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## Back to Switzerland by Philipp von Orelli

In 1986 Philipp von Orelli arrived in London to minister to Britain's Swiss community at the Swiss Church in London. Eight years later, he and his family are about to return to Switzerland. He now writes a farewell letter to the UK's Swiss community...

23 January is the date of our Farewell Service at the Swiss Church in London - almost eight years to the day since my induction in 1986. A few days later my wife, our two children and I should be boarding the ferry at Dover to return to Switzerland. It is time, therefore, to say good-bye and I would like to take this opportunity of telling the Swiss community in Britain of a few of things which I am going to miss.

I write this especially for those who perhaps are slightly envious of our imminent return to Switzerland. One thing that has struck me on several occasions of late is the flavour of the Big City. There is a sense of freedom that I experience when, for example, I am driving across London and also when I drive through the wide open English countryside. I feel that I have space to breathe. This feeling is somehow reflected in the general tolerance and acceptance that I have found in Britain. I was, and still am, fascinated by the big mix of nationalities and cultures in the capital which definitely contributes to the broadmindedness of most people.

As regards the Swiss community in London, I have enjoyed the close knit relationships in the various groups with which I have had contact and the extraordinary cohesion of the entire community which manifested itself on occasions such as the Swiss Fair at Bat-



Philipp and Johanna von Orelli

tersea in 1991.

As for the Church, I discovered that a lot of local English churches of various denominations are very strong and lively and that, quite apparently, God is at work in them. This is why my wife and I have tried, whenever possible, to encourage Swiss people to become involved in their local British parish so that problems of isolation from local British communities might be overcome.

We ourselves developed connections with an Anglican church in Finchley which inspired us strongly in our work in the Swiss Church too. In Finchley we were accepted by the Anglican community and, on a much deeper level, we also experienced acceptance by God as a loving Father. We learnt to pray to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and saw people healed from physical ailments and from deep emotional hurt. Others found a new orientation and

security in their lives. This gave us a clear vision of what can happen, and what we would like to happen, in a church. We were able to see that churches here in Britain are, on average, more experienced in this regard than in Switzerland. This again is something we are going to miss.

Last, but not least, we are going to miss so many of you who are reading this article, those whom we have met, made our friends and with whom we have worked. We thank you all for the support and interest in our work over the last eight years. May we ask you to help Pfarrer/le pasteur Gottfried Locher and his wife Barbara feel just as welcome as you made us feel. May God bless you!

### NEXT ISSUE...

*The story of the flag  
presented to the UK's  
Swiss community  
by George II*

*The editor and the  
Editorial Committee  
of the Regional News-UK  
wish readers  
A MERRY CHRISTMAS  
and A HAPPY NEW YEAR*

### THE UNIONE TICINESE

*wishes all its members  
and many friends  
Season's Greetings !*

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*augura ai soci e  
rispettive famiglie  
Felice Natale e  
Buon Anno !*

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\* denotes organisation  
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## YOUTH EXCHANGE

*For details of the  
1994 Youth exchange  
programme  
to Switzerland,  
contact Margrit Lyster,  
Swiss Welfare Office,  
London.  
Tel: 071 387 3608*

## Obituary

*The Stratford Herald has  
reported the death of  
retired Swiss hotelier  
Emil Sachs (88) in Sep-  
tember. Born in London  
of Swiss parents, Mr  
Sachs completed his  
training at the hotel  
school in Luzern and  
worked in several coun-  
tries before taking over  
the management of two  
Stratford hotels, the  
White Swan and then the  
Shakespeare Hotel.*

## Around and About



*Tyne Tees Swiss Club celebrating Europe*

### INVITATION TO INAUGURAL MEETING

Movenpick Marche Restaurants,  
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1 Swiss Court, London W1V 7FJ.  
Tel 071 734 1291  
Fax 071 494 0502

