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An Amish Mortuary Ritual at the Intersection of Cultural Anthropology and Lexicography

Setting the Scene

Scribbled in the corner was the Pennsylvania Dutch word: *Rumdraage*, 'to carry around.' It seemed peculiar to me to see such a random and equally uninteresting word penciled onto a page of field notes. But the accompanying explanation of a Amish funerary custom was fascinating. I was in the basement of our campus library, organizing the contents of the John A. Hostetler Papers. Since my first experiences with the Anabaptists were as a lexicographer on the Pennsylvania German Dictionary Project, my curiosity was piqued: a single and seemingly mundane lexical item being associated with a cultural custom. Although our work on the dictionary project was always prefaced with a caution about the "comprehensive" and not "complete" nature of the project, I never imagined that I would find additions to word entries years after the fact while moving folders and boxes around in the basement of the university archives.

Yet a glance at the massive dictionary project for Pennsylvania Dutch yields only the standard definition: 'to carry around' (Beam and Trout 2006). Lacking from both the dictionary and contemporary accounts of Amish mortuary rituals is the inclusion of this funerary custom, *Rumdraage*.

Introduction

In the human experience, both birth and death create such uncertainty and change. In birth the newborn is held with uncertain wonderment. In death a stirring reflection of the possible afterlife and mortality pervades the minds of mourners. Yet as universally imminent as death is, cultures around the world explore death in a variety of ways, often striving to reiterate the cohesiveness of the group and offer support during the period of mourning.

It should come as no surprise that an ethnoreligious group, like the Amish, which has resisted the mainstream trend toward individualism, promotes family- and group-centric ideals even in the final stages of the life-journey. This paper explores a peculiar mortuary ritual among the Amish in Central Pennsylvania.¹ While observers can definitely explain its significance in light of anthropological theories of in-group cohesion, grief support, and ritual, we cannot completely ignore the historicity that such a ritual has, as it may not be practiced by any other group of Amish in the world. Its significance, as a characteristic trait of the Amish in northern Appalachia, warrants attention for further explanation of the diversity of an American ethnoreligious minority, which is sadly often thought as monolithic.

Necessary Background

The Amish are a group of sectarians found only in North America, though their roots can be traced to the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century in central Europe. In 1525, a group of men, seeking more radical reform to religion than their Protestant teacher, Ulrich Zwingli, baptized each other as adults in Zurich, Switzerland. Although each of the three men either died or were killed shortly thereafter, their baptisms sparked a movement, which went underground in defiance of state religious authorities throughout Europe. The group stressed nonconformity to the world, separation of church and state, pacifism, and adult baptism. As early as 1528, a communal branch of these adult baptizers, or Anabaptists, moved eastward into Austria, Moravia, Bohemia, Transylvania, Wallachia, and Russia until eventually arriving in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. As settlers of North and South Dakota and the prairie provinces of Canada, this group, the Hutterites, still stresses communal living on rural colonies.

The larger Swiss Brethren movement eventually followed the Rhine River through Germany and into the Netherlands. Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest who became a leader in the Netherlands, gave his name to the peaceable branch of the Anabaptists (Mennonites). However in 1693, a more conservative faction, led by an assertive Jacob Amman from the Alsace region in France, precipitated a schism in the Swiss Brethren church. Amman wanted foot-washing in worship services, communion twice a year, and shunning of excommunicated members. His church would also forever be associated with his name (Amish).²

Today, following several migrations to colonial America, the Amish number over 250,000 and double in growth every twenty years. They still practice the original tenets of Anabaptism and can readily be identified by their plain dress, headcoverings, worship in homes, travel by horse-and-buggy, and rejection of most modern technology.

