of a decade. Its purpose was practical, rather than to provide abstract mediation. *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is a centrist critique of a particularly polarized period and subject in post-war Swiss history: the hotel and its place in society during the 1920s. And this description applies in a double sense. Inglin's novel develops an intermediary argument, between the poles of hotelier and *Heimat*-style reactionary; and in its form, *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is a middle ground, between high literature and the work of the hotel lobby.

If *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is not read relative to its historical context, it appears a clunky narrative at best. Even the author himself eventually disowned it. It was a story for the 1920s. What is more, in the years immediately after publication, Swiss cultural debate was gearing up for a decision at a governmental level over whether to extend the 'Hotelbauverbot' that had been relaxed mid-decade. The law was due to expire on 31 December 1930. In 1929, the *St Galler Tagblatt* argued for its abolition by acknowledging 'das ungesunde Spekulationswesen, das sich in der Hotel-Branche breit macht' – but blamed the legal distortion of the market.[71] The paper adopts a more economically liberal position than the hotel lobby itself, contending that customers otherwise lose out. It cites the example of a Bernese hotel that, given a lack of competition, chose not install running water in its rooms. Financial speculation and rising prices are represented by Eugen in *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, but so too are the novelties and conveniences of luxury living: running water is the very modernization he has in mind. If for some Inglin's novel was evidence of social excess, and for others it was an

inaccurate portrayal altogether, for others still it surely demonstrated a flawed protectionist economic policy.

Against this background of an historic cultural conflict, it is easy to understand the contemporary popularity of *Grand Hotel Excelsior*. At the very least, it valorized discussion of a topic about which Swiss citizens already felt strongly. Yet the novel's reception is also a testament to the problem of centrism itself in polarized times. An intermediary position is controversial if either people do not consider their own thinking to be peripheral, or, like the junior Peter Sigwart, they are so committed to their worldview that to move to the centre would mean giving up their principles – and would entail an existential crisis. Outside of intellectual circles, then, in society at large, Inglin's work resonated because it was received along ready-made lines: not as a moderate corrective, but instead as confirmation of the ills of Swiss hoteliers, or the flaws of those opposed to the hospitality sector.

It is equally simple to explain why *Grand Hotel Excelsior* is seldom studied today. It is hardly great literature. Its proposed solutions for a more balanced situation in 1928 are general, and for the historian too unspecific to Switzerland's contemporary policies on hotels – the subject on which Inglin spills so much literary and critical ink. The institutions he advocates depend on individual insight and responsibility if they are to be constructive in changing and culturally fraught times. To this day, Inglin's canton of Schwyz imposes no inheritance tax, and none is applied on a federal level, either. For better or worse, forced heirship rules in Switzerland safeguard inherited wealth for families. University education is both easily accessible and publicly funded. The ideals of compromise and consensus have become cornerstones of a mythical Swiss self-image. In this light, *Grand Hotel Excelsior* may appear to be all the more unremarkable. But it was precisely in the early twentieth century that such a cultural structure for modern Switzerland was formed.

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NOTES

[1] Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), p. 199.

[2] Konrad Falke, *Wengen. Ein Landschaftsbild* (Zurich and Leipzig: Rascher, 1913), p. 43.

[3] Jakob Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2015). Erster Teil: 2. Kindle ebook.

[4] Clive H. Church and Randolph C. Head, *A Concise History of Switzerland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 189.

[5] Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg. Roman* (Stuttgart, Hamburg, and Munich: Deutscher Bücherbund, 1952), p. 10.

[6] Hermann Hesse, *Kurgast. Aufzeichnungen einer Badener Kur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2015), p. 106.

[7] Ibid., 41.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 50 and p. 9.

[10] Jean Paul, *Friedens-Predigt an Deutschland* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808), p. 38; Hesse, *Kurgast*, p. 58.

[11] Falke, *Wengen*, unpaginated (preface).

[12] David Clay Large, *The Grand Spas of Central Europe: A History of Intrigue, Politics, Art, and Healing* (Lanham, Maryland and London, 2015), p. 294.

[13] Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv SLA: Bern, Switzerland. MS-L-83-Inglin-Meinrad. Inglin, Meinrad an Hesse, Hermann; Korrespondenz. 2a.

[14] See Church and Head, *A Concise History*, p. 204.

[15] Carl Hilty, *Glück*, 3 vols. (Frauenfeld and Leipzig: J Hubers and Hinrichs, 1901), vol. 1, p. 154.

