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## The Mother Tongue at School

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on a key contradiction in nineteenth-century nationalist ideology, namely the opposition between the emphasis on the sacred status of the mother tongue, on the one hand, and the use of universal mandatory schooling as a means of homogenization, on the other. The influential philologist Jacob Grimm insisted that only people whose mother tongue was German counted as members of the German nation; the mother tongue was the key criterion of authentic belonging. Yet Grimm also realized that mandatory schooling imposed a uniform language across a wide territory, wiping out local dialects and effectively giving shape to a more linguistically unified people. He thus witnessed how modern mass instruction forged a more standardized culture at the expense of the more natural-seeming transmission of language within families. In Grimm's writings on education, the valorization of the mother is continually disturbed by the presence of a surrogate figure, the school teacher.

**KEYWORDS:** Jacob Grimm; nationalism; nation building; 19th century; mother tongue; schooling; compulsory; education; folklore; philology; German literature

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Political rule in the modern age is legitimate only when the people rule over themselves; the people must be sovereign. But this modern conception of political legitimacy introduces a problem of delineation. What are the boundaries of the people in whose name rule can secure legitimacy?<sup>1</sup> How can one draw clear lines around the self of collective self-rule? The people themselves cannot quite perform the feat of self-definition through some democratic procedure, since their prior existence as a boundary-drawing collective would then be presupposed.

In the face of this problem of definition, nationalists have stood ready to supply an answer to the question of the political unit and its coherence. The people, they claim, are already naturally given, bound together as it were by a shared history, a homeland, a common culture, but above all a language, a medium of mutual understanding that constitutes indisputable proof of cohesiveness. A minimal nationalist requirement for legitimate rule is thus that whoever rules must speak the people's language; linguistically and culturally, like must rule over like.<sup>2</sup> This prohibits the dominance of a foreign elite, however

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1 Arash Abizadeh, 'On the Demos and its Kin: Nationalism, Democracy, and the Boundary Problem,' *American Political Science Review*, 106.4 (2012), pp. 867–82 (p. 868) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000421>>.

2 Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 4.

advanced or enlightened. Clear linguistic and cultural discontinuity across the political hierarchy becomes discernible as a violation of national self-determination; alien rule is per definition illegitimate rule.

In the eyes of most nationalists, it is also not possible to become part of a people by working deliberately to learn their language, as this would render the people too porous. Only native speakers, only those for whom the language is a 'mother tongue', are guaranteed inclusion. National belonging is reserved for individuals who have learned the language in a natural way, as evidenced by their current mastery, free from any touch of foreign awkwardness. This delimiting and restricting notion of the mother tongue, the one special language learned early and unconsciously and therefore spoken authentically and effortlessly, borrows its plausibility from images of the maternal, icons of the mother caring for and nursing a child that imbibes both its first nourishment and its first words through a close, symbiotic relationship.<sup>3</sup> In the nationalist imagination, the political legitimacy ensured through the self-rule of the nationally defined people partly relies on an iconography of the singularly intimate mother-child relationship. In Germany, around 1800 in particular, the book market saw a flood 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 even alphabetization; basic cultural skills were to be taught not formally by some authority but transmitted in the medium of motherly love.<sup>4</sup>

But the language constitutive of the self-determining people is not really learned in the mother's embrace or from the mother's mouth. The standardized and codified national tongue, spoken by millions of individuals across several provinces, is typically taught through the institutional infrastructure of primary education, through schooling mandated by the state. The children of the nation all speak the same language and hence live in an area of mutual comprehensibility that makes them into a people insofar as they have all been exposed to the same curriculum. The school as an indispensable instrument of nationaliza-

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3 Thomas Paul Bonfiglio, *Mother Tongues and Nations: The Invention of the Native Speaker* (New York: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010), p. 185.

4 Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 27–28.

tion is hardly an unknown feature of modern nation-building,<sup>5</sup> and yet nationalists may prefer the image of the mother whispering to her child over the image of the schoolteacher instructing their pupils, for an honest recognition of mass schooling could suggest that the nation is a political project rather than a natural ground. An emphasis on mass instruction instead of motherly speech could disturb the nationalist conception of legitimacy, according to which political rule must trace the given boundaries among naturally living communities rather than impose unity through state-funded institutions.

The philologist Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) did more than most to promote German and reduce the use of prestigious transnational languages such as Latin or French. His collections of German folk tales, legends, myths, and legal antiquities, some of which he edited in cooperation with his brother Wilhelm, helped establish and disseminate supposedly national traditions, and his grammatical studies reconstructed the genealogy of the German language, which ultimately yielded a linguistic criterion for separating the German from the non-German.<sup>6</sup> A politically prominent cultural nationalist, he explicitly and influentially tied the coherence of the German people to its shared national tongue and substantiated his claim with philological studies still deemed foundational for the discipline of *Germanistik*.

Living in the era of a massive expansion of increasingly state-supervised primary schooling, Grimm also commented, rather ambivalently, 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 occur at the expense of regional linguistic variation. Grimm, both an advocate of political unity on a cultural and linguistic basis and an expert on indigenous folk traditions rooted in particular localities, was thus compelled to reconcile his political support for the advancement of a national language with his appreciation of historical, premodern Germanic speech and present-day dialects. He

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5 See for instance the recent article by Keith Darden and Harris Mylonas, 'Threats to Territorial Integrity, National Mass Schooling, and Linguistic Commonality', *Comparative Political Studies*, 49.11 (2016), pp. 1446–79.

6 Sarah Pourciau, *The Writing of Spirit: Soul, System, and the Roots of Language Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 53.

had to resolve the tension between the implementation of a politically crucial transregional linguistic standard and the unplanned evolution of genuine folk idioms. To return to the nationalist iconography, Grimm's occasional writings had to suggest some way of harmonizing the institutional tool of nation-building — universal schooling — with the romanticist predilection for the icon of intimacy and naturalness, which provided a source of ideological validation — the maternal body. Grimm was, in other words, forced to present a plausible relationship between the images of the teacher and the mother.

Is there such a thing as a mother tongue in the age of mass schooling? In 1849, Grimm gave a lecture on the school, the university, and the academy at the Prussian Academy of the Sciences in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> The institutions listed together in the title without any mark or conjunction — 'schule universität akademie'<sup>8</sup> — constitute an ascending sequence of interlocking institutions: all children attend schools to learn elementary and therefore required skills; a smaller number of students go to university 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. Each of these institutions, it turns out, also stands in a relationship to the German nation, or ought to stand in one. The university, Grimm observes, has long provided German-speaking lands with a transregional institutional network and is recognized as a particularly German achievement, the envy of competing nations. In his account, the academy, a body typically sponsored by a court, is more obviously an import from French culture and unfortunately does not quite tie the German states together. In the lecture to his peers in the Prussian Academy, Grimm thus calls for a German national academy, which would recognize institutionally that the enterprise of science is a national German endeavour.<sup>9</sup> The link between the

7 Grimm joined the Academy as a regular member in 1832 and gave twenty-three lectures, from 1842 to 1859, mostly on philological topics. See *Verzeichniss der Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften von 1710–1870 in alphabetischer Folge der Verfasser* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1871), pp. 93–94. The immense German dictionary, *Grimms Wörterbuch*, was begun under the auspices of the Academy. See Conrad Grau, *Die Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (Heidelberg: Spektrum, 1993), pp. 157–59.

8 Jacob Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften: Reden und Abhandlungen*, 2 vols (Berlin: Dümmler, 1879), 