An Amish Mortuary Ritual

From early settlements in southeastern Pennsylvania, the Amish have spread out, forming new daughter settlements throughout Pennsylvania, New York, the Midwest, the South, and Canada. Within Pennsylvania, the most familiar Amish are those in the Lancaster County settlement, identifiable with their gray buggies. However a variety of Amish in different regions of the commonwealth can be found. The Amish explored in this paper live in Kishacoquillas "Big" Valley. Big Valley is located in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, and has a population (both Amish and non-Amish) of about 14,000. The settlement began with three Amish families and was supplemented by more moving northward from an earlier Berks County, Pennsylvania, settlement. Topographically isolated, the Valley is narrow, level and bound on two sides by Standing Stone "Back" Mountain and Jack's "Front" Mountain.

Importantly, the history of the Anabaptists in Big Valley is one of schism and religious divergence. From the original Amish-only settlement, an array of Anabaptist groups has emerged. Hostetler (1993) separates the Valley into twelve distinct Anabaptist groups ranging from assimilated Mennonites to a group of the most conservative Amish in the world. He calls it an "Anabaptist continuum." Distinctive dress is important for all Old Order Amish groups in Big Valley for distinction from other Anabaptist and other Amish sects; additionally all Old Order groups in Big Valley use horse and buggy for transportation with the color of the buggy top being divergent. The Old School Amish, or Nebraska Amish, is one of three Old Order Amish sects in Big Valley. Nebraska Amish men wear white shirts, wide-brimmed hats, no suspenders or belts, and brown trousers. They drive white-topped buggies equipped with gas lanterns and no window panes. Women wear a flat, straw hat and brown dresses with aprons. They may not paint their barns or use modern farm equipment, window screens, curtains, or carpets. The Byler Amish is an Old Order Amish sect, whose men wear solid color shirts and have one suspender. Women wear brown bonnets. Unlike the Nebraska Amish, Bylers may use tractors in the barnyard, but still use horse-driven equipment in the field. Similar to the Nebraska, Bylers may not have carpets in their homes, though half-length curtains are allowed. The Renno Amish is the third Old Order Amish sect in Big Valley, which has frequent religious and marital contact with the Bylers. Their buggies have black tops and men wear black pants with solid color shirts, while women wear black bonnets and colored cape dresses. Carpets and window coverings are permitted. Houses and barns may be painted.³

Of the three groups, the most "peculiar" are the Old School "Nebraska" Amish, easily identified by their white buggies. The term "Nebraska" arose in 1881, after the church split from another Amish district in the northern end of Big Valley. Initially, church members wrote to Bishop Yost H. Yoder

(1842–1901) in Nebraska and asked for him to officially declare the legitimacy of the church. It was not until the church gained a member of the clergy from their original group that Bishop Yoder came and ordained Menno L. Yoder as bishop, David L. Hostetler as minister, and Jacob Zook as deacon. Several reasons have been cited as the cause for the split, among them are: disputes of clover seed, length of hair, and buggy style (Hurd 1981, ch. 2; Kauffman 1991, 119; Mook 1962). Mook (1962) also claims that the origin of the split is rooted in the 1863 split between the Peachey and Byler churches in Big Valley, and that the Nebraska Amish formed from a conservative hold-over. Additional splits within the church have occurred since 1881, namely a split in October 1922 over barn dances and overhanging eaves on homes (Hurd 1981, 34) and in Spring 1978 over chainsaws and the use of bulldozers to dig basements (Hurd 1981, 35–36). Recent interviews by Donald Kraybill (personal communication) also indicate the possibility of divisions since 2000, so that the number of Nebraska groups may be currently as many as four or five. In the Valley, the Nebraska groups are known colloquially as White-Toppers, or *Weiss-Wegli Leit*. They currently reside in Big Valley, as well as Snyder, Union, and Centre Counties. A 2004 population count of Nebraska Amish in Big Valley numbered 1,119 individuals with only five surnames represented (Friedrich 2004, 12, 14)

Of additional interest are the costumes and customs of the White-Toppers. The most researched aspects of their culture have been their textiles (Friedrich 2004; Weiser 1987, 1998) and mate selection (Hurd 1981). It is important to keep in mind that the White-Toppers are the most conservative Amish in the world as far as clothing is concerned, in that their clothing “represents a stylized form of [older] attire” resisting “innovations evident in other Amish attire” (Weiser 1989, 9).⁴ This paper will explore the funerary customs of the Nebraska people. It will be argued here that their funeral customs may exhibit similar conservatism as their dress.

