

Philip E. Webber. *Pella Dutch: The Portrait of a Language and Its Use in One of Iowa's Ethnic Communities.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988) ix, 163 pp., \$14.95.

This book does exactly what it says it will, namely to study how language is used by the some two hundred and fifty citizens of Pella who still make use of it. As such it should be useful to those interested in nineteenth century emigrants from Europe whose descendants are still clinging to part of their ethnic roots.

Of the three aspects of language that seem relevant to such a group: the language itself, its use in the printed media, and its use in the churches, Webber concentrates on the first, but provides sufficient information about the latter to present a fairly full picture of the Pella ethnic community—both past and present.

As to the language itself, the most interesting fact seems to be that some members of the community, itself established in the 1840s, now speak a variety of Dutch which differs substantially from modern Netherlands Dutch. More recent migration from the old country has had little effect on it because the old settlers are defensive of their unusual manner of speech, and the new settlers seem unwilling to try to change the language that they find on their arrival.

In addition, the language seems to have usually been learned from older rather than younger members of the community, and as a result the Pella variations on Dutch were reinforced. There are many, perhaps too many, examples of Pella speech patterns, and Webber at times forgets to translate words and phrases into English.

This reviewer wishes that more had been done with the media and the churches. We are told that the last Dutch newspaper ceased publication in 1942 and that a strangely repressive Iowa law that forbade the public use of any foreign language during World War One tended to put a virtual stop to the use of Dutch in the churches, although Dutch still continued to be used in them to a degree until the 1940s and 1950s. But more material on both matters would make the picture of the language and the people both fuller and more interesting. Other Northern European immigrant groups seem to follow the same general pattern, and further details about Pella would make more specific comparison and contrast easier to accomplish.

Webber got his material from a detailed questionnaire which he gave some sixty people who still speak the language to some degree, and the body of the book is an analysis of the responses: Why do you speak Dutch? Where did you learn to speak it? On what occasions do you use it? Have you tried to teach it to your children? The latter is perhaps the key question, for he finds that the answer is yes only a third of the time, and sporadic attempts to teach Dutch in the schools in the area never were very fruitful. This seems odd at a time when there seems to be something of a revival of interest in the language of one's ancestors.

Although there are several books already on the subject of the Dutch in America, this one deals interestingly with an admittedly limited aspect of their assimilation or lack of it. Besides its clear presentation of the language of Pella, it also sheds suggestive light on the experience of other groups of immigrants, and for this reason should be very useful for a large number of students of ethnicity. A generalist might well start the book with Appendix B, material that Webber prepared for the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress in 1982, and which contains a good summary of all ethnic aspects of life in Pella.

Coupled with the recent interest in ethnicity and language, this work may encourage more investigation of the way in which native languages have continued to function in this country.

—Phillips G. Davies
Iowa State University

August Wilson. *Fences*. (New York: Plume, 1986) 101 pp., \$6.95 paper.

At the turn of the century, playwrights wrestled with realism and wrought a new theater capable of great poetic and symbolic force. It was an exciting time because artists turned their talents to subjects which had never been deemed fit for the stage. The classic requirements of rank and verse were swept aside as audiences learned that even illiterates could make music with their tongues, and that eloquent, serious exploration of the human condition extended well beyond the provinces of kings and queens.

August Wilson's *Fences* prompts these observations. Wilson is a playwright of vision who has set himself an ambitious goal. *Fences* is the second in a proposed series of plays which will dramatize the African-American experience throughout this century, decade by decade. Wilson sets his play in the quiescent period of the fifties and tells the tale of an extended family headed by 53-year-old Troy Maxim. A sexually active and rebellious youth, Troy spent fifteen years in jail for manslaughter. There, he took up baseball, reformed himself, and became one of the most outstanding players in the old Negro league.

A racist society may have denied him entry in the Major Leagues, but this illiterate man successfully manipulates the system to become the first black to drive a garbage truck in his city. It is not enough. A man of tremendous appetites, Troy betrays his loyal wife, and when his mistress dies in childbirth, he brings his infant daughter home for his wife to raise. She accepts the responsibility, but denies him her bed. His son, Cory, is