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## Emotions and Identity in Hotel Rooms

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# Emotions and Identity in Hotel Rooms

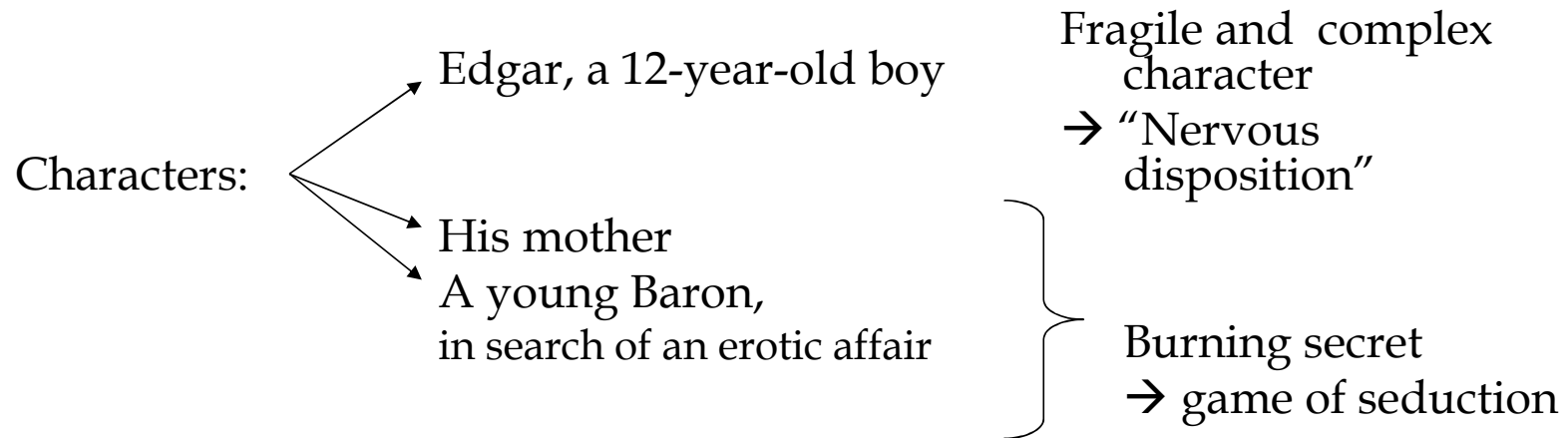


Silvia Ulrich (University of Torino)

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# Stefan Zweig, *Brennendes Geheimnis* (1911), short story



Setting: A Grand Hotel in Semmering (Lower Austria)



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# The Grand Hotel

Possibility to live  
close to each  
other sharing  
the same space

Undermines  
many rules  
of living together  
with respect to  
hierarchy and gender

In Hotel's  
semi-public places  
takes place a "show"  
which question  
ethical and moral matters  
as truth and lies

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## M. Foucault, *Des espaces autres* (1967)