Purpose of a Funeral Ceremony

The modern notions of a funeral in contemporary America, complete with sprays of flowers, beautifying the corpse, and the office of a funeral director are indeed very recent innovations in the United States (Mitford 1963, 190). The stark plainness of funerals had long dominated a nation founded by more austere Protestant groups. But movement away from simplicity in the stage of death and mourning from Puritanical practices can be readily observed in the ornateness-trajectory of tombstones and memorials (Thursby 2006, 20).⁵ Embalming was perfected after the Civil War and tombstones became elaborate reminders, *memento mori*, of an afterlife (Howarth 2007,

218). Funeral celebrations moved away from stark plainness toward frivolity of in-group camaraderie. The funeral celebration in the United States calls on the mourner as an animated and active participant, not only for grief support, but validation of our own society's norms. As such, the funeral ceremony (at least in the United States) has a focus not on the deceased but on the living.⁶

The Mortuary Ritual

Death, dying, and the funeral ceremony can be interpreted in large measure as rituals of culture. The overarching purpose of the mortuary ritual is to make the death public (Howarth 2007, 234). In making the event public, mourners are invited to participate in a larger and complex societal change—a change (or passage) from living to deceased and from living to mourner. As such the mortuary ritual is a rite of passage, one that shows a disconnect with a previous role in life and the incorporation of a new role (Rosenblatt et al. 1976, 87).

We are beholden to the early work of ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, who made “ritual” accessible to all cultures, significantly departing from the work of earlier evolutionary anthropologists, who focused on the ritual as a reaction to historical context. For his theoretical construct, the rite has meaning, regardless of its past associations (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 31). Van Gennep (2004) explained the tripartite nature of these *rites de passage* (rites of passage): *séparation* (separation), *marge* (liminality), and *agrégation* (incorporation)—the separation of living and dead, the transition into new societal roles, and the incorporation of the new role into the continued societal construct. It is through the manifestation of each of these parts that important values and beliefs of a culture can be scrutinized.

Looking solely at the rite of passage in death, Robert Hertz (1960), a sociologist and student of Durkheim, noted the three-purpose function of a mortuary ritual: disposal of the corpse, intercession in the fate of the soul, and reintegration of the mourners into the social fabric. I would like to stress this final point. It is through the mortuary ritual that a culture's people are allowed to accept a new status of the individual (as mourner or as self-defined void of the deceased) and to accept the new status of the deceased (as departed loved one) (Rosenblatt et al. 1976, 89). Because of this effort on the part of the participant in the mortuary ritual or death ceremony, society and culture can continue onward, assuming new roles, but nonetheless, diachronically defining their outward manifestation of identity and personhood. A ready example is that of the wailing Warao women with their polyphonic and intertextual tunes, which reinforce societal (and gender) distinctions of a society in transition at death (Briggs 1993).

In reinterpreting van Gennep's rites of passage, Thursby (2006, 46) changes "incorporation" to the more reciprocal idea of "connectedness." Perhaps this distinction better incorporates Hertz's ideas as well. The reciprocity of the deceased and the mourner—the role of each in the re-definition of the social fabric. This idea is nothing new, of course, for the Jews have long differentiated stages of their mourning period, *shivah*, not only for honoring and respecting the deceased, the *k'vod hamet*, but also (at a different stage) for consolation of the mourner, the *nichum aveilium* (Thursby 2006, 55).

Funerary Feasts

In studying the role of the mortuary ritual in society and culture, we cannot ignore the binding elements of the ritual. Two important elements are eating and drinking. Indeed Jews begin the *shivah* with a meal of comfort, the *seudat havra'ah*. And even contemporary Methodists in the Midwest include "cheesy funeral potatoes" in their cookbooks (Thursby 2006, 81). No less than eight major feasts are celebrated as funeral custom on the Tanga islands of Papua New Guinea, including the *moratineng* (one especially for the women who sat with and cried over the corpse) and a ritual exchange of food from the family in receipt of shell valuables from the funeral guests (Foster 1990). Conversely, the women who cry over and sit with the deceased in the island nation of Madagascar do not prepare or serve the funeral feast—a ritual taken over by the younger *ampela mahery*, "strong women" (Raharijona and Kus 2001).