Thursday, 3 February 1994

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 19:00 for 19:15 | <b>Swiss Liberal Democrats International, SLDI in UK.</b><br>Founding of London Chapter.  |
| 19:45 for 20:00 | Dr Georg Stucky, Nat. Councillor,<br>Baar-Zug: A Swiss MP's view of the<br>Swiss position - outside the EC.   |
| 20:30           | Free discussion: the Swiss abroad's<br>voluntary old age and invalidity insurance and the Federal<br>vote of 20 February 1994: questions and suggestions. |

**Thursday 26 May 1994, 19:00: next meeting, covering amongst  
other items the Federal vote of 12 June 1994.**



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## Tyne Tees

Ernst Keller, Consul-General, recently made his first visit since taking up his post to Tyne Tees Swiss Club. During a brief address he complemented the club for its initiative in participating in an international festival, *Celebrating Europe*, held in Durham. He also commented on the recent referendum giving approval to the purchase of thirty-four new fighter aircraft at a cost of Sfr.3.5 billion which, following the rejection of the EEA, many have interpreted as a sign that the Swiss prefer independence to European integration. Keller rejected such notions. 'We all know that a very large and ever increasing measure of interdependence remains a basic fact of our position in Europe and the world. There can be,' he added, 'no question of Switzerland remaining isolated.'

## Unione Ticinese

The lecture series organised by Unione Ticinese as part of its 120th anniversary programme opened with a most successful bang.

The first lecture on Ticino Today by the eminent speaker Dr Mario Grassi filled the lecture theatre at the Swiss embassy to capacity on 23 September.

He outlined eloquently the full spectrum of Ticino's demographic, economic and social characteristics, noting that 24% of its 300,000 resident adult population is of foreign extraction. Over 23% of those attending some primary and secondary schools are not Swiss, with as many as nine different languages spoken in a class of only 25. Only Geneva, with some 27% non-EC nationals, is a culturally and

## Diary

**FOSSUK.** All readers are invited to attend the AGM of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK, to be held in Birmingham on 4-5 June. Details in next issue.

**MANCHESTER SWISS CLUB** has organised a Fondue and Raclette Party on 19 February in Wilmslow. The club's AGM will be held on 3 March in the Village Hall, Cheadle.

**MIDLANDS SWISS SOCIETY** has arranged to hold its annual ball on 19 February at the Grand Hotel.

**UNIONE TICINESE** has organised an illustrated lecture by Dr Geoffrey Beard on *Stuccatori Ticinesi* at the Swiss Embassy Lecture Theatre, London, on 19 January, at 7 p.m. The 120th Anniversary Banquet will be held at Villa Carlotta on 5 February. Details from the Hon. Secretary (Tel. 071 937 6631).

racially less homogeneous Swiss canton.

Despite its demographic composition and its persisting structural problems, the Ticino authorities are gradually overcoming the defensive state of isolation, protectionism and immobilism, moving towards the national inevitability of a modern, open-minded secular society.

At a time when Ticino's 150 years of republican traditions, autonomy and liberty is finding sturdy anchorage in Switzerland's principles of democracy, Ticino is also under growing influence from the south. Milan's economic development is now transforming Ticino into a dynamic, innovative, alpine region which bridges northern and southern Europe.

Such a transition can, however, and will only be successfully crowned when the Swiss electorate has fully underwritten entry to the European community. [GB]

## Virgilio Berti: A Tribute *by Valeria Ossola*

As was briefly reported in the last issue of the *Regional News-UK*, the Swiss colony in London suffered a great loss with the sudden death on 6 August - while on holiday - of Virgilio Berti: surely no other member of the community can have taken a more active part in the life and running of so many Swiss societies and organisations in Britain, over a period of so many years. And no one else in Britain's Swiss community was probably held in greater affection by so many compatriots.

Born in London on 14 October 1917 of Carlo and Augusta Berti from Calpiogna/TI, Virgil attended St Aloysius School in Highgate, London. Every year the family spent the long school holidays in Calpiogna, where he learnt the local dialect (though recently he tended to stick to Italian). He continued to visit Switzerland regularly over the years and not only Ticino, since his youngest brother Charles lives with his family in Raeterschen/ZH. During the war Virgil served with the British Army Royal Service Corps: he was wounded in the evacuation of Dunkirk (one of the very few sur-

vivors when a boat was hit and sank) and he was then invalided out of active service in 1941. After the war he joined the staff of the Swiss Bank Corporation in Gresham Street, London, where he worked until his retirement in 1982.

