

MARK L. LOUDEN, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2016), 504 pp.

“It would definitely have to be a dumb blockhead, / Big or small, / Who doesn’t know that the cream from two / Of the very best cows / Is better than from one,” wrote the Pennsylvania poet Henry Lee Fisher (1822-1909), in his native language, Pennsylvania Dutch, translated here into English. “Hey, you educated bookworm back there, / You can’t find anything like that in books” (61). As Fisher’s taunt of pedantic bookworms suggests, the poet’s true quarrel was not with those who questioned the worth of mixing cream from different cows. Rather, Fisher took issue with commentators of his day who were critical of the language he had grown up speaking in the rural hinterlands of southeastern Pennsylvania. Such people, Fisher well knew, looked down upon “Pennsylvania Dutch,” as the language became called, as a garbled gibberish of English and German, spoken, so they thought, by culturally backward central-European settlers and their descendants. A passionate defender of his native tongue, Fisher hailed Pennsylvania Dutch as a sophisticated and culturally rich language, far better, indeed, than English. “There’s no language in this world / Like Pennsylvania Dutch. / For every word comes from the heart, / And it has more pepper, salt, and spices,” he wrote, continuing his food metaphor (61). Fisher is one of many Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking characters to populate Mark L. Louden’s landmark new book, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*, published by the John Hopkins University Press as part of its distinguished “Young Center Books in Anabaptist & Pietist Studies” series. The book represents a major achievement of linguistic, historical, and anthropological scholarship, and it will be of great use to scholars from across the disciplines who share interests in the United States’s diverse linguistic and cultural heritage.

Louden divides *Pennsylvania Dutch* into seven chapters, which, together, offer a sweeping yet finely textured survey of the language’s origins, history, and lasting literary and cultural significance. The topics of the chapters, and the linkages between them, reflect Louden’s deftness in rendering complex linguistic discussions intelligible to non-specialists, as well as a certain gift for interdisciplinary re-

search and analysis. The first chapter, appropriately titled “What Is Pennsylvania Dutch?” (1), makes use of Louden’s deep linguistic research as he seeks to build a foundation for his later consideration of the language’s cultural impact. In this chapter, Louden makes his case that Pennsylvania Dutch is not a dialect of German, as so many have considered it, but rather a language unto itself, possessing the fundamental components of any language: phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon (15). While he acknowledges that drawing clear distinctions between what constitutes a language versus a dialect is a fraught enterprise, Louden warns us of the negative side-effects of labelling Pennsylvania Dutch a dialect—implying that it had degraded from some ideal, pure German over time, via its removal from Europe and exposure to the contaminating influence of English. On the contrary, Louden’s findings reveal that, in some senses, “Pennsylvania Dutch grammar is actually more complex than standard German” (25), and that “Pennsylvania Dutch and Palatine German are at least as different from one another as, say, Norwegian is from Swedish” (18). What is more, Louden also points out that Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking residents of early America were often also proficient in “Pennsylvania High German” (11), which was regularly employed in print publications intended for Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking audiences. This adds yet another gradation in the varied linguistic world of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Much of the first chapter is thus devoted to situating Pennsylvania Dutch in its linguistic context, and building the case for its cultural significance and importance as a subject of scholarly inquiry. While debate over the status of Pennsylvania Dutch as language or dialect will doubtless rage on after Louden’s work, he certainly succeeds in underscoring the complexity, uniqueness, and scholarly importance of the language through his exhaustive and carefully structured analysis. This foundational work completed, chapters two and three offer a history of the development of the language from its origins to approximately 1860. Louden traces the history of German settlement of southeastern Pennsylvania and, while emphasizing the roots of Pennsylvania Dutch as a spoken language, plumbs the extant written evidence to make conclusions about when, where, and how the language first took form. “From the beginning, Pennsylvania Dutch culture was a fun-

damentally rural one” (71), Loudon notes—an observation that rings true to this day. Newspaper evidence suggests that by the 1780’s, Pennsylvania’s German settlers had already developed a regional variant of spoken German, drawing heavily on the English language (88-89). Loudon highlights that even the earliest written evidence of Pennsylvania Dutch identifies it as a rural variant of German that reflected its speakers’ supposed status on the culturally and linguistically mixed periphery of civilization, where they intermingled their native tongue with English (91). Newspaper texts written in Pennsylvania Dutch often revolve around themes of class, society, and language use, suggesting that young people and those who sought to become “Gentelmänner and Ladies” (155) abandoned Pennsylvania Dutch for more fashionable English at their peril, in that they lost something of their pious and humble identity in the process. Almost all written commentaries on Pennsylvania Dutch, and many early writings presented in the language, featured cultural commentary about the status of its speakers, as well as their and their language’s place in the wider social order.