It is through food that a culture can comfort and reaffirm a collective identity. Soul food of the group is indeed that. Food, which not only reminds us of our pasts, but sparks renewed interest and definition of ourselves. As such, the role of ethnic cuisine in the mortuary ritual is often a necessity. Not only does it affirm the identity of the group, but strengthens the relationships between members of that culture (Thursby 2007, 79). Some cultures in the world even engage in necrophagy (anthropophagy, or ritual cannibalism, of the deceased) ranging from consumption of just bone ashes throughout the Amazon and small pieces of flesh in Melanesia to the consumption of organ tissue among the Amazon's Warí (Conklin 1995).

Yet the solidifying effect of the funeral feast is not always stagnant against time and context, as the Malawi in southeastern Africa are currently abandoning the tradition of a funeral feast and funeral participation due to the high mortality rates of the AIDS crisis (Kiš 2007). All of these particulars are important, when we view the mortuary ritual as an uncertain time in newly defining roles and status within a culture—the necessity of having something, which binds a group together, something that can be shared by participants in mourning.

Additionally we find celebrations involving much drinking and socializing at funerals, for example among the Berewan in central northern Borneo and rum drinking at funerals among the Bara (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 64, 117).⁷ The Asante of Africa's western coast give the deceased water shortly after death in the hopes that it will strengthen them for a journey over the mountains into the great beyond—and the pouring of alcohol (though often in excess) and reciting of prayers ensure the loved one safe travels (Bonsu and DeBerry-Spence 2008). In Ireland, a “sin-eater” was traditionally paid to take on the deceased's earthly sins to allow them full entrance into heaven. Utilizing both elements of food and drink, the sin-eater needed to sit on the deceased and eat a loaf of bread and drink a certain amount of beer (Thursby 2006, 88). Indeed many western cultures in Europe (e.g. Italian, Basque, French, and Spanish) serve bread and wine before and after a funeral (Thursby 2006, 79). Older traditions in Alpine Swiss villages, also show the tradition of buying wine from the *Gemeindekeller* for funerals (Gibson and Weinberg 1980).

In the New World, the practice of serving alcohol at funerals was enough to distress Puritan Cotton Mather to denounce the drunken behavior of mourners (Mather 1713). Regardless, contemporary funerals still integrate alcohol. The pouring of beer and wine at the feet of a distraught father in the second line of a recent New Orleans's funeral parade is of note here (Regis 2001). And more recently in the American gangland, the ritual of “pouring one out for a homie” entails emptying a container, usually forty fluid ounces of malt liquor, onto a street curb for a deceased gang member (Miller 1991). Certainly a relationship between bread and alcohol and sins (sin-eating) can be drawn with the Holy Eucharist, an act still consecrated by many Catholics in the world at their funerals.

Pennsylvania Dutch Ways of Death

With regard to the food and drink funerary customs of far-off lands and cultures (explained above), the Pennsylvania Dutch had no less folklore or ritual attached to death. In 1768, Conrad Beissel's death in the Ephrata Cloister caused the Sisters of the group to turn every bottle and keg upside down to prevent food spoilage. Even some contemporary Pennsylvania Dutch might shake a vinegar bottle, thereby moving the *Essich-Mutter*, following the death of the woman of the household (Coffin 1976, 89). The underlying belief is that with the ruin of life comes potential ruin of food in the home. Traditionally the Pennsylvania Dutch delayed burial, in the hopes that life would return to the body. But after making sure that life was lost, burials were celebrated, as in other cultures, with *Seelesse* (soul food) at the *Leichtesse* (funeral

feast) (Brumbach 1964; Adams and Brumbach 1981; Shupp 1984). Coffin (1976, 87) sites a Pennsylvania Lutheran, who surmised that: "Our Germans look forward all of their lives to their funerals, hoping to be able to entertain their friends on that great occasion with the hospitality due them." So elaborate were the funeral feasts of the Pennsylvania Dutch that so-called "funeral runners," or *Mitesser*, appeared at every funeral possible only for the intention of partaking in the food and drink (editor's note in Brumbach 1964; Gilbert 1977, 8).⁸