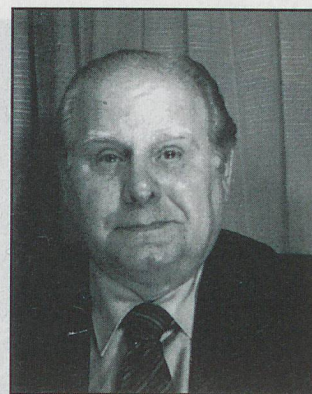
He joined the Unione Ticinese in the 1930s and, following in his father's footsteps, he was treasurer (1947-60), president (1966-68) and later also he served as secretary and as trustee. He was a member of the Unione's committee until the 1993 AGM, when he was reappointed trustee for another three years.

Other societies and organisations to which he belonged over the years included: the Schweizerbund (which was wound up in 1961 and of which he was president for a number of years); the 1st August Committee (of which he was a member for thirty-eight years and president from 1968-91); the Swiss Benevolent Society (serving as president from 1979-83); the Swiss Mercantile Society (a member from 1958); the New Helvetic Society (serving as a council member from 1967 to 1990); FOS-

SUK (of which he was honorary secretary for a number of years); and, as a keen philatelist, the Helvetia Philatelic Society.

He was, at all times, a loyal and dedicated member of every society with which he was associated, always willing to give freely and unstintingly of his time, advice and help whenever required, attending meetings regularly and assiduously. Paying tribute to Virgil on his retirement as president of the 1st August Committee in 1992, Ambassador Muheim commented, 'I am sure you will agree with me when I say he has been a most devoted and effective president and deserved great credit for the task he has accomplished in this capacity'.

Virgil will be greatly missed, and on behalf of the ambassador and staff of the Swiss embassy and all his many friends in the community, I would like to extend to his widow Christina, his son Ian (who has also been president of the Unione Ticinese), his daughter Maureen, his beloved grand-daughter Tania and the rest of his family our deepest sympathy.



Virgilio Berti

### Regional News-UK

The editor welcomes readers' views and comments, as well as reports from Swiss clubs and societies. Letters and articles for the next issue of the *Regional News-UK*, to be published in December, should be forwarded to Dr David Ditchburn, Department of History, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Old Aberdeen AB9 2UB (Tel 0224 272999; Fax 0224 272203) by 28 February 1994

#### City Swiss Club



Founded in 1856

After the great success of last year, the Committee invites all Swiss and friends to the

#### 129th Banquet and Ball

organised for the Swiss community

The Banquet and Ball will include a very attractive programme and will be held again at **Claridge's**, W1, on Saturday 12th March 1994. If you are interested send the coupon below to receive an invitation.

Pat Silverlock, c/o **Secure Trust Group PLC**, Royex House, Aldermanbury Square, London EC2V 7HR  
Please send me an invitation

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## Letters

### Male Fantasies

Sir,  
I was surprised and disappointed that you chose to publish Paul Eugster's somewhat propagandist letter (*Swiss Review* 3/93).

It might be interesting to know why Mr Eugster selects not to stay in the country he seems so keen to defend against 'possible superior might'. I suppose this means 'from abroad' and, this being the case, he does not seem too worried or proud to live amongst foreigners!

Mr Eugster's choice of the word *Eidgenossen* denotes a German-Swiss bias, which is hardly surprising as bigoted people often forget they are not representative of a whole. Does it mean the rest of the Swiss are not worthy of the name?

Furthermore, I imagine that whilst Mr Eugster's man-hero is busy fantasising about being a proud soldier, his ultimate woman is occupied in the kitchen or nursery, longing for his return!

Yours,  
Arlette Pengilly,  
London.

### No Regrets

Sir,  
Mr J R Schwytzer is clearly upset by the outcome of the EEA referendum (*Swiss Review* 3/93) and he is entitled to his opinions. I see no point in entering into a lengthy argument.