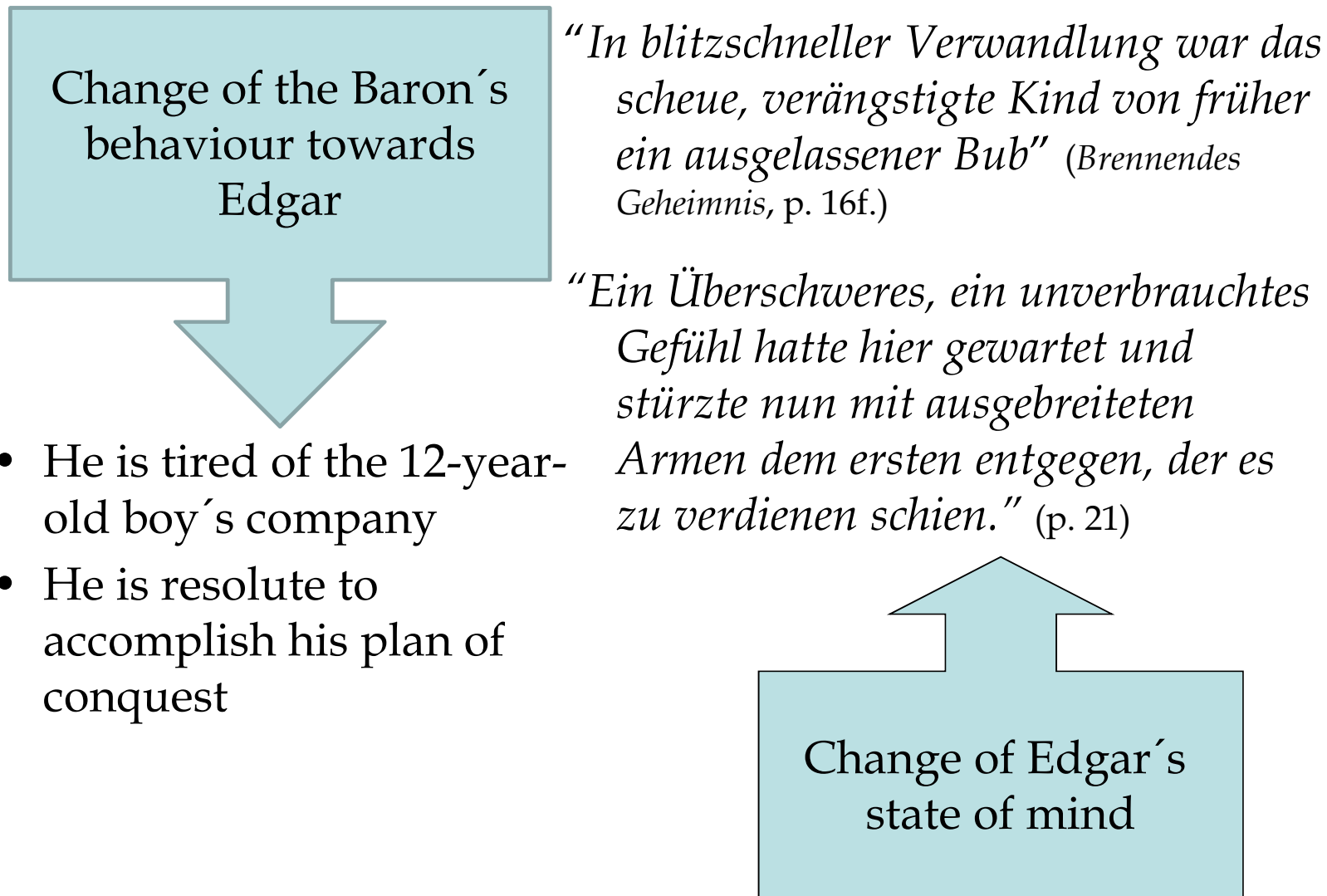
- Adolescence as “heterotopia of crisis”
- Heterotopia as “other” space, interstitial, between anachronistic worlds → threshold
- Adolescence as “threshold” where signs of childish behaviour coexist and clash with indications of adulthood → critical period
- In the Hotel’s spaces it changes from a latent state into the explosion of aggressiveness
- Philosophical interpretation of this short story instead of a psychological-pedagogical one

Pedagogical and behavioural models from the early 20th century about social relationships

Exclusion of children from the adult life

At the Grand Hotel

- Edgar establishes a new and closer contact with the two adults
- The Baron breaks a rule of the epoch just to take advantage of Edgar's naivety in order to reach his mother





## The Grand Hotel's influence on Edgar's behaviour and feelings

In the semi-public places  
as foyer and restaurant

- Edgar jolts seeing the Baron arrive
- Greets him smiling
- Shows his excitement
- Talks to him confidentially
- Reproaches him bitterly

Edgar is characterized by *“einer merkwürdig überreizten Leidenschaft der Zuneigung oder Feindlichkeit. Zu nichts schien er ein ruhiges Verhältnis zu haben, von jedem Menschen oder Ding sprach er entweder in Verzückung oder mit einem Hasse, der so heftig war, daß er sein Gesicht unangenehm verzerrte und es fast böseartig und hässlich machte. Etwas Wildes und Sprunghaftes, vielleicht noch bedingt durch die kürzlich überstandene Krankheit, gab seinen Reden fanatisches Feuer, und es schien, daß seine Linkischkeit nur mühsam unterdrückte Angst vor der eigenen Leidenschaft war“* (Brennendes Geheimnis, p. 18)

# The Grand Hotel's influence on Edgar's behaviour and feelings

In the semi-private places as the room and even the coach

- Edgar can reflect rationally upon:
- His own relationship with the two adults
- The emotions provoked by them

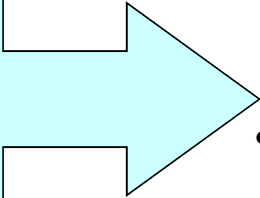
*“Bin ich denn seiner würdig, ich, ein kleiner Bub, zwölf Jahre alt, der noch die Schule vor sich hat, der abends vor allen andern ins Bett geschickt wird?“ (Brennendes Geheimnis, p. 18)*