Another food custom, this one adapted by the Pennsylvania Dutch from their English-neighbors in the eighteenth century, was the distribution of funeral biscuits (Weaver 1989, 111). These biscuits were typically served at funerals, and could have been eaten (Weaver 1989) or saved as another *memento mori*, a reminder of the life and death of a loved one (Thursby 2006). Coffin (1976, 70–71) gives the ingredients in funeral biscuits as: flour, sugar, butter, pearl ash salt, and caraway seed—markedly hard to the bite. These funeral cakes and alcohol were considered "staples" of early New England funerals (Geddes 1981). And the popularity of the funeral biscuit in Pennsylvania is noted as early as 1748 in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, where Benjamin Betterton's advertisement for "Burial Biscake" appeared (Weaver 1989, 108). Gottlieb Mittelberger, in his eighteenth century account of travels throughout Pennsylvania, noted that Pennsylvania Dutch funerals were celebrated like European weddings, complete with cake and West Indian rum (spiced with lemons, sugar and juniper berries) (1997, 114).

Alcohol consumption is also not unfamiliar to the Pennsylvania Dutch. The 1738 double-funeral of Dunkard leader Johannes Gumre and his wife Anna in Pennsylvania's Wissahickon Valley included expenses for breads, cakes, meats, cheese, butter, sugar and molasses (or rum, as Sachse [1899] points out). Generations later, Victor Dieffenbach recounted in funerary stories from his grandfather that the Pennsylvania Dutchmen would form a line in the yard just before leaving for the church and cemetery to pass down a bottle of rye whisky. After taking a sip, the bottle was passed to the next in line and so it went until each had imbibed a bit. If the father of the household died, then his oldest son assumed the role of "bottle-bearer" (Dieffenbach 1949).

The funeral ceremony among Amish groups is markedly different from the nonsectarian Pennsylvania Dutch. In fact Amish funeral rituals vary considerably by group affiliation. Most Amish prefer to die at home and as soon as a death is announced the entire community is set into action. The family does very little for the preparation of the funeral. A room in the home is prepared: cleaned and furniture removed. The body, except in the strictest of settlements, is removed to the funeral director's where it is embalmed and then returned. Upon returning, members of the Amish community wash and

prepare the body for the viewing. Both men and women may be dressed in white (the apron and dress of the woman is the same as that of her wedding day).⁹ In days leading up to the funeral, the *Leichtaasaager* (Hostetler 1993, 200–6) extends invitations to friends and family to attend the funeral.¹⁰

On the third day after death, the body is viewed. A one or two-hour service with silent prayer, spoken hymns, and sermons in the home follows the viewing (Tortora 1997).¹¹ In Big Valley, the funeral service is performed by one minister and there is no singing (Scott 1988). The body is then removed to the burial site, where a final viewing is done. Among the Nebraska Amish, the clergyman reads a hymn as the body is lowered into the ground.¹² Attendees are invited to silently say the Lord's Prayer (Scott 1988). After the plain wooden box is lowered into a plain wooden vault and the grave filled, the participants of the funeral ceremony return to the home for a large noon meal. The meal may consist of "mashed potatoes and gravy, cold beef and gravy, cole slaw, pepper cabbage, prunes, applesauce, cheese, bread, buns, and raisin pie or 'funeral pie'" (Tortora 1997, 136).¹³

Again the funeral custom of sharing the noon meal is one of role realization. As members of the community help in preparation of the meal, the participants rejoin to feast on ethnic soul foods and breathe new life into the home of the deceased. As such, "the bereaved experience a sense of belonging and togetherness" (Hostetler 1993, 206)—facets so important to the Amish way of life. As one Amishman recounted for Bryer (1979, 257): "The funeral is not for the one who died, you know; it is for the family."