[16] Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz*, Erster Teil: 2. Tanner offers the best summary of Switzerland in the 1920s.

[17] Marcel Just, 'Das »Hotelbauverbot« 1915—1952', in *Arosa. Die Moderne in den Bergen*, ed. by Marcel Just, Christof Kübler, Matthias Noell and Renzo Semadeni (Zurich: GTA, 2007), pp. 24-27. For criticism of the 'Hotelbauverbot' especially in technical and industry writings from 1918 until 1939, see: Daniel Kessler, *Hotels und Dörfer. Oberengadiner Hotellerie und Bevölkerung in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Chur: Bündner Monatsblatt, 1997), p. 17, ftn. 4. On Swiss hotels before 1920, see the various works by Roland Flückiger-Seiler, e.g. *Hoteltträume zwischen Gletschern und Palmen. Schweizer Tourismus und Hotelbau, 1830-1920* (Baden: Hier + Jetzt, 2005), 2nd edn.

[18] Reprinted as 'Um das Hotelbau-Verbot', in *Illustrierte schweizerische Handwerker-Zeitung*, 28 November, 45:35 (1929), 417-418 (here: p. 17).

[19] Hans Bienengraeber, 'Mittelstandskurorte', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue,* 7 February, 29:6 (1920), p. 1.

[20] 'Mittelstandshotel', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue,* 21 April, 36:16 (1927), p. 1. For the price of 8 francs and upwards per night, see, e.g., 'Mittelstandskurorte', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue,* 29 February, 29:9 (1920), pp. 2-3 (here: p. 2).

[21] Large, *Grand Spas*, p. 293.

[22] Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 90.

[23] Ibid., p. 110.

[24] I thank Henk de Berg for discussions on this point. Cited in, e.g., Henk de Berg, 'Bonjour Tristesse: Alexandre Kojève's Reading of Françoise Sagan', *Phrasis: Studies in Language and Literature*, 50:1 (2009), 3-20, p. 20.

[25] Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz*, Erster Teil: 2.

[26] 'Keine Fremdenhetze!', *Neue Wege. Blätter für religiöse Arbeit* 12:6 (1918), 299-300, p. 299.

[27] 'Entvölkerung, Landwirtschaft und Fremdenverkehr', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 2 December, 35:48 (1926), p. 1.

[28] Oscar Alder, 'Landeschronik von Appennzell A. Rh. für das Jahr 1926', *Appenzellische Jahrbücher* 54 (1927), 81-109, p. 92

[29] 'Literatur', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 16 July, 34:29 (1925), p. 7.

[30] *Schweizer Hotel-Revue,* 29 September, 36:39 (1927), p. 8.

[31] The novel seems to be listed as a stand-alone work in Josef Hunkeler's obituary of Lang, but no catalogue entries confirm it having appeared as a book. See *Heimatskunde Wiggertal* 8 (1946), 71-74, p. 74.

[32] Robert Jakob Lang, 'Das Hotel „Zum blauen Band". Ein fröhlicher Roman', in *Schweizer Bibliothek* (1925), vol. 4, 71-106 (here: p. 83). The novel continues in vol. 5 (1925), 113-160, and vol. 6 (1925), 93-146. I thank the staff at the Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek, Bern and Andrea Meyer Ludowisy of Senate House library, London, for their help.

[33] Erich Kästner, *Gesammelte Schriften in sieben Bänden* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1959), vol. 2: *Romane,* p. 233. I thank Karoline Watroba for pointing out that while *Der Zauberlehrling* is generally dated 1936, scholarship on Kästner now uses the date 1938 because of stronger circumstantial evidence.

[34] See Cordula Seger, *Grand Hotel – Schauplatz der Literatur* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005); 'Die literarische Bühne Grand Hotel', in *Grand Hotel. Bühne der Literatur*, ed. by Cordula Seger and Reinhard G. Wittmann (Munich and Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2007), pp. 8-25 (here: p. 13); '*Grand Hotel Excelsior* — Chiffre seiner Zeit', in *» Kurz nach Mittag aber lag der See noch glatt und friedlich da« Neue Studien zu Meinrad Inglin*, ed. by Christian von Zimmermann and Daniel Annen (Zurich: Chronos, 2013), pp. 129-143. See also Eva C. Wiegmann-Schubert, *Kulturkritik und Naturverbundenheit im Werk von Meinrad Inglin. Von der antimodernen Verweigerung zur konstruktiven Kulturkritik* (Essen: Klartext, 2012), pp. 172-185 and 196-199.