I would, however, like to say that I was born in England of Swiss parents and for the past decade alone I have spent over three months each year in Switzerland. I have been able to discuss with Swiss citizens, who earn their living and pay taxes in Switzerland, the question of the EEA.

Mr Schwytzer thinks that the Swiss who voted against the EEA have made a big mistake.

Well, let's wait and see - almost surely there will be no regrets and we should have faith, instead of grumbling about the existing outcome.

I still say vive la Suisse.

Yours sincerely,  
Vreneli Inwood-Bryner,  
London.

### A Festive Message

**Jeffrey Long, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, extends a festive message to all readers of the Regional News-UK...**

As we approach the end of another year it gives me great pleasure to send you greetings and a wish that you may have a Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

Regrettably the past year has been one of terrible conflicts in various parts of the world, many caused by 'man-made' divisions in society. Such divisions are not natural but tend to be created and perpetuated by those who seek personal gain, be it political, financial or some other. Of course, there are, and always will be, differences in societies since no two people are alike, but such differences should not be used to make barriers which divide people.

Christmas is a time of peace. Let us all make a contribution to world peace by resolving those conflicts that we may have. Communication not only helps to prevent conflict but is also essential in resolving conflicts and this is an area in which Switzerland and the Swiss community has an excellent record.

As for the Swiss community in Britain, the past year has seen the number of delegates to the council of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad increased to three, each with a deputy. So, we are now better represented. Women, moreover, are now recognized, more than ever before, as playing an active part in the Swiss community. Of the six delegates and deputies, four are women. Of the seven Swiss societies in the north of England and Scotland, five have a woman president.

For anyone not yet enjoying the benefits of membership of a Swiss society, why not contact one now? You will be made most welcome, both in your local club and at the Federation of Swiss Societies' AGM, which will be held in Birmingham on 4-5 June. I look forward to meeting you all there!

## CHEESES FROM SWITZERLAND

Proudly presents a regular *RECIPE SERVICE* featuring a member of the *SWISS ALPINE SKI TEAM*

### William Besse's Favourite Recipe - NEUCHATEL CHEESE FONDUE

#### Ingredients:

1 garlic clove, halved  
600g Gruyere SWITZERLAND, grated  
200g Emmental SWITZERLAND, grated  
4 level tsp cornflour  
350 ml Neuchatel white wine or another dry white wine  
1 tsp fresh lemon juice  
1 small glass kirsch  
freshly ground black pepper  
a pinch of nutmeg  
crusty bread cut into 25mm cubes (approx 200g per person or 800g in total)

1. Rub the inside of the fondue pot with the garlic halves.
2. Add the cheese and the cornflour and mix well.
3. Add the lemon juice to the white wine and pour over the cheese. Stirring constantly, heat through until the cheese has melted and is bubbling gently.
4. Blend in the kirsch and season to taste.

5. Fondue is traditionally served in the centre of the table, kept warm over an adjustable burner. To eat, everyone spears a chunk of bread with a fondue fork and dips it into the cheese. The fondue should be stirred frequently with the chunks of bread during the meal.



SWITZERLAND

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## The Quiet Pioneers

by Heidi Reisz

This year the Swiss National Tourist Office in London celebrates its centenary year. In this final part of the history of what is now London's most famous foreign tourist office, Heidi Reisz traces the SNTO's progress since the opening of the Leicester Square office in 1965.

It was in 1965 that the Swiss Centre opened in Leicester Square, London. It was a busy year for everyone in the Centre. About seven hundred travel agents, members of the press and other opinion formers went on educational visits that covered excursions, factory visits, lectures and group discussions. The visits resulted in enthusiastic coverage of all things Swiss and the SNTO could congratulate itself on achieving both the travel and cultural objectives of its statutes.

Also in 1965 central Switzerland celebrated the centenary of Queen Victoria's visit. Sixty British school children were invited to visit Switzerland and, in suitable eye-catching style, two uniformed British policemen accompanied the trip and ended up controlling traffic in Luzern during the anniversary ceremony.

