

The Mother Tongue at School
Jacob Grimm and the Institutions of Nation Building

The Nation and the Mother Tongue

In the modern age, political rule obtains legitimacy when it is sensitive to and grounded in the people – this was a premise shared even by the politically cautious Jacob Grimm and his peers among the moderate liberals and constitutional monarchists in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, this post-revolutionary conception of political legitimacy introduced a problem of delineation. What were the boundaries of the people, in the name of which rule could secure legitimacy? How could anyone draw clear lines around the collective self of collective self-rule? In the face of these difficulties of definition, nationalists like Grimm stood ready to supply an answer to the question of the appropriate political unit, its coherence and integrity. The national people, they claimed, was already naturally given, bound together as it were by a shared history, a homeland, a common culture but, above all, a language with ancient roots, a medium of mutual understanding that constituted indisputable proof of its natural cohesiveness. An absolutely minimal nationalist requirement for legitimate rule was thus that whoever ruled spoke the people's language. Linguistically and culturally, like should rule over like. The figure able to discern the linguistic and cultural boundaries of the people with scientific precision was, finally, the grammarian or philologist.

Yet if the philologist was to determine the true boundaries of the collective by studying the borders of languages and divide up speakers into non-overlapping groups, it should not be possible to gain entrance to a people by working deliberately to learn its language. Such opportunities would render the people too porous and confound the delineation. Only *native* speakers, those for whom the language was a “mother tongue,” were guaranteed inclusion. National belonging was reserved for individuals who had absorbed their language in a particularly natural way, as evidenced by their easy mastery, free from any touch of foreign awkwardness. When the

philologist separated peoples from one another, then, he would listen only to mother tongues. This delimiting and restricting function of the mother tongue, the one special language learned early and unconsciously and therefore spoken authentically and effortlessly, borrowed its plausibility from images of the maternal body, icons of the mother caring for and nursing a child who imbibed both its first nourishment and its language through a close familial relationship.¹ In the nationalist imagination, the political legitimacy ensured through the self-rule of the nationally defined people rested upon an iconography of the singularly intimate mother-child relationship. In Germany around 1800, the book market saw a stream of tracts and primers on maternal education, in which the mother was presented as the proper, indeed irreplaceable source of the child's linguistic ability and alphabetization; basic cultural skills were not to be taught formally by some authority but transmitted in the medium of motherly love.²

Jacob Grimm frequently invoked the concept of the mother tongue and painted scenes of the child learning the language from the loving mother. "The first words," he stated in his 1851 lecture on the origin of language held in Berlin, "the baby hears at the maternal breast, spoken by the soft and gentle voice of the mother."³ The mother alone, he also wrote, conveyed "most indelibly [*unvertilgbarsten*]" our sense of "home and fatherland."⁴ In a preface to his friend Vuk Karadžić's Serbian grammar, he spoke of the gift of language that everyone receives or "sucks in" with the "mother's milk."⁵ The uniquely local subtleties and variations of a dialect, he wrote in an essay on the German comic author Jean Paul, were absorbed with the *muttermilch* [mother's milk] and would remain foreign to every stranger.⁶ For Jacob Grimm, everyone had a mother tongue, the language learned first and most intimately. Latin had served as the language of the clergy and the professoriate, and French had been the language of courtly circles, but German had truly belonged to the mothers, partly because they had always been less educated.⁷

Even in Grimm's age, however, language was not learned exclusively in the mother's embrace and from the mother's mouth. The standardized, codified national tongue, typically spoken by millions of individuals over several provinces, had already begun to be taught in the institutional infrastructure of primary education, through schooling mandated by the state. The children of the nation spoke the same language and lived in an area of mutual comprehensibility that made them a people partly because they had all been exposed to a similar curriculum, taught by instructors going through similar forms of teacher training; "schools," a historian of

culture states simply, “removed children from their local and familiar culture.”⁸

Nationalists of Grimm’s era understood that the school served as an indispensable instrument of nation building,⁹ and yet they preferred the image of the mother whispering to her child over the image of the schoolteacher instructing his pupils, for an honest recognition of mass schooling could suggest that the nation represented a willed political project rather than a natural, pre-political ground. The emphasis on mass instruction instead of motherly speech could disturb the conception of legitimacy according to which political rule must respect the given boundaries among entirely natural communities. For Jacob Grimm specifically, the recognition that nationhood was partially the outcome of large-scale schooling efforts would also sideline the figure of the philologist, whose political vocation depended on the importance of mediation between the natural community of the people and the ruling elite. A full account of schooling and its effects would force him to admit that a people could to some extent be *made* by top-down institutional means rather than discovered by means of philological research.