In addition to offering a linguistic history of Pennsylvania Dutch and an exploration of its wide use among everyday residents of rural southeastern Pennsylvania, Loudon explores the literary and cultural world in which Pennsylvania Dutch operated, and that the language helped to create. “As a distinct Pennsylvania Dutch folk culture fermented in the bucolic crucible of southeastern Pennsylvania in the first half of the nineteenth century, so too was the stage set during that time for the emergence of a body of folk literature in Pennsylvania Dutch that flowered in the decades after the Civil War” (142). With a special focus on Pennsylvania Dutch literary texts that populated newspapers of the period as well as other printed publications, Loudon opens a window on a literary world into which few modern Americans have ever peered. The works Loudon considers range from short, informal newspaper articles to longer efforts, but they all share one thing in common: time, and a general decline in use of the Pennsylvania Dutch language among nonsectarian descendants of its original speakers, have rendered them obscure.

Chapter four, titled “Profiles in Pennsylvania Dutch Literature” (179), explores the Pennsylvania Dutch literary world in the

second half of the nineteenth century, when leading intellectuals among Pennsylvania Dutch-speakers undertook to create a literature for their language. In this chapter, Loudon the linguist becomes Loudon the littérateur—sensitive as ever, of course, to issues of language mechanics, but interested more in illuminating the meaning and cultural resonance of the texts under consideration. The chapter, as its title suggests, consists of four “profiles” of authors who wrote in the Pennsylvania Dutch language. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, some Pennsylvania Dutch-speakers began to appreciate the cultural significance of their language and to romanticize and sentimentalize its seemingly homespun, folk qualities (181). The first author Loudon considers is Ludwig August Wollenweber, who was actually not a native Pennsylvania Dutch-speaker, but who at the young age of twenty-four immigrated to Pennsylvania from the Palatinate in 1832 and lived the remainder of his life in the region, studying and celebrating the language he had found in his adopted homeland (181-83). Next, Loudon considers Henry Harbaugh, a man who, born to Pennsylvania Dutch stock in 1817, demonstrated many of the chief characteristics of Pennsylvania Dutch authors. He felt close filial attachment to the language but had pursued higher education and a clerical career requiring the use of English more as an adult, before embracing his native tongue as an artistic medium (189-91). Loudon perceptively draws a connection between the poetry of Harbaugh and similar poetic works written in dialect by European Romantics including famous figures like Robert Burns of Scotland. “While many of Harbaugh’s poems in both languages [i.e. English and Pennsylvania Dutch] have a nostalgic, rustic quality reminiscent of the works of European Romantics such as [Johann Peter] Hebel and Burns, the range of emotions he expresses in his Pennsylvania Dutch poetry is broader than what he writes in ‘perfect and polished’ English” (193). Loudon next considers Edward H. Rauch, born 1820, a contemporary of Harbaugh’s who became Pennsylvania Dutch’s “earliest defender in the face of skepticism of the language’s inherent value among Pennsylvania Dutch and outsiders alike” (203) and founded the *Pennsylvania Dutchman* magazine in 1873 (205). Abraham Reeser Horne, the chapter’s fourth and final entry into the Pennsylvania Dutch literary pantheon, advocated for the employment of the Pennsylvania Dutch

language in public schools and authored a textbook titled the *Pennsylvania German Manual*, which, in Loudén's words, "remains a classic work today" (218). The book sought to open the door to high-quality public-educational opportunities for Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking children by using their native tongue as a bridge to proficiency in English, rather than simply ignoring what many perceived to be their low-class, rustic linguistic heritage (219-25). Ironically, the book found little resonance among educators but enjoyed popularity among adults interested in keeping the language alive (232-33).