Rumdraage

I had first heard about the Nebraska Amish in summer 2004, while visiting the late Reverend Fred Weiser at his home in New Oxford, Pennsylvania. Fred's work among the Nebraska people's textiles is unparalleled, as have been his many significant contributions to Pennsylvania Dutch studies. Fred recounted at that meeting on recently having been to a Nebraska viewing, when he was brought into the house of an Amish grandmother. He depicted the scene so vividly—being led by candlelight into a completely dark room, as the old woman's son lifted the flame to her cold face. He remarked that it felt as if he had stepped back into early colonial America.

Several years later, I had the opportunity to participate in an oral history project in Big Valley, interviewing members of several Anabaptist groups about cultural, religious and linguistic changes throughout their lifetimes (cf. Page and Brown 2007). And in summer 2007, while working as a collections processing assistant at The Pennsylvania State University Archives, I came across field notes and the mention of *Rumdraage* in the John A. Hostetler Papers.¹⁴ Hostetler noted that *Rumdraage* applied to serving bread and wine

during an Amish funeral. The bread, he noted, was a particular type of sweet bread, which only one woman in the community could bake.

A wonderful account of a Nebraska Amish funeral by Scott (1988) does mention this practice, but refers to it as a "refreshment." In a more structured ethnographic approach, I elicited information about the ritual from the Valley's Amish. They were generally aware of this unique custom. A bishop in the Renno church believed that the practice was still continued by the Nebraska. A bishop in the Byler church stated that his father-in-law remembers the ritual, but that it is no longer practiced in their church. He also indicated that *Rumdraage* occurred after the funeral service, before burial. A member of the Nebraska church confirmed the assertions of the others. He stated that *Rumdraage* is still practiced, much in the same way Amish communion is celebrated. Bread and cheese are carried in by the pallbearer's wife to the mourners seated in the house of the deceased. A bottle of wine and two small glasses on a plate are brought in by the pallbearer. The wine, bread, and cheese are passed to each of the mourners. Another pallbearer and wife may take some of the bread and wine outside to others. In this way, a type of "communion" is given to those in attendance.¹⁵

The question which looms is *why*. Why does this practice exist among such a small secluded group in Central Pennsylvania? Did other Amish groups also serve communion at funerals, but have since lost this practice? Examining the answers from members of the Black and Yellow Top Amish in the Valley, the answer to the second question would seem to be "yes." All of the Amish in Big Valley did serve bread and wine at a funeral at some time in their history. The practice has been since abandoned by all groups except the Nebraska. To the author's knowledge, no other Amish groups observe serving bread and wine during a funeral service.

One bishop suggested that the practice has roots in an interpretation of the *Apocrypha's Book of Tobit*. The *Apocrypha*, as noted by Hostetler (1993, 341), along with *The Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* seem to hold a special, even magical, place among the Amish. Indeed, contrary to most modern English versions of the Christian Bible, Luther's German version (still used by the Amish) does include the *Apocrypha*. The line in question is from Tobit 4:18 "Pour out thy bread and thy wine on the tomb of the just, and give not to sinners" (Charles 1913). Since some Amish groups still read the first four chapters of the *Book of Tobit* during their wedding ceremonies (cf. Hostetler 1993, 195) it would seem likely that this is the origin. However, the question still remains as to why other Amish, who read the same *Book of Tobit*, choose not to practice *Rumdraage*.

Perhaps we need to return to funeral biscuits—those tokens of memory passed around at funerals and adopted by the Pennsylvania Dutch in the

eighteenth century. In fact, Weaver (1989, 110) notes that the hard biscuits were dipped in fruit wine or beer at the funeral. Additionally, the manner in which they were served (taken from a Lutheran account in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania) is strikingly similar to that of the Nebraska Amish *Rumdraage*: the daughter serves bread and cakes on a large pewter plate and the son serves whisky or wine from a cup on a plate (Weaver 1989, 110). As with their textiles, being holdovers from a distant past, so too may their funeral traditions be holdovers of early colonial mortuary rituals in Pennsylvania.