Living in the era of a massive expansion of increasingly state-supervised primary schooling, Grimm commented on the early nineteenth-century push toward universal literacy within German-speaking territories. He welcomed the prospect of gradual unification, linguistic and therefore also political, but believed that it would likely have to occur at the expense of regional linguistic variation. Grimm, both an advocate of political unity on a linguistic basis and an expert on indigenous folk traditions rooted in particular localities, was thus caught in a bind. He was compelled to reconcile his political support for the advancement of one unifying national language with his deep appreciation of provincial and often opaque local speech, and he had to resolve the tension between the implementation of a politically crucial transregional linguistic standard and the unplanned evolution of a genuine folk idiom. To return to the nationalist mother-child iconography, Grimm’s writings had to find some way of harmonizing a powerful institutional tool of nation building – universal schooling – with the predilection for the icon of intimacy and naturalness that helped separate speakers into authentic and inauthentic ones – the maternal body. Grimm was in other words forced to present a plausible relationship between the iconography of the mother from whom language could be soaked up naturally and the image of the teacher who taught a regimented, standardized language at school.

The Mother Tongue and the Rise of Mass Schooling

In 1849, Grimm gave a lecture on institutions of education in the Prussian Academy of the Sciences in Berlin. He had joined the academy as a regular member in 1832, when he lived in Göttingen, but once he had relocated to Berlin, he gave more than twenty lectures, from 1842 to 1859, mostly on philological topics.¹⁰ Work on the immense German dictionary, *Grimms Wörterbuch*, was begun under the auspices of the academy.¹¹ The 1849 lecture, however, treated a different and more sociological theme, namely the completed modern educational system as an organized series of credentializing institutions.¹² Its title simply lists three institutions without any mark or conjunction – “school university academy [*schule universität akademie*]”¹³ – and the lecture that followed suggested that they constitute an ascending sequence of levels.¹⁴ First all children attend schools to learn elementary required skills; then a smaller number of students are admitted to universities to explore fields of knowledge of their own choice; and, finally, an exclusive group of university-educated scholars gather in academies to exchange research findings. School, university, and academy appeared as interlocking institutions, each focusing on a particular step: teaching, teaching and research, and research alone.

Each of these institutions, Grimm believed, also stood in a unique relationship to the German nation, or ought to stand in one. The university, Grimm observed, had long provided German-speaking lands with a transregional institutional network and was widely recognized as a particularly German achievement, even the envy of other nations.¹⁵ In addition, the universities in Germany were very much bases for the propagation of nationalist ideas in nineteenth-century German lands¹⁶ and themselves reinforced national unity with the help of national scientific journals and national professional congresses such as the first Germanist convention in 1846. In contrast, Grimm deemed the academy, a body typically sponsored by a court, an import from French culture that did not quite tie the German states together.¹⁷ In the lecture to his peers in the Prussian academy, Grimm called for a new German national academy, an institutional body that would recognize that the enterprise of science had become a national rather than a regional, principality-based endeavor.¹⁸

The link between the school and the nation was a little more complex, and Grimm did not laud primary education or call for its complete national extension. If anything, he approached state-mandated schooling as the relative novelty that it was, acknowledging its rapid rise in Prussia

and elsewhere in German lands during his lifetime without granting it an inevitable existence. His observations conveyed an historical reality. Schools were in no way a nineteenth-century invention: hundreds of schools were established in Prussia in the 1730s and there were school-compulsion laws in the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Still, military defeat in the Napoleonic wars had contributed to a renewed and intensified effort to extend public education. At the same time, the focus on religious conformity under church supervision was gradually replaced by state-organized schooling with the aim of creating a literate and loyal citizenry.²⁰ In his 1849 lecture, Grimm was clearly concerned with this current form of state-organized schooling.

Grimm's attitude to the rise of mass schooling was ambivalent to say the least. He opened his reflections on the school with a question, a fundamental one, namely whether schooling was or was not necessary: "Must human beings go to school? [*Musz denn der mensch zu schule gehen?*]"²¹ His answer to this question was negative. Human beings did not in fact have to go to school, since they could learn plenty of things at home, all that they really needed, from their parents, their siblings, and their neighbors. The son of the farmer learned to work on the farm, the daughter in the household learned how to run it, and both learned how to speak the language of their family and environment. No pedagogically informed instruction outside of the familial unit and hence no public institution staffed by a distinct group of instructors were necessary for children to learn the tongue spoken by the parents, the language that could legitimately be called the mother tongue and gave them community membership.

