

Zeitschrift: Die Schweiz = Suisse = Svizzera = Switzerland : offizielle Reisezeitschrift der Schweiz. Verkehrszentrale, der Schweizerischen Bundesbahnen, Privatbahnen ... [et al.]

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Verkehrszentrale

Band: 35 (1962)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Die Züge

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-779217>

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Winterliche Eisenbahnimpression. Photo Rindlisbacher
Impression fantasmagorique d'un train en hiver
Visione fantasmagorica di un treno, d'inverno
Wintertime skating impressions



DIE ZÜGE

*Wohnt Schlaf in ihren Räumen,
Abschied, Vermächtnis, Glück.
Sie sehen früh die Sterne,
und Nacht holt sie zurück.
Wo aber letzte Züge
stillstehn zu ihrer Zeit,
ist es zum ersten Zuge
kaum eine Stunde weit.*

*Hier endet keine Reise.
Und wiegen Lust und Weh.
Blüht Mohn am Schotterwege.
Bald riecht die Luft nach Schnee.
Die vielen Sterne blinken
wie Lichter einer Stadt,
die keiner, der sie suchte,
je ganz betreten hat.*

*Die Streckenwärter frieren.
Die Weichen sind gestellt.
Das Jahr sei gut, sei böse,
heil oder krank die Welt –
just wenn sich lange Züge
begegneten im Lauf,
ging manchmal in vier Augen
ein Erdensönnlein auf.*

*Die sich nie wiedersehen
und ohne Namen sind,
sie sind die Brüder, Schwestern
vom einst verlorenen Kind.
Die ferne Stadt am Himmel –
schickt sie jetzt Boten aus?
Wird dort das Mahl gerichtet
in unsrer Väter Haus?*

*Zugreisen ohne Ende.
Stellwerke. Blinksignal.
Reine und schmutzige Hände.
Brücken und Wartesaal.
Nach vielen Finsternissen,
in einer stillen Stadt,
werden wir vielleicht wissen,
wer wen gefunden hat.*

ALBERT EHRLSMANN

WHY SHOULD WE OBSERVE A JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU YEAR?

On 28th June 1712, Suzanne Rousseau, née Bernard, wife of the Genevan watchmaker Isaak Rousseau, gave birth to a son whose life and writings were to have tremendous influence throughout the world. When Jean-Jacques was ten days old, his mother died of childbed fever. The loss of his mother was of decisive importance for the development of the sensitive young genius who rebelled against the excessive artificiality of the 18th century and sounded the revolutionary cry "back to nature!" It was characteristic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that in the people, places, and things he loved, he unconsciously sought some of the maternal affection and protection he had not received as a child. This was just as true of the landscapes he enjoyed living in as of the women he loved... as true of the simple, uncomplicated life he defended in his writings, as of the simple, unsophisticated people he chose as shining examples. It is significant that he referred to Madame de Warens, the woman who tried to teach him the error of his youthful ways, as "Mama" not "sweetheart".

The motherless boy soon had the misfortune of being separated from his father who was forced to flee from Geneva as the result of duelling affair. After that, Jean-Jacques' upbringing lay mostly in the hand of strangers. With scarcely any restrictions, his hunger for reading became almost insatiable, and he developed a penchant for a dreamy kind of preoccupation with himself and for an adventuresome wanderlust which was, at one and the same time, a source of trouble and of the keenest enjoyment for him. Once as he was returning from a distant journey and found the gates of the city already locked, he turned his back upon the cold city of Calvin. Driven about and torn by doubts, he lived from then on with the longing for a place he could call home, a place where he could put his roots down... an intense desire for uncomplicated nature and simple goodness. This nostalgic feeling was at the base of his messages condemning the decadence of civilization and the extent to which the people of his time had departed from nature. His ideas were picked up by his contemporaries, almost as though they constituted a new gospel, even though they were flatly contradicted by Rousseau's own life and actions. Before him, Haller, in his poem "The Alps", had glorified the natural life led by the rustic inhabitants of the Swiss mountains; Gessner had made it fashionable to write idyllic rustic poetry; and the Zurich school led by Bodmer and Breitinger, in the midst of the age of reason, attempted to re-introduce imagination into poetry. But it took Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who truly carried the sorrows and suffering of his era within himself, to sound the "back to nature call" with enough strength and passion and explosive power to cause a world-wide "back to nature" movement.

For Switzerland it was highly significant that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, even after the ban placed on his writings by his native city, and even after the persecutions he suffered within his own country, still loved Geneva and his Swiss homeland so much that he chose Switzerland as the setting for his "Nouvelle Héloïse", thus holding up Swiss people, constitutions, laws, customs—along with the rest of the best of Swiss civic life and traditions—as a shining ideal for all the world to see. Achieving a tremendous effect in breadth and depth, Rousseau's message went straight to the heart of people, who consciously or unconsciously were tired of all the affectation and pretence of the rococo era. In their hearts he awakened a strong desire for a more genuine world, for great and powerful appreciation of nature, for natural landscapes and natural ways of living which could give them again the hope of becoming real people. Present-day Switzerland, with her world-wide reputation as a vacation land, can look back with gratitude to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as one of her first and foremost discoverers and apostles.

But it is not gratitude alone which has led Switzerland's tourist authorities to proclaim the year 1962—the 250th anniversary of Rousseau's birth—as the "Jean-Jacques Rous-