Conclusion

We are left, in the end, with more questions than answers. The exact root of *Rumdraage* is unclear. Is it simply one group's interpretation of the *Apocrypha*? Or is it a holdover from an earlier funerary practice of serving funeral biscuits? We cannot be certain of either. Geographically, Big Valley's secluded nature and relative isolation from many other Amish groups might make it a prime location for both the innovation and continuance of a unique custom. However, its location on the fringe of the original area of Pennsylvania Dutch settlement might speak against the continuance of the funeral biscuit tradition. We are content, though, that it is not completely unlikely that the Mifflin County Amish did not simply adapt this English biscuit custom and preserve it through modernity. A ready example of just such a cultural bridge is the St. Michael's Day celebration of Goose Day in Big Valley. This affair, claimed to be a holdover from the county's earlier Scottish and Irish inhabitants, celebrating the day on which a landlord was paid a goose by his tenants, is not without an Amish spin. Oral tradition, recounted by Julia Spicher Kasdorf (personal communication) attests that the origin of the custom lies with an astute Amishwoman, who capitalized on the day by selling her home-raised geese.

The story of *Rumdraage* is unfortunately incomplete, yet its integration into current studies on both funerary customs and Amish sociology/anthropology make its discussion both necessary and valid. Indeed it seems that scholars have much to explore in cultures in our very own backyards. Its discussion here also makes a comprehensive Pennsylvania Dutch dictionary even more complete. The discussion of a single Pennsylvania Dutch lexical item over pages in this manuscript is a testament to the comprehensive and imperfect nature of the dictionary project, showing that there is much to be done in both Pennsylvania Dutch lexicography and Pennsylvania Dutch studies. Moreover, the preservation of this ritual (now in print and not just in practice) ensures the more complete description of America's Anabaptist culture and society (only casual references are given in Scott 1988 and Hostetler 1993). For it is often the ritual that is lost to time and unfortunately

unrecoverable by archeology, which otherwise successfully informs contemporary society about mortuary customs (Trinkaus 1984).

The unique practice of a Protestant group celebrating a communion-like ritual at the funeral ceremony is remarkable. Early German Protestants sought to make their funerals rather sparse—usually just a procession, hymn at the grave, and burial with the role of the clergy reduced to a minimum (Koslofsky 2000). Special altars for the communion rite were also avoided, further separating Catholic ritual from Protestant ritual (Reinis 2007, 257). As such, the funeral took on a more social role for the group and less of a religious role. It would be interesting to take that early Protestant analysis into consideration with *Rumdraage*. Is Scott (1988) correct in referring to it as “refreshment,” even with the presence of bread and wine. In other words, does *Rumdraage* serve an overt religious function, as communion, or an overt social function, as strengthening cohesion?¹⁶

We note, though, that complex rituals are often linguistically named, just as *Rumdraage*, as in *kabary* marriage requests studied by Ochs Keenan (1973), where phases of the ritual are identified by illocutionary-act names. In comparison, the verbal action-oriented ritual names are often employed for textually based rituals via the first utterance, e.g. *Kýrie eléision*, *Hail Mary*, and *Shima*.¹⁷ The use of the action-oriented “to carry around” word for the ritual is not coincidental, by locating the “here-and-now” of the ritual (cf. Silverstein 2004). Moreover the naming of a ritual, at least in English, often shows a structured “procedure” with both “a sense of collective or communal enactment that is purposive . . . and an awareness that they are different from ‘ordinary’ everyday events” (Tambiah 1979, 116–17). In effect, the word *Rumdraage* conveys not only the act of the ritual in the action-oriented verbal *draage* ‘to carry,’ but also conveys the communal instantiation of the ritual itself with *rum* ‘around (to every mourner).’ As such, *Rumdraage* not only typifies the collective and communal—the carrying around to each person—but also the purposive, by using a verbal form for the action posits the motion, the deed, as foremost. Moreover, the elements of the ritual cannot be discounted as coincidental: on the one hand, wine and bread as symbols of communion and in turn the ethereal body (and blood) of Christ and on the other, cheese, the decayable empirical “body,” not unknown to German immigrants as a food staple and symbol of hospitality.¹⁸