Yet human beings did go to schools in early nineteenth-century Germany and Grimm knew well the rationale behind near-comprehensive and compulsory primary education, namely the achievement of universal literacy. Despite his preference for local and familial contexts of learning, Grimm hesitantly appreciated the value of the specifically modern project of mass learning. The basic aim of mandatory schooling was, Grimm reported, to ensure that all children "without exception" learn how to read and write in a medium of communication with a wide, national reach, skills that had become so vital that Grimm did not quite feel the need to outline their particular purposes.²² His silence indicates perhaps that literacy no longer possessed one exclusive function, such as the religious one of basic access to the Bible, but instead constituted a general requirement in the institutional and media landscape of the day. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, more and more institutions and activities presupposed literacy: the

military and navy supplied officers with manuals and maps, merchants dealt with contracts and accounts, the legal profession as well as any encounter with it obviously involved paper work, as did state administration, and the volume of newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, handbooks, and novels increased rapidly.²³ Grimm had to admit, however, that the language that the pupils were supposed to learn to read, write, and properly speak in school as future members of a literate national citizenry was not exactly the mother tongue, but rather the language of the schoolteacher, which in no way ranked as of superior quality. Teachers even routinely abused the native rules of language, the *angeborene sprachregel*, Grimm claimed.²⁴ Compulsory primary education organized by German states had become inescapable, Grimm conceded, but for those who cared about language or the integrity of the mother tongue, this institutionalized teaching did not constitute an advance.

Grimm recognized the modern necessity of teaching rudimentary reading and writing, and he did express support for the idea of a single national language. The unity of a *written* German language, Grimm announced in a preface to the 1822 edition of his *German Grammar*, could not come at too high a price,²⁵ for it served as a continual reminder of a shared German descent and functioned as an indispensable medium of the present German community. Such unity could be achieved without the introduction of mandatory schooling, but the school introduced reading and writing in this language to the totality of the nation's children. Even when it was taught imperfectly, instruction in and use of German across all institutions of education, from primary school to the university, represented for Grimm a triumph of the national over the foreign and the classical.²⁶ Grimm had arrived at a compromise position: he was not convinced of the quality of mass education and regretted the diminished linguistic role of the home and the family, yet he understood the great value of schooling to the project of nation building.

Many decades before his lecture to the academy in Berlin and some years before he commenced his grammatical studies, however, the young Jacob Grimm had been much less willing to accept the intrusion of teachers in the spontaneous familial process of language learning. A letter that he wrote as a young man to Friedrich Carl von Savigny evinced a more principled resistance to instruction in German to German-speaking children. Educational reform, he wrote in 1814, may well damage the natural linguistic competence fostered in small-scale communities. To learn a language at school, Grimm reasoned, was to learn to apply a set of rules, whereas the language spoken at home was learned naturally, without

the mediation of explicitly stated conventions. Those who went to school, Grimm continued, learned to read and write their supposed “mother tongue [*Muttersprache*]” through a codified form and could begin to view German as if it were a foreign language, while being deprived of their local dialect.²⁷ It was appropriate to learn Latin or Greek in school, since the acquisition of these traditionally taught languages would not upset the automatic absorption of local speech, but that which was already one’s own should not be presented, through formalized teaching, as if it came from without. The native, *das einheimische*, did not amount to a kind of knowledge or defined skill to be acquired; it should come as naturally as breathing.²⁸ In Grimm’s view, then, teachers turned the native German tongue into something alien. Even in the 1819 preface to the first volume of the German grammar, he wrote that school instruction could interfere with the “free development of the child’s capacity for language [*die freie entfaltung des sprachvermögens*].” The sounds of the “fatherland,” he continued, enter the child with the “mother’s milk [*muttermilch*],” and not through the instruction of the schoolteacher.²⁹

When Grimm spoke to the academy in Berlin about schooling roughly three decades later, however, the early opposition to the teaching of German had faded. He continued to believe that inadequately trained schoolteachers were likely to corrupt young speakers with their faulty teaching of grammar, but he no longer argued against primary education. It was evidently not too late to pose a fundamental question in a more philosophical vein – “must human beings go to school?” – and yet much too late to demand that society dismantle its institutions of schooling. Even by the second decade of the nineteenth century, after Grimm’s letter to Savigny, the great majority of both German liberals and German conservatives had come to accept mandatory schooling as a basic feature of society and an instrument for (liberal) reform and formation or (conservative) social control.³⁰ The educable masses and the schooled society were no longer, as in the eighteenth century, visions or ideas, but a reality to be shaped or modified rather than eliminated.