*“[Edgar und seine Mutter] spürten, daß sie sich belauerten, zum erstenmal in ihrem Leben. Bisher hatten sie einander blind vertraut, jetzt aber war etwas zwischen Mutter und Kind [...] plötzlich anders geworden. Zum erstenmal in ihrem Leben begannen sie, sich zu beobachten, ihre beide Schicksale voneinander zu trennen, beide schon mit einem heimlichen Haß gegeneinander, der noch zu neu war, als daß sie sich ihn einzugestehn wagten“.*  
(Brennendes Geheimnis, p. 18)

## G. Simmel, *Der Raum und die räumlichen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft* (1908)

- Inhabited space triggers well-defined, reciprocal feelings in the people who share it
- Their proximity, instead of indifference, arouses extreme and opposite feelings
  - shyness, embarrassment, passion, although prevented by fear, childish happiness and despair, confusion, jealousy towards his mother, anxiety, anger, and finally hatred.
  - A suspicion transforms hatred into a silent declaration of war.
  - From this moment on, fear overcomes him, it becomes the terror of the unknown and later real anguish

Edgar's stay at the Grand Hotel is a climax of changing emotions



Edgar looks  
for a balance  
between  
his childhood  
and adolescence



Edgars holidays  
swing between  
the Grand Hotel  
and his  
grandmother's home

## G. Bachelard, *La poetique de l'espace* (1957)



- “it makes sense considering the “home” as an instrument for the analysis of the human soul”
- Home as the image and the guarantee of “safe intimacy”.

The hotel takes up the function of the proper place for a painful ritual of passage from childhood to adulthood



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Adolescence as  
an intermediate phase  
in one's life



Both are a “product” of the modernity

(Unlike the preindustrial societies, when it was a  
premature marriage that marked the passage  
from childhood to adulthood)

# Edgar's escape from the Hotel

- Edgar's escape to his grandmother's villa is an illusion to the return to childhood
- He acknowledges himself as a  
– modern! – adolescent  
→ he is not ready for mature life, waiting for maturity in his grandmother's home
- The home guards the “new” secret between mother and son
- Silence coincides with patient waiting





## Epiphanic places to adolescence besides the hotel



“Er lief hinaus in den Wald, gerade konnte er sich noch im Dunkel retten, wo ihn niemand sah, und da brach es heraus, in einem Strom heißer Tränen. „Lügner, Hunde, Betrüger, Schurken“ – er mußte diese Worte laut herausschreien, sonst wäre es erstickt. Die Wut, die Ungeduld, der Ärger, die Neugier, die Hilflosigkeit und der Verrat der letzten Tage, im kindischen Kampf, im Wahn seiner Erwachsenenheit niedergehalten, sprengten jetzt die Brust und wurden Tränen. Er weinte in dieser Stunde fassungsloser Wut alles aus sich heraus, Vertrauen, Liebe, Gläubigkeit, Respekt – seine ganze Kindheit” (*Brennendes Geheimnis*, p. 52)

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# The end of Edgar's childhood

- It does not coincide with a sensual experience
- It has to do with the dialectics between confusion of feeling inside the hotel and the *ratio*, i.e. observation and reflection outside the hotel
- This dialectics is possible in antropological places (home) and nonplaces (wood, street, station's waiting-room, train, park)

# Edgar's "displacement"

- It refers to the loss of permanent residence and its substitution with provisional abodes
- It introduces a reflection on the "uncanny" or Heideggerian "Unheimliches" or "Nicht-zu-Hause-sein"
- The grandmother's home represents the *Heimliches* = secret (< *Heim* = home)
- It reflects Schopenhauer's philosophy: "[... wie] Tage so voll gepreßt sein konnten vom vielfältigen Übergang des Schmerzes und der Lust [...]. Er war unfähig, an irgend etwas oder jemanden mit Haß zu denken, er bereute nichts, und selbst für den Baron, den Verführer, seinen bittersten Feind, fand er ein neues Gefühl der Dankbarkeit, weil er ihm die Tür aufgetan hatte zu dieser Welt der ersten Gefühle" (*Brennendes Geheimnis*, p. 88)

# Conclusion

- Transformation of the *topos* of a rebellious adolescence (→ escape from home) into a “cronotopic” reflection
- Adolescence as a metaphor of the passage from the “secure world of the past” into modernity
  - passage from the paternal home to the Hotel of holidays
- Childhood as the world of an innocent past doomed to disappear under the blows of a cold and destructive modernity

# Thank you for your attention