Regardless, its function within the community is clear. Naturally the practice complements the rite of passage. That a religious custom has gravity for an ethnoreligious minority is without question. In sharing—literally, in communing—with each other, the group’s religious and social fabric remain intact. In death (in change), continuance of a shared custom becomes paramount and the symbolism of the Eucharist, taken only during the year when

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the entire Amish congregation is in peaceful accord, exhibits a light of continuance (perhaps even survival) in the darkness and uncertainty of death.

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Notes

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² For a more thorough discussion of Anabaptist history cf. Hostetler (1974; 1993), Kraybill and Bowman (2001), Kraybill and Hurd (2006) and Nolt (2003).

³ Additional information on the Amish of Big Valley is found in Hayes (1946), Mook (1976), Peachey (1930), Stroup (1965).

⁴ Another Amish group, the Swartzentrubers, are (at least in some respects) more conservative than the Nebraska.

⁵ Notable exceptions to this are the Quakers, Shakers, and Amish.

⁶ This is not necessarily unique to the United States, or even "western" culture. Buddhist practices insist that funeral ceremonies for those who live after 80 years are to be celebrations of life and not death (Thursby 2006, 33).

⁷ Malagasy funerals are said to be not only "bawdy" but inspire "drunken revelry" due to the fact this culture views the deceased as in limbo and isolated and, therefore, in need of entertainment (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 112).

⁸ Coffin (1976, 88) gives us a wonderful old adage said around Lebanon, Pennsylvania in bygone days about such *Mitesser*: "A funeral's not a funeral without a corpse and Eddie Sussekuche."

⁹ This may indicate the lifelong preparation of death (Bryer 1979).

¹⁰ The practice is comparative not only in custom, but also linguistically, to the *aanspreeker* in Dutch New Amsterdam, who announced deaths along the Hudson River in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Coffin 1976, 69). Other Pennsylvania Pietist groups also had inviters (*Einlader, Anzeiger*) to their funerals (Sachse 1899).

¹¹ Tortora's (1997) account is consistent with the Amish in Lancaster County. Other Amish groups do have singing at their funerals. The descriptions of "the Amish" throughout this text are, in parts, necessarily generic. The Amish cannot be considered monolithic.

¹² Reading a hymn is of course mirrored in earlier Pennsylvania Dutch funeral ceremonies, where hymns were sung at the grave. A practice traceable to earlier German Protestant tradition (Ebert 1789).

¹³ In this final respect, the Amish parallel the Pennsylvania Dutch (*Leichtboi*, Gilbert 1977, 8, Shupp 1984, 9; Gehris 1985) and other New Englanders.

¹⁴ The John A. Hostetler Papers, along with the existing Chris Gaines Memorial Library collection, and the newly arrived Getrude Huntingdon Papers, are housed within the Special Collections Library at The Pennsylvania State University. These collections plus the Harmony Society Collection, the Ammon Stapleton Collection, Pennsylvania German Broad-sides and Fraktur, and the Allison-Shelley Collection of German Literature in Translation make Penn State's Special Collections Library one of the largest and most comprehensive facilities for German-American (especially Anabaptist) research in the country.

¹⁵ Although, I am certain that only baptized members may partake in the communion, other Anabaptist conventions (i.e., communion only when the membership is in accord) may not necessarily be met. As such this ritual may not be an exact duplicate of the communion rite, but rather a symbolic feasting with religious undertones.

¹⁶ We can compare the social function of cohesion with other practices, like that of Old Order River Brethren women baking bread for the love-feast (Reynolds 2001).

¹⁷ Many thanks to Michael Silverstein for bringing this to my attention.

¹⁸ Again, my thanks to Michael Silverstein for this helpful analogy.

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