With no hope for limits to the school system and its curriculum, Grimm instead marveled at its sheer scale. There were, he mentioned in his academy address, 15 million people in Prussia, and about 30,000 schoolteachers, roughly one for every group of 50 pupils, according to his calculations. The other German-speaking lands employed around 50,000–60,000 teachers, a figure that Grimm believed may be larger than in other European countries and hence testified to the pan-German commitment to schooling: “Germany,” he concluded, “is a country of

school masters.³¹ All in all, Grimm believed that about 80,000–90,000 schoolteachers contributed to the rise and dominance of a more or less uniform national language, numbers that appear in modern-day scholarship as well.³² Whether or not the teachers guarded or corrupted the authentic mother tongue, the trend toward universal schooling was irreversible.

Against this backdrop, Grimm ceased to question the institution of the school and chose instead to focus on the political fights that had emerged within it or over it. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were a number of conflicts. First of all, schoolteachers themselves complained about their situation. As a group in society, they were struggling to obtain higher compensation and enhanced professional reputation and met with multiple obstacles, such as the gulf between schoolteachers and credentialized academics, the subordination of teachers under local pastors, poor teacher training, and the reluctance of local communities to pay for instruction.³³ As a state servant well aware of his societal location, Grimm stood firmly against the schoolteachers' desire for elevated prestige. In his lecture, he indicated that he wanted to maintain the comparatively low status of the elementary schoolteachers, against the efforts of the group's more restless and radical representatives, whose alleged ties to communists he deemed quite plausible.³⁴ (Only about 1 percent of schoolteachers were actually politically involved.³⁵) As a delegate to the Frankfurt assembly in 1848, Grimm reported, he had found himself inundated with schoolteacher petitions for higher pay and improved legal standing, both of which he considered unsuitable to the important but still cognitively modest schoolhouse tasks. Human beings had to go to school and hence tens of thousands of primary schoolteachers had to be employed and paid; yet this stubborn fact about modern society did not, Grimm believed, need to be glorified in a way that would suggest any meaningful social proximity of local schoolteachers to the well-educated instructors and professors in the much more selective and demanding institutions of the gymnasium and the university.

In some way, the gradually fading importance of Latin in higher education, symbolized by Grimm's own advocacy for Germanic philology, was blurring the social border between the learned man and the simple teacher. Knowledge of Latin had traditionally drawn a conspicuous social boundary around the men of letters in European society,³⁶ and hence Grimm's lifelong efforts to enhance the aura of the vernacular served to soften the line between the erudite elite and low-level teachers. Yet it was clearly important to Grimm to maintain the social barrier, proud as he was of his position as a professional working for the state. Despite the rise of

state-mandated schooling and dedicated teacher seminars in the nineteenth century, the teacher remained a low-status figure compared with the prestigious circle of university professors;³⁷ Grimm had no interest in changing this. The schoolteacher, he insisted, did not need or deserve the status of a civil servant.

By 1849, then, Grimm had partially overcome some of his anti-institutional impulse, his radical emphasis on the natural, the native, and the local, and accepted an accomplished fact: schools and schoolteachers were everywhere, in every German land, province, and village. Germany was well on its way to becoming a society of schools or what the historian Thomas Nipperdey has called a schooled over over-schooled society, *verschulte Gesellschaft*, in which school attendance had been installed as a nonnegotiable obligation for all.³⁸ Yet Grimm had clearly not overcome his social bias against schoolteachers and was not willing to grant them higher status. Nor did he think that the mere ubiquity of the school suddenly rendered the institution a more appropriate vessel for the mother tongue. For Grimm, the separation between the genuine mother tongue and the schoolmaster's taught idiom remained in force. Even so, the older Grimm tried to reduce the contrast between the polar figures of the mother and the teacher. Rather than posit a clear opposition between the family and the school, he now searched for some way to draw them closer to each other.