Nine years later the Queen's silver jubilee coincided with the Swiss Centre's tenth anniversary. Among other events, an old inn sign from Switzerland showing a golden crown and a memorial plaque were set in Leicester Square where a Tree of Friendship stands alongside the federal flags.

Continuing the rewarding relationship between the BBC and the SNTO, Leysin became an enormous film set in March 1978 when seventy producers, cameramen and technicians gathered for ten days to film about fifty stars,



*Dame Jean Conan Doyle opens the Sherlock Holmes Museum, Meiringen, in 1991, as members of the Sherlock Holmes Society look on.*

singers, dancers and comedians of world fame. The filming was in cooperation with Suisse Romand TV and TV companies from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria to produce a sixty minute programme under the title of *Snow Time Special - Special Vacances Blanches*. There was circus tent accommodation for 2,500 people and the cameras panned over the stunning backdrop of Leysin, Les Diablerets and the alps of the canton Vaud. The resulting programmes were shown over Easter and at Christmas in seven countries and was a huge success with about seventy million viewers per show absorbing the talent and scenery of Switzerland.

From the spectacular to the eccentric, forty-five members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London held a seminar in cooperation with the SNTO in Basel and in the Bernese Oberland. From the moment they landed to the time they left Switzerland all the participants dressed in the fashion of 1891, the year of the Reichenbachfall mystery

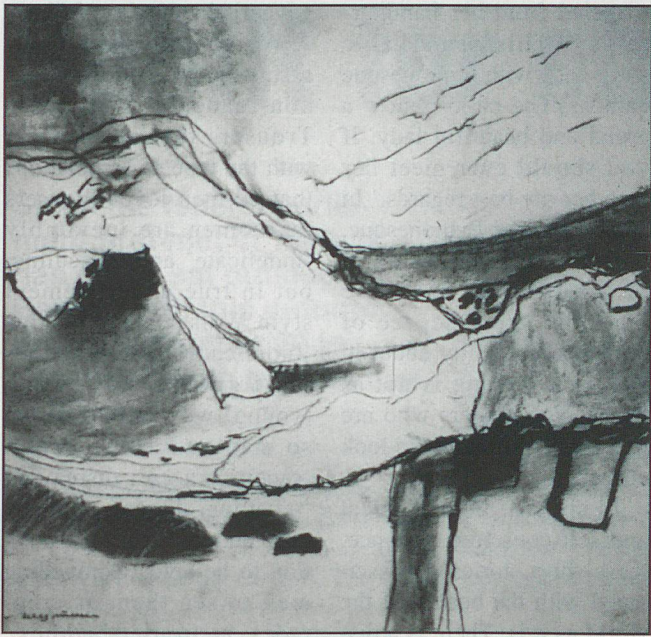
which resulted in the supposed death of Sherlock Holmes. The highlights of the trip included the arrest and imprisonment of the whole group in Basel, a strange thing to write home about! The group also undertook a pilgrimage tour to the Reichenbach Falls for a reconstruction of the fight between Holmes and Moriarty and a visit to the Jungfraujoch with a meeting between Holmes and James Bond on the Shilthorn.

In 1985 the city of Westminster marked its four-hundredth anniversary and the Swiss National Tourist Office commissioned a glockenspiel of twenty-five bells to present to London to celebrate the long and happy association. The glockenspiel was installed in Leicester Square the following year. There is one bell from each of Switzerland's twenty-three cantons, each dedicated to one of Westminster's twenty-three wards. There are a further two - one is from the Swiss Confederation and the other from the Principality of Liechtenstein. The glocken-

spiel have become a popular tourist attraction in their own right and added a decidedly Swiss air to the busy Leicester Square.

Ever original the SNTO signalled the start of its centenary with a huge snow sculpture in Leicester Square in December 1992. Stretching twenty feet across Swiss Court and rising about ten feet in height, the sculpture contained twelve tonnes of man-made snow and depicted famous landmarks in both countries, including Tower Bridge and the Matterhorn. It was particularly appropriate as Mother Nature saw fit to provide almost perfect skiing conditions at the time, reminding Britons and the Swiss that the huge winter sport industry is the result of yet another example of successful collaboration between the two peoples - the British rash enough to throw themselves down mountain sides strapped to two pieces of wood and the Swiss astute enough to pioneer facilities to make the sport enjoyable, safer and accessible for all.