The final three chapters of *Pennsylvania Dutch* explore the language in a wider national context and carry the analysis to the present day, posing titillating questions about the cultural conditions for heritage language preservation. Chapter five, "Pennsylvania Dutch in the Public Eye" (237), considers how Americans have reacted to and interpreted the significance of the language in both positive and negative lights, examining the legacies of such figures as Helen Reimensnyder Martin (1868-1939), whose popular novels portrayed Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking sectarians in unflattering ways (248). Loudén also examines the fate of Pennsylvania Dutch in the context of the German language's embattled status during the World Wars, offering nuance to oft-repeated assumptions about the fate of non-English-speakers during those troubled periods (252). He also examines the rise of academic scholarship centered on the language, as well as organized efforts to celebrate, preserve, and study Pennsylvania Dutch and its associated culture (276). Chapter six explores the unique and important role played by Amish and Mennonites in keeping Pennsylvania Dutch alive as an actively spoken language, considering why and how sectarian culture has helped sustain the language compared to the nonsectarian Pennsylvania Dutch (including Lutheran and Reformed settlers and their descendants), among whom use of the language has steadily declined (298). "For sectarians and nonsectarians alike," Loudén observes, "the basic requirements for language maintenance have been largely the same: active speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch are rural dwellers of limited social and geographic mobility who live in heavily Pennsylvania Dutch communities and marry within their group; those who move away, pursue higher education, enter the professions, and

marry outsiders usually shift to English" (353). In chapter seven, "An American Story" (355), Loudén eloquently connects Pennsylvania Dutch language and culture to common understandings of the American experience. Loudén postulates that the survival and vitality of the language owes much to an American brand of tolerance and love for liberty, and he considers how movement of Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking residents from southeastern Pennsylvania to other regions of the United States and Canada has impacted the language's survival, again pointing out the important role played by sectarian Pennsylvania Dutch-speakers in keeping the language alive. "The healthy sociolinguistic situation of Pennsylvania Dutch is linked to the social-spiritual vitality of the faith communities for whom it has become a central part of their identity," Loudén notes. "The Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites are profoundly aware of the significance of preserving their mother tongue" (355). They achieve that feat even when they move away from the region where the language originated (360-65). He includes in the chapter a thoughtful examination of other communities in which language preservation and spiritual life are closely linked, including the Old Colony Mennonites; the Hutterites; and the Haredim, Orthodox Jews. This wider, global analytical context places the details of Pennsylvania Dutch linguistic heritage in fascinating relief and invites a more expansive conversation about heritage language preservation, spirituality, and the insider/outsider status of the languages' speakers (365-69).

The success of *Pennsylvania Dutch* rests in its author's ability to present detail-oriented, specialist knowledge of linguistic patterns in German and Pennsylvania Dutch in accessible and meaningful ways to scholars from across the disciplines—as well as members of the public, for whom this book offers a scholarly yet approachable introduction to the topic. Loudén dedicates *Pennsylvania Dutch* to the late Don Yoder (1921-2015), professor of folklife at the University of Pennsylvania, who played a major role awakening broader scholarly interest in the folk culture of Pennsylvania Dutch-speakers. This book certainly fits within the scholarly lineage of Yoder and his acolytes, who articulated an interdisciplinary approach to cultural study that drew on all aspects of human society—from less tangible features like language and religion to material elements like decora-

tive arts, craft traditions, and vernacular landscapes—in hopes of shedding light on the inner machinations of culture.¹ While fundamentally a work of linguistic and literary analysis, *Pennsylvania Dutch* is solidly rooted in the “bucolic crucible of southeastern Pennsylvania” (142) and links linguistic patterns to the experiences of everyday life among the language’s speakers, past and present. In this regard, *Pennsylvania Dutch* is both a fitting testament to the analytical power of interdisciplinary folklife studies and also a major step forward for several inter-related fields of scholarship.

Indeed, Louden’s book might be seen as a programmatic statement, a stepping-stone that other scholars can use to launch focused studies of various aspects of Pennsylvania Dutch linguistic and cultural history. Print culturists and scholars of Pennsylvania’s German-language manuscript traditions, for example, might follow Louden’s lead by studying the relationship between text presentation and linguistic form. The author graces us with several examples of written and printed Penn-

sylvania Dutch texts, suggesting the potential for future research in this area (see pp. 22 and 159, for example). Louden’s discussions of various authors who wrote in the Pennsylvania Dutch language should certainly inspire further literary-interpretive inquiry. The possibilities for more work on the language’s origins and cultural significance are endless. It seems certain, however, that literary scholars and cultural historians of the Pennsylvania Dutch must reckon their research agendas to Louden’s insights about the spectrum of languages employed by the settlers of southeastern Pennsylvania and their descendants—as well as the importance of considering orality and spoken culture when assessing the Pennsylvania Dutch experience. Perusing this notable contribution to linguistic, literary, and historical scholarship, the book’s readers will surely agree with Henry Lee Fisher that “There’s no language in this world / Like Pennsylvania Dutch” (61).

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¹ For more on the folklife approach, see Don Yoder, *Discovering American Folklife: Essays on Folk Culture & the Pennsylvania Dutch* (1990; repr., Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2001).