The schoolteacher was not the mother and yet, it turns out, not far removed from the maternal body. In his academy lecture, Grimm likened the schoolteacher to the figure of the *Amme*, the wet nurse, the woman who provides the child with nourishment and comfort, breastfeeds it and cares for it, but is not the birth mother: "a teacher, who like a wet-nurse [*amme*] holds the breast toward the infant, pours in the simple food of the first knowledge into the child, nourishes, prepares and instructs it in all things."³⁹ This image of breastfeeding was not a slip on Grimm's part but an attempt to give the teacher a place in relation to the nationalist imagery of the mother tongue. The pupil, Grimm continued, would even learn at the breast of the teacher, absorbing the "first milk [*ersten milchs*]" of learning.⁴⁰ In the 1849 lecture, then, the teacher had begun to morph into something like a mother. Grimm tried to justify this peculiar blending of disparate figures with linguistic material. Hallowed words for teaching and instruction in classical languages, Grimm pointed out, derived from ancient terms for wet nurse; the position of the teacher as an acceptable substitute for the mother had an ancient pedigree.⁴¹

Grimm's metaphor of the wet nurse was meant to sanctify the local teacher, without granting him a more elevated social status vis-à-vis

instructors at the higher levels of teaching and research. He intended to establish the teacher's relative nearness and closeness rather than his intrusiveness and strangeness and did so with the help of imagery that clearly feminized this figure: the teacher was not the mother, but a close approximation – and hence at a remove from the male civil servant. Following the logic of his image, we could say that the children would not exactly learn a mother tongue at school, but the tongue of their *surrogate* mother. After the introduction of state-mandated education in the mid-nineteenth century, after the establishment of school houses in each and every German town, all of which provided training in reading and writing of a transregional language, the population would learn to write and perhaps also to speak neither a genuine mother tongue nor an essentially foreign language, but some close approximation of what Grimm considered the most natural idiom: a surrogate mother tongue.

Grimm's attempt to mediate between the mother tongue and the school took the form of a trope: teaching in the era of mass schooling inevitably involved the supplementation or replacement of the mother. The addition of the wet nurse to the iconography of the maternal represents a kind of compromise image. The ideological motivation for this argument by imagery ought to be clear. If the age of mass schooling put pressure on the iconography of the mother-child relationship supposed to anchor the intimacy of the mother tongue that protected exclusive national membership, then the unity of the nation, and with it the idea of legitimate political rule, could be preserved by the expansion of the maternal. When the nationalist conception of the mother tongue as the basis for natural national membership was brought into contact with the undeniable fact of mass schooling, the teacher had to be converted into a motherly figure.

Mandatory Schooling and Military Service

Must human beings go to school? Grimm's answer to the question was no, if humans were simply supposed to learn to speak their mother tongue, but the answer was yes if they were to become members of a nation of millions of people; the answer was emphatically yes if they were to become loyal subjects of a state willing to take up arms to defend its integrity. In an early nineteenth-century Germany shaken by Napoleon's victories, mass schooling emerged as a potentially effective means of forging a more compact and disciplined citizenry, just as it had long been an institutional device of ecclesiastical authorities to ensure conformity with religious dogma.⁴² To this day, mass education remains

a preferred instrument for governments that want to “indoctrinate previously unschooled populations into a coherent, shared national identity and establish a common, durable, national loyalty that supersedes previous ethnic, family, and kinship ties, inoculates the population from external agitation, and ensures resistance to alien rule.”⁴³ In his study of nationalism, the sociologist Ernest Gellner even ranks the importance of the state’s monopoly over the means of instruction higher than its monopoly over the means of coercion, for the former establishes a common standard of linguistic proficiency and cultural competence that facilitates uniformity and communicative ease across a large region and in that process builds a widely shared attachment.⁴⁴

One can ask, though, attachment to what? Conationals, Gellner claims, are not necessarily loyal to the same king or the same God but rather to the same school culture, which formed them and to which they owe their social membership and employability in an anonymous but culturally standardized society. This may have been an intuition shared by nineteenth-century government elites who found themselves increasingly reliant on armies raised by conscription. Facing the threat of defeat and dissolution, they set out to expand the school system to provide a public good to a population on which it now depended militarily but also to homogenize that population’s varied local cultures and give a consistent national shape to its allegiances.⁴⁵ Schooled subjects were given the opportunity to achieve literacy and numeracy, skills of increasing utility within a national territory, but they were also introduced to standardized narratives meant to foster a uniform cultural identity that could underpin mass loyalty. In this way, the school system represented a sort of historical bargain between rulers and populations.