## Swiss Artists in Scotland



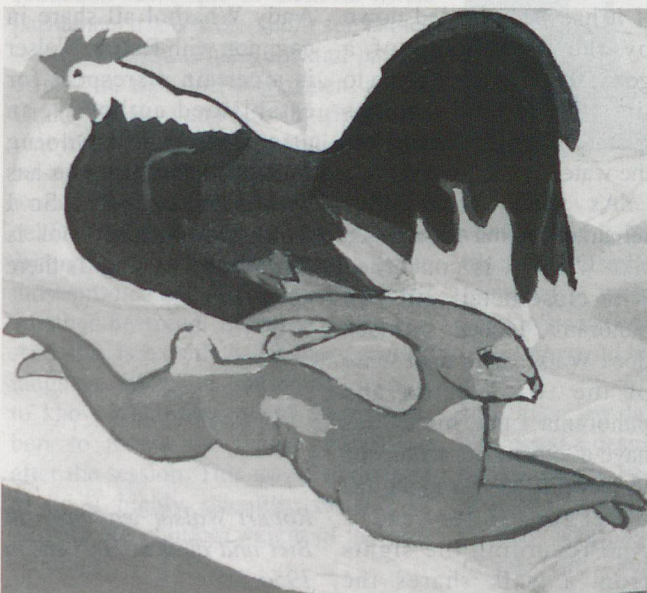
The work of Ann Wegmuller (top); Catherine Imhof's *Fabled Animals* (bottom left); and Peter Allan's *Eclipse of the Moon II* (bottom right).

A recent request in the **Regional News-UK** for information about Swiss artists working in the UK prompted a flood of responses. In the first of a series of features, the **Regional News-UK** now introduces three Swiss artists working in Scotland.

Catherine Imhof-Cardinal, a French artist of Swiss extraction, lives and works near Aberdeen though exhi-

bitions of her work have been regularly displayed in France and Switzerland as well as in Scotland. Catherine's lively personality, well known to members of the Aberdeen Swiss Club, is reflected in her approach to painting. Her work in figurative, landscape and animal painting demonstrates a strong sense of form and colour.

Ann Wegmuller was



born in Scotland and lived in Switzerland for many years. Her studio at Aberuthven in Perthshire forms part of an old church which her husband Fredi has converted into a beautiful family house. Well-known in Scotland, Ann has won several awards and lectures at the Dollar Summer School. Her paintings, whether seascapes, cornfields, flowers or abstracts, are extremely subtle, full of delicate shades and beautifully balanced. Readers who happen to be in Aberdeen during the last week of February and first two weeks of March can visit an exhibition of Ann's work at the Gallery Heinzel,

21 Spa Street.

**Peter Allan**, son of a Dunfermline Swiss Club member, is the youngest of the three featured artists and recently graduated from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee. He specializes in woodcuts, prints and mixed media collages which are almost metaphysical in concept, with titles such as *Six Comets*, *Hubble Space Telescope* and *Eclipse of the Moon*. Most of his works are executed in colours of brown and black and white. Peter, who has already won several awards, exhibits mainly in Scotland. [UD]



## Book Review

By Graham Ryan

Robert Walser, *The Walk, trans. by Christopher Middleton and others* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992. Pbk, 190pp. £9.99)

The problem with literary book reviews is that nobody reads them. And why should they? Read no further and you prove my point. I will occasionally read a book review if it concerns the biography of an interesting and famous person; but I can get the same sort of information from women's magazines and the tabloid press.

Reviews of prose fiction and poetry seem pointless simply because 'literature' no longer has the audience or influence it once had. Nowadays, literary audiences/readers consist of three groups. Firstly, writers themselves read one another's writings and form pompous, mutual admiration, or mutual hatred, societies. Secondly, some academics read and study literature but neither they nor anybody else know why. Thirdly, there is the literary book-buyer - as opposed to the reader. The overwhelming majority of the population does not have any substantial contact with literary writing.