[35] Max Rychner, 'Anmerkungen', *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, December, 21:12 (1928), 881-892 (pp. 884-885).

[36] Meinrad Inglin, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Georg Schoeck (Zurich: Ammann, 1988), vol. 2: *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, p. 12.

[37] Ibid., p. 103.

[38] Ibid., p. 286.

[39] Ibid., p. 14.

[40] Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, 210.

[41] See, e.g., *Freiburger Nachrichten*, 29 May 1929, p. 2; *Briger Anzeiger*, 1 June 1929, p. 3.

[42] Dominik Müller, 'Vom Kellner zum Dichter. Das Wechselverhältnis von Tourismus und Literatur in Meinrad Inglins *Werner Amberg*', in *Neue Studien zu Meinrad Inglin*, pp. 223-239 (here: pp. 231-232).

[43] Inglin, *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, p. 14.

[44] Ibid., p. 243.

[45] See Susanne Stacker, *Sublime Visionen. Architektur in den Alpen* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), p. 152; Roland Flückiger-Seiler, 'Der Hotelbau in Mürren. Von der Tradition zur Moderne', *Heimatschutz / Patrimoine* 4 (2014), 6-8 (here: p. 8).

[46] Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), p. 20.

[47] Inglin, *Grand Excelsior*, pp. 272-273.

[48] Seger, '*Grand Hotel Excelsior* — Chiffre seiner Zeit', p. 138.

[49] Flückiger-Seiler, *Hoteltträume*, pp. 148-149.

[50] Beatrice von Matt, *Melnrad Inglin. Eine Biographie* (Zurich and Freiburg im Breisgau: Atlantis, 1976), pp. 42-45.

[51] *Briger Anzeiger*, 2 January 1901, p. 3.

[52] Flückiger-Seiler, *Hoteltträume*, pp. 148-149.

[53] [53] Meinrad Inglin, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Georg Schoeck (Zurich: Ammann, 1988), vol. 6: *Werner Amberg. Die Geschichte seiner Jugend*, p. 35.

[54] Seger, '*Grand Hotel Excelsior* — Chiffre seiner Zeit', pp. 136-138; *Grand Hotel – Schauplatz der Literatur*, pp. 323-327. See also Ulrike Zitzlsperger in the present issue of *FMLS*: 'Between Modernity and Nostalgia: The Meanings of Death in Hotels'.

[55] Inglin, *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, p. 242.

[56] See under 'Technischer Rundschau' the entry 'Selbsttätige Feuermelder' in *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 15 June, 31:24 (1922), p. 3. For the Siemens advertisement see, e.g., *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 8 September, 36:36 (1927), p. 6.

[57] Daniel Annen, 'Die Schweiz — ein liberaler Staat. Aber wie? Demokratische Strukturen bei Kant, Schiller, Ragaz und Inglin', in *Liberalismus und moderne Schweiz*, ed. by René Roca (Basel: Schwabe, 2017), pp. 143-166.

[58] Wiegmann-Schubert, *Kulturkritik und Naturverbundenheit*, p. 198. See also p. 378, and *passim.*

[59] Inglin, *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, pp. 252-253, *passim.*

[60] Ibid., p. 196.

[61] See Tanner, Erster Teil: 2. For the original wording of the proposal, see <https://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis21t.html> [accessed 1 August 2019].

[62] Inglin, *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, p. 296.

[63] Ibid, p. 8.

[64] Ibid., pp. 251-252.

[65] Ibid., p. 253.

[66] Ibid., p. 299.

[67] 'Eine Anregung. Seelsorge für die Hotelangestellten', *Schweizerische Kirchen-Zeitung*, 29 August, 35 (1929), pp. 286-287.

[68] 'Literatur', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 20 December, 37:51 (1928), p. 13.

[69] 'Literatur', *Schweizer Hotel-Revue*, 18 July, 38:29 (1929), p. 13.

[70] Meinrad Inglin, *Die Briefwechsel mit Traugott Vogel und Emil Staiger*, ed. by Felix R Hangartner (Zurich: Amman, 1992), pp. 264-266 (here: p. 264).

[71] 'Um das Hotelbau-Verbot' (1929), p. 418.