Early German nationalists in Grimm’s intellectual milieu did observe the close link between universal schooling and state loyalty, between the obligation to attend school and the obligation to fight for the country.⁴⁶ The school as an instrument of national military preparation appeared in Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation*, which, as we know, the young Grimm hailed as one of the finest books ever written.⁴⁷ A system of national education supervised by the state rather than the church or local authorities, Fichte claimed, would undoubtedly be a costly enterprise and yet he promised it would prove an exceptionally wise investment in the state’s future military capacity. With great confidence, Fichte envisaged a straight path from the state schools to the military barracks; a properly and uniformly schooled people would be a people ready for mobilization, unyielding in war.⁴⁸

Fichte was hardly the first to tout the link between schooling and loyalty, and discussions of a school system took place among governing elites in the Holy Roman Empire as early as the 1770s.⁴⁹ Around the time that he gave his nationalist lecture series in French-occupied Berlin, Prussian elite reformers had begun to explore very seriously the possibility of a large-scale schooling expansion and reform. After Napoleon's humiliating defeat, they, too, considered investments in primary education a means to winning future wars. Schools could increase incentives to fight by linguistically integrating and instilling patriotism in an otherwise scattered, culturally fragmented, and hence reluctant population. Every citizen should receive a measure of instruction, the Prussian king advised after the Franco-Prussian treaty of Tilsit in the summer of 1807, through which Prussia was stripped of almost half of its territories and people.⁵⁰ Post-defeat schooling efforts did have noticeable effects: literacy rates in Prussia were very high prior to 1800, but illiteracy became negligible in the male cohort born between 1837 and 1841, the period just before Grimm arrived in Berlin.⁵¹ European military rivalry drove the expansion and consolidation of schooling.

Grimm exhibited no overt enthusiasm for arming whole peoples in his lecture on educational institutions in 1849, but he did think of the school curriculum as a means to reduce foreign influence on German culture. He also chose to convey this view in martial rhetoric. Cultural and literary accomplishments, he wrote, must be achieved with one's "own weapons [*eigenen Waffen*]," that is, in and with the national language rather than a classical or transnational one.⁵² The emergence of German as a fully developed literary language, which had culminated in distinctive masterpieces such as Goethe's poems, justified the desired dominance of the vernacular across the institutions of learning, including the university. Yet the idea of a nation in arms was also present in Grimm's account of national education, although it was lodged in the lecture's imagery. He called the tens of thousands of schoolmasters throughout Prussia and the rest of Germany a vast "army [*heer*]" of teachers and mandatory primary education the *heerstrasse für alle kinder*, the "great military road for all children."⁵³ At the level of metaphor at least, Grimm associated the agents of instruction with the massive armies that first appeared in the Napoleonic age. If nothing else, sheer scale allowed for an association between the modern mandatory school and the modern conscription-based military.

When one surveys the various images of the instructor in Grimm's lecture, one could say that he pictured the individual schoolteacher as

both a surrogate mother and a member of a military-scale collective, both a wet nurse and a foot soldier. This split characterization of the teacher in the schooling system, distributed over the pages on primary education, is not an unfortunate case of mixed metaphors but reflects the ideological construction of nationhood. The national subjects taught at school were the potential members of a future army ready to do battle for their nation: as Fichte stated explicitly, one prominent ideological aim of education, perhaps the most prominent, was to generate a loyal national citizenry. At the same time, the national language had to remain a mother tongue, that is, the linguistic criterion of this national membership had to be naturalized in such a way that the national collective, however large and dispersed, retained the semblance of a familial community. The schoolteachers of the nation indirectly prepared the children for the defense of the state and must in this capacity plausibly stand in for the mother as the icon of symbiotic intimacy, because only the caring, nourishing maternal body guaranteed the depth and authenticity of national belonging. Given nationalism's double preference for the maternal and the martial, it is fitting that Grimm's schoolteacher appeared, over the course of his lecture, as both a substitute mother and an infantry soldier. The teacher who cared for the children like a wet nurse was also a member of a vast army.