The (extremely small) literary world really knows this and tries to boost its readership and influence by holding 'events': everybody has heard of the Booker Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature; but how many people spend their time reading the books? When are 'literature people' going to stop fooling themselves and take stock of the fact that one of the best-selling, and certainly the most influential, books of the previous decade was *The F-Plan Diet*?

In terms of popular appeal, every art-form has its day: fine art before the printing press, written art with the printing press and film art with cinema, television and even computer games.

The moving image is the art-form of today. And there are certain features of film art which make reading literature difficult. Constantly changing shots and brisk editing, so common in films, is conducive to a shorter attention span. The moving image is also very much suited to the use of the spectacular (action movies, horror movies, erotic movies). And the act of watching the moving image has its own voyeuristic pleasure. So what has Robert Walser got to offer a modern 'non-reader'?

First of all, Walser's book is a collection of short stories, many of them very short (a page or so); to read an entire text in a matter of minutes is particularly gratifying and suits a short attention span. A story could be read on the bus or during the TV adverts. After all, we modern non-readers tend not to set aside time for reading; if we read, we read when there is nothing else to do.

Although Walser does not write about spectacular happenings, he does permit fantasy to break into the narrative: ordinary things can become blown out of all proportion and fantastical stories can suddenly drop to the level of the mundane. In the second of *Two Strange Stories* we read a fairy-tale-like story of a pure and pretty young girl who becomes lost. The child's maid searches for her for twenty years. Then, one day, as the maid is about to wipe her eye, she finds the young child (now a woman)

revealed from her handkerchief! This remarkable story ends with Pythonesque bathos: 'The child is now a grand and beautiful lady. If you should ever meet her give her my best regards.' In addition to the Pythonesque, Walser's writing is said to be Kafkaesque but there isn't the same degree of nightmarish quality about it. Walser's writing is not as bleak. Non-readers who are into horror films should look elsewhere.

In spite of their ironical and self-conscious distance, these short stories are fascinated with the beauty of the world as it is. There is a disarming simplicity in some of the descriptions of scenes and an eye for insignificant detail.

He remarks: 'We don't need to see anything out of the ordinary. We already see so much.' And so, in the eponymous story, when he is out for a walk, he writes: 'An unassuming pedestrian should not remain unconsidered, or unrecorded; for he asks me politely to mention him.' The descriptions of the (presumably) Swiss countryside are vivid and numerous (as one would expect in a collection called *The Walk*): 'Below him lies the lake, as if it had been hurled down by the great hand of a god...The Alps have come to life and dip with fabulous gestures their foreheads into the water.'

As one critic has remarked, going for a walk, like writing, is concerned with close detail and vast panorama. Indeed, so much does Walser give us a sense of the two - detail and panorama - that his stories have a 'cinematic' technique in this respect. So much the better for the non-reader. And recording the sights from a walk shares the

voyeuristic premise of film.

Walser has many other affinities with the modern non-reader. His essay on Trousers invests trousers with the type of associations that ad-men love. Trousers on women are inevitably 'indelicate' and masculine; but in true advertisement style Walser plays on this 'indelicate' and describes the figure of the daring (young) woman we find in so many advertisements: 'saucy...brazen', displaying 'rebellion, dissent, compromise and insistent on a position to be held...Compelling men to see them as comrades, as trouser-buddies.' Such a young woman exhibits 'trouserish, trouserly and trouserful demands!' Levis and Wrangler have obviously taken a leaf out of Walser's book.

It was Walser himself who said: 'My writing is wallpapering.' Does the gnomic nature of his comment justify a further, third, addition to the '-esque' epithets:

Pythonesque, Kafkaesque and finally Wharholesque? Such adjectives are, of course, pretentious nonsense, as the non-reader him/herself may judge. But what Monty Python, Franz Kafka and Andy Warhol all share in common with Robert Walser is a certain disrespect for established authority, an utter rejection of 'doing something because one has been told to do it.' So I won't say that this book is compulsory reading. Is there any such thing?

Robert Walser was born in Biel and died in Herisau in 1956.