

FALLING OUT OF LOVE WITH THE SWISS

CORDELIA GRAHAM NARROWS HER HORIZONS

My great-grandparents went on holiday to Italy once. They never went back because they found it to be dirty. Instead they went to Switzerland. Switzerland, Switzerland, always clean, always tidy. The Marks and Spencer of Europe. Switzerland is a country of edges; the edge of peace, the physical edge of the Alps - it is the upper edge of civilisation.

“Switzerland, always clean, always tidy. The Marks and Spencer of Europe”

I always used to adore this country: it doesn't get involved in wars, the UN is deeply rooted there and it makes fit chocolate. I was in awe of the discretion and restraint eminent in its citizens, who keep a cover over the collection plate in mass and can speak at least three languages.

What's more, I loved that one can still smoke indoors, despite accusations of Switzerland being a nanny state, despite laws against discarding one's chewing gum on the street. 'Here's a country that can see sense,' thought I to myself.

Bearing this in mind, these holidays, soft packet of Gauloises in my pocket, I sallied forth to the nightclub(s) of Wengen, a town the size of Hexham in the Alps. Despite my father's complaints that 'no bugger gets up to do any work there', I was sure that there would be some form of civilised, quaint nightlife lurking, ready to embrace me and my amour suisse.



Once there, I took a look around. Although not packed with interesting enlightened types, there was bound to be some somewhere.

My first encounter was with a more bland breed of Durham graduate. 'Come on, Cordelia, you are abroad - go forth and leave perfidious Albion where it should be - at home.' So I found a Swiss, from, joy of joys, Basel. 'It used to be the Holy Roman Empire; he must be interesting!' exclaimed I in my head. I think I have come across a gem of a person (particularly one who was wearing a diamond-patterned jumper and smoking Lucky Strikes) who might possibly enjoy the occasional medieval throwback, as I do. No such luck: he advocated a heavy bombing campaign of Iran because 'Muslims want to blow us up' and didn't hold with university education. 'People might say that they care about tolerance, but, really it's you and your people whom you are going to put first', said he with an apathetic shrug. I was in so much tolerant shock of his intolerant views that I was unable to reply.

“Come on, Cordelia, you are abroad - go forth and leave perfidious Albion where it should be - at home.”

It seems an illustrious continental upbringing is not necessarily conducive to thinking like me. My veneration of Europeans is somewhat diminished - of course the opinion of one fool is not representative of an entire country, yet one fool is still himself. What's more, the only other Swiss I have ever had the opportunity of being intimately acquainted with once blew his nose on the nearest rock for a want of more suitable item. I realised that Switzerland wasn't quite the haven of civilization I once thought. Suddenly, perfidious Albion wasn't looking so bad.

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I'm In France. Things are different here, a bit.

Times when I'd usually be bored I've suffered instead from l'ennui existentiel. They're the same, except you ask yourself not "what to do?" but "Why to do?" It's not a mood conducive to revision.

Second difference is the language. They're imprecise about things. They call lunch "dejeuner," but they call breakfast "le petit-dejeuner." What do they call a littler than usual lunch? Are we to understand that if they're only peckish, or had a large breakfast- "un grand petit-dejeuner" (note oxymoron) or if they just got up late, that they eat more than they want or don't eat lunch at all? What if the petit-dejeuner is larger than the déjeuner? What then? I asked an obliging Frenchman.

"Je ne sais pas." He said. "Merci." I said. "Merci, a lot." I thought... "Rosbif stupide" he thought. Then we got off the bubble-lift and I never saw him again. It was a thing that we had together.

Anyway, I had brunch. Thought I'd play it safe. "Le brunch." It was fitting; I'm brunch anyway, my beliefs are: Between atheism and agnosticism, then later there's deism for dinner. Dawkins calls it "Intellectual poverty." I call it brunch. Je suis brunch.

I haven't had much time to catch up with Lamoney, but the last thing I heard he was working on a new section to the "Brief Guide to Conversation." called "Some Popular Nonsensical Terms of Emphasis and How To Deal With Them: From 'I'm officially... adjective' to 'I'm so... insert verb in the progressive...again' touching upon the correct use of the three meaningless superlatives... Absolutely, completely, entirely."

Anyway. I had better get going. I'm existentially ennui'd stiff.

Oh-wevwah,
Yours phonetically,

James le Brunche