National Schooling and the National Archive

Through a constellation of metaphors, Grimm captured the double task of the school to sustain the idea of an intimate linguistic communion and community across generations and to prepare large cohorts for duties in the service of the state. The schoolhouse was a substitute home as well as the first station on the way to military service. If Grimm expressed only lukewarm enthusiasm for schooling, it was, again, because of its deleterious effect on unique local habits of speech. It was primarily as a scholar of folk tradition that he deemed the price of mandatory education high. The young Grimm noticed how schooled children tended to unlearn the dialects that may have been almost entirely incomprehensible to German speakers of other regions, and the older, distinguished member of the Prussian academy speaking in 1849 remained aware of the fact that the schoolteacher's standardized tongue amounted to an assault on local cultural integrity in the very varied German lands.

To root out dialects and replace them with a purified national idiom was not infrequently an expressed aim of education and Grimm understood

and regretted this fact.⁵⁴ Grimm viewed schooling as accompanied by the threat of a future retreat and even extinction of linguistic variety, a process that did take place during the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Apprehensive of a cultural uniformity enforced by a coercive state eager to dissolve the semi-opacity of local communities and integrate them into a larger collective, Grimm knew that the language of the schooled nation was never introduced into a linguistic vacuum but did damage to existing linguistic subgroups for the sake of their greater transparency and availability to a centralized authority.⁵⁶ Of all the coercive simplifications of social life enforced by the modern state, James Scott writes in his anarchist treatment of the statehood, “the imposition of a single, official language may be the most powerful” – and such an imposition is made possible not least by means of universal schooling.⁵⁷

Grimm’s hesitant stance toward schooling was rooted not only in his appreciation of cultural and linguistic individuality but also his own scholarly concern for intact research material. He noted in his lecture that the academic achievements of his own fields, comparative grammar and mythology, depended on attention to scorned idioms, allegedly unsophisticated languages, and neglected folk traditions, which helped uncover a more complete picture of linguistic and cultural change.⁵⁸ For Grimm, dialects embodied the charms of regional diversity, but they also preserved archaic linguistic forms with greater fidelity than the language of the elites in centers of learning and administration.⁵⁹ From the point of view of the grammarian and cultural historian, local variation must thus be salvaged, not flattened out. The achievement of national literary and cultural greatness did require the spread of a standardized literary German throughout educational institutions, but this very process marginalized and endangered the local material that was necessary for the comparative grammarian’s exploration of linguistic history. A comprehensive German school system that would teach all its pupils to read and recite Goethe poems, Grimm’s prime example of canonical vernacular literature, would at the same time contribute to the elimination of the richness of local dialects and speech patterns and hence attenuate connections to the past and deprive grammatical studies of clues.

The nationalist cause of achieving German literary and cultural greatness and promoting national loyalty was thus at odds with the academic’s interest in saving the linguistic diversity that would help uncover the nation’s history. Yet where we can discern an obvious tension between nationalist and localist causes, or a conflict between the aims of national-literary competitiveness in a European cultural space, on the one hand, and antiquarian or scientific motives, on the other, Grimm chose instead to see

a coordinated process of nation building. He believed that the school system could contribute to both the homogenization of the vernacular *and* the preservation or linguistic remains for scholarly purposes.

What reconciled Grimm to the reach and penetration of the school system was at least partly the problem of retrieving and collecting materials for study. Several times over his career, Grimm sought to initiate large-scale collaborative projects of folklore collection to expand the archive of neglected and endangered traditions of German poetry. He was not the only one or the first to want to do so: Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim had similarly sought to cover all German regions with a “net of collection.”⁶⁰ In 1811, one year before the two brothers Grimm published their very first volume of folktales Jacob Grimm drafted a call for materials, including traditions, legends, fairy tales, proverbs, poems, or really any fragment of a genuine folk literature that would allow him and others to gain a richer view of old German poetry.⁶¹ In the call, Grimm made apparent why a few scholars alone could not complete such an enterprise. The desired materials, and especially the purest samples of folk literature, treasures undistorted by any “false enlightenment,” would likely be found in the most remote and hidden regions of Germany – in high mountains, closed valleys, and small villages unconnected to major routes.⁶² For this reason, only a great number of geographically dispersed collaborators would ever be able to gather the necessary volume of valuable folk expressions. Since specificity and locality were of utmost importance, Grimm also encouraged the future volunteers to transcribe dialects faithfully, without correcting perceived errors made by uneducated informants. The collectors must also note the precise place of transcription; only in this way would scholars be able to piece together a more comprehensive image of the variegated cultures of Germany. For reasons of completeness, Grimm expressed the hope that he would be able to recruit a knowledgeable liaison in every single German landscape.

The large numbers of eager amateur collectors never materialized, at least not to serve Grimm’s preferred research project, but the early vision of an associational infrastructure for collecting folk materials resurfaced in his lecture on the school, university, and academy. Grimm saw that the thousands of German schoolteachers could not but help to serve as agents of cultural and linguistic homogenization, insofar as they would teach a more uniform national language across different provinces. At the same time, he believed the school system that put a teacher in every village might also allow for more systematic collection of linguistic and narrative materials so valuable to research in the field of Germanic Studies.⁶³ Schoolteachers could be

asked to record and pass on local speech and tradition from all corners of the German-speaking lands to a center of study and research. The mass of teachers clearly contributed to the consolidation of German across regions but they could also be preparing the “artifactualization” of folk culture, the conversion of oral tradition and local habits into objects of scholarly investigation.⁶⁴ The arrangement and ordering of such materials, already conducted with exemplary zeal by Grimm himself, would in turn provide the nation with a cultural-historical depth that would otherwise be lost.

Grimm imagined the schoolhouse as the site for a process of exchange of great value to the gigantic project of nation building. Schoolteachers were primarily tasked with the dissemination of an increasingly widely read and understood national tongue, but, ideally, they should also transfer now-endangered folkloric forms to some center of research devoted to the excavation of the varied national past. The rural idioms, local dialects, and circulating folk narratives that Grimm knew would likely vanish over time, not the least because of mass schooling, could nonetheless be preserved and moved into the archives of properly trained researchers, thanks to the cooperative efforts of schoolteachers everywhere. If this would come to pass, the myriad of local mother tongues that would soon cease to be spoken could at least be transcribed and eventually put on display in anthologies and studies of German linguistic history, much like the magnificent historical objects that modern states no longer have actual use for, such as royal insignia, are not discarded but moved into the space of the museum to support the constitution of a shared historical identity. The art critic and theorist Boris Groys has claimed that museums, and by extension anthologies of linguistic and literary materials such as the ones Grimm produced, can be seen as tools of cultural recycling in that they convert materials marginalized by supposed historical progress into building blocks for a common historical identity.⁶⁵ Royal symbols cannot quite be used in a modern republic, but they can be displayed in glass vitrines as tokens of a shared past. For Grimm, the school emerged as a potential instrument of cultural recycling on a massive scale, since teachers everywhere could help record and save the cultural and linguistic legacy that schooling was ultimately meant to smooth out and replace.

Grimm viewed mass schooling as a crucial institutional device for nation building thanks to a double function, a possible bidirectional traffic between the peripheral school and the centers of state administration and state-funded research. In his vision, the numerous lowly agents of the growing German system of schooling were at work on supplanting dialects

with standardized German, and yet they would also much more efficiently and comprehensively than any small group of scholars be able to capture local speech, to be examined and presented as historical evidence of the emergence of a unified (surrogate) mother tongue. In Grimm's view, the army of German teachers spread out over all the provinces would prepare their pupils for a national future and also help retain for this increasingly unified people the relics of a textured, diverse national past. The teachers would help save the dialects that they would gradually eliminate.

For Jacob Grimm, the philologist was a figure uniquely able to mediate between a national community and a political regime; the philologist could remind the German people of its own historical depth and the richness of its own language but was also best suited to the task of informing the king of the boundaries and character of the nation. The people needed philologically prepared opportunities for self-recognition, and the monarch needed philologically informed guidance about the extent and substance of the only viable and acceptable unit of rule in the modern era, namely the national people. Yet the school would seem to threaten the key mediating role of the philologist, since a state-organized educational system could forge linguistic and cultural unity over a vast territory. Schooling could *produce* a national people eventually ready to defend the state and would not necessarily need a philologist to trace the outlines of an already given wholeness whose integrity should be respected. In the age of comprehensive primary education, nations could be made rather than found, an awkward situation for the philologist devoted to the careful study of the naturally evolving, lovingly transmitted mother tongue and its natural geography. As we have seen, however, Grimm still found a way to insert the figure of the philologist into the institutional structure of the schooled society, partly by suggesting that the school system with its vast number of teachers could be turned into a supply line for the researcher eager for access to a great wealth of material from an infinitely valuable but superseded stage of national culture. For Grimm, the school would not be a threat to the German philologists but a support, not the end of all political-philological efforts but, at least during a transitional period, their best possible source.