



Mr. President, miini Dame u Herre, a ch airde,



Haggis<sup>1</sup> is a traditional Scottish dish, *sonsie* Chieftain of the Pudding Race<sup>2</sup>. Many Bernese Haggis greenhorns would prefer a *Bernerplatte*, a nice *Leberli R osti* or even a humble *Cervela*, now that Argentinian bovine intestines<sup>3</sup> are once again available. We Swiss are seemingly unaware that the *Larousse Gastronomique* tells us that, whereas its description is not immediately appealing, Haggis has an excellent nutty texture and a delicious savory flavor.



Due to Haggis' offal ingredients, it was illegal to import it into Switzerland since the BSE crisis of 1986. This was tragic and led to the revival of the ancient art of Haggis Smuggling. The organizing committee tried serving legally imported vegetarian haggis. Such fare is sometimes described as *Haggis Interruptus* and, being deeply unsatisfying, left the hungry Helvetic hankering for Haggis<sup>4</sup> unstilled in its wake. Nobody finished their dinner.

Happily, this ban has now been relaxed and we can enjoy 16 kg of full strength Haggis tonight.

For the next one-and-a-half thousand words – in layman's terms 10 minutes – I would like present to you my impressions of Switzerland since arriving here in 1986; to describe why I may now say "we Swiss" – why I chose to undergo *Einb urgerung* and what this mystical metamorphosis entails.



But first, I would like to speak to you of the reason why it is essential to learn one of the Swiss national languages and of my *Umlaut* fetish.

Switzerland is a Confederation of 26 Cantons, each represented by a fountain on the new *Berner Bundesplatz*. Six Cantons have traditionally been called "half-Cantons". The term "Canton with half of a cantonal vote" has recently come into use in official documents for constitutionally-challenged Cantons, and "half-Canton" is now politically incorrect<sup>5</sup> along with relating cheesy jokes about neighbouring Fribourg, where the cows are supposedly prettier than the girls.



To be fair to our neighbours from Fribourg, they have their share of cheesy jokes too<sup>6</sup>, such as concerning the guest waiting to be served in a Bernese Restaurant: "Snails are our specialty" informed the head waiter. "I know", replied the guest from Fribourg. "I was served by one of them here yesterday."

4 national languages and a polyglot mixture of languages spoken by *Uusl ander* make for a vibrant cultural mixture. Learning one of the national languages is an important step towards integration, a feeling, however, not shared by all who come to Switzerland, as illustrated in our next story:

A Swiss man, looking for directions, encounters two English residents of Berne who are waiting at a bus stop near Loeb. "Entschuldigung, f ahrt die Nummer 10 von hier ab?", he enquires. The two Englishmen just stare at him. "Excusez-moi, parlez-vous fran ais?", asks the Swiss man. The two continue to stare. "Parlate italiano?" No response. "D iscurras t i rumantsch?" Still nothing.





The Swiss man walks off, extremely disgusted.

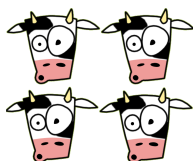
The first Englishman says to the second: "Y'know, maybe we should learn a foreign language..."  
"Why?" says the other, "That bloke knew 4 languages and it didn't help him!"

From an early stage, I was fascinated by *Umlauts*. *Umlaut* comes from the German *um* – “the other way around” and *Laut*, meaning “sound”. Use of an *Umlaut* is a sort of vowel movement in which the vowel is held in for just a little longer than necessary and subsequently expressed like a semivowel in the following syllable<sup>8</sup>. I learned that one word is *ein Wort*. But it does not give two *Worts* nor even two *Worte*. It gives *zwei Wörter*, with an Umlaut and a confusing little “r” at the end.



*Umlaute* mean nothing to me, there simply not being two letter U's in my brain. But I do feel that, if they have to be used, they should be used consistently. The one word in the German language which, in the interests of internal grammatical consistency, should have an *Umlaut* in its plural form, it is the word *Umlaut* itself. It should be *die Umläute* and not, confusingly, *die Umlaute*, that is without an *Umlaut*.

I have learned that English, too, possesses a vestigial form of *Umlaut*. It survives like a Germanic appendix in the plural form of certain words, such as *man*, which changes to *men*; *foot* which changes to *feet*, *goose*, *mouse*, *louse*, *woman* and *tooth*. For an *Umlaut-fetishist*, it was thrilling to find that Robert Burns uses the plural *umlauted* form of the word *cow* (which is *kine*) in the 1792 poem “*Auld Rob Morris*”<sup>9</sup>:



There's Auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen,  
He's the King o' gude fellows, and wale o' auld men;  
He has gowd in his coffers, he has owsen and **kine**,  
And ae bonie lass, his dautie and mine.

While learning Swiss German, my inexperienced ear was struck by the mystery of *who is Siegfried?* And *why do Swiss speak so often of Haggis?* I formed the impression that a fellow named *Siegfried* was often mentioned in conversation. It was *Sigi* this and *Sigi* that. Example:

*er het mir gseit, es **sigi** ir ordnig zum fäschtli z'ga*

I had no idea who this *Sigi* person was, but he was everywhere. In addition and – to my surprise – there was much talk of haggis. Yes, really: haggis, albeit more like *haiggisch* –in a slurred fashion as if one had had too much *Kirsch* with the *Fondue*. Example:

*öpper het mir gseit, dass du es fäschtli organisiert **haiggisch***

Over time, I learned that *sigi* and *haiggisch* are parts of the sophisticated subjunctive grammatical beauty of Swiss German indirect speech.

Before talking about *Einbürgerung*, it is time for our next story. It concerns the fact that one does not become a citizen of Switzerland, rather a member of the *Gemeinde* where one lives. After *Einbürgerung* it is no longer a case of *Ausländer* and *Einwohner*, but a rivalry between the near Swiss and the far Swiss from *dort ane*, like our two Bernese heroes in the following story:



Zwe Bärner Giele stöh zäme zfriede a dr Aare. Da gseh si plötzlech wie n'ä Zürcher i dr Strömig um sis Läbe kämpft.

Da seit dr eint Bärner zum angere: „Isch ou no hert, he! Dr anger dert kämpft verbisse um sis Läbe u mir stöh nume da u luege zue.“ **<pause>** Seit dr anger:

„Ja hesch eigentlich rächt – s'isch scho hert --- chum mir hocken ab!“

By 2006, I felt qualified to apply for Swiss nationality as:

- I thoroughly enjoyed spontaneity, **<pause>** as long as it is planned;
- I had started to call people who irritate me *nerve saws*
- I now understood some of the many meanings of the word *Auä*, such as
  - probably *dr Haggis schmeckt äuä guet*
  - a definite no: *Äuä! Es schmeckt gruusig.*
  - an enthusiastic yes: *Äuä de schoo! Es schmeckt wunderbar!*
  - an expression of surprise: *Äuä...! I het's nie 'denkt!*

What, then, were the reasons for me to apply for Swiss nationality?

Heimat is that place where you feel that you belong, where you are understood, where you can go on Fridays to the *Worber Kultur und Begegnungszentrum* (otherwise known as the *Egger Brauerei*) to meet your *Kumpels*. Switzerland felt like a second *Heimat* to me.



Berne does not offer long-term foreign residents the possibility to vote at local level. Like a latter-day Suffragette, I desired the franchise, even if I had to purchase it.

The Guinness Factor As Ireland and Switzerland both allow dual nationality, I would still be welcome on St Patrick's Day at the Irish Embassy in Bern to drink a nice, dark, malty and tasty Guinness.



Ostermundigen, my chosen *Gemeinde*, whose elegant sandstone graces much of the *Berner Münster* and the *Kölnerdom*<sup>10</sup>, is one of the few *Gemeinde* which requires candidates to take a language test. Other countries also make requirements: Scotland requires a current Certificate of Thrift, issued by your Bank. England requires one to demonstrate a dry sense of humour by stating that one finds it more interesting to watch cricket than to watch the grass growing. Ireland requires a twinkle in the eye and the kiss of the Blarney Stone.

Ostermundigen, by contrast, requires that you pass a language test, consisting of a set of 25 simple multiple choice questions.

Example: Your washing machine breaks down. Do you seek help from:

- a) your *Hausarzt*
- b) your *Haustier*
- c) the *Hauswart*

An interview with the *Einbürgerungskommission* followed. Frau Sahli liked a Candidate who could speak German. Herr Blau, the *Gemeindepolizist*, knew many things about me. The wonderfully named Mr Kunti, a local politician with an Umlaut, led the interview. We spoke of Swiss culture, history, politics, integration and mashed potatoes. The panel agreed that *Muskatnuss* is an essential ingredient of well-made *Kartoffelstock*, and would probably agree today that the correct term for bonuses paid to senior UBS executives – that is, in addition to monthly salaries higher than the salary of a *Bundesrat* – is not *bonus*, but *variable salary component*.



There might have been no agreement about whether I should be the last crafty foreign crow who can get my claws into a free-for-all Swiss passport. As you know, the *Schweizervolk* will decide this weekend concerning freedom of movement<sup>11</sup>. If you have the right to vote, then please do so. If you agree with the SVP that the crows should remain hungry, then vote *NEIN*. If you feel that Switzerland should continue to enjoy the sweet apple fruits of bi-lateral treaties with the European Union, then please vote *JA*, as your Speaker will do.



Following the interview, I collected a large number of *Scheine*, each accompanied by its own *Einzahlungsschein*: a *Wohnschein* from every *Gemeinde* where I had lived; confirmation that I had paid all of my taxes, and a *Bescheinigung* from the police that I had no criminal record and posed no threat to public order.

In the *Tagesanzeiger* of 22 Nov 2006, I learned that I would become a member of the Ostermundigen community.

I received a short, dry letter, asking me to please find enclosed the *Heimatschein*, which I had ordered and that the *Einzahlungsschein* would follow by separate post.



It was done, I was a *Schwiizer Bürger* with a shiny new red passport, issued by the *Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft*. I still had my old burgundy *Pas Éireannach*, issued by an *tAontas Eorpach*. I was both within the European Community, and (bi-laterally) without. Who could ask for more?



I would like to propose a Toast to *Haggis Interruptus*, to *Sigfried*, to *Einzahlungsscheine*, to Bernese Snails and bi-lateral Treaties; in short, to *Heimat*.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, please now be upstanding as I give you the Toast to the Host Country: ***Sláinte Switzerland – Äuä!***

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haggis>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rabbie-burns.com/the\\_poems/addresstoahaggis.cfm.html](http://www.rabbie-burns.com/the_poems/addresstoahaggis.cfm.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.anzeiger.biz/index.php?article\\_id=53&id=9515](http://www.anzeiger.biz/index.php?article_id=53&id=9515)

<sup>4</sup> For admirable alliterative assistance: see synonym dictionary at <http://dico.isc.cnrs.fr/dico/en/search>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.newspackdictionary.com/ns-pi.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mittelschulvorbereitung.ch/content/english/Z405Swissjoke.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Reto Rumantsch Pronunciation help available in this excellent UTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtuhgJDOxUY>

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic\\_umlaut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_umlaut)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.robertburns.org/works/383.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ostermundigen>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.personenfreizuegigkeit-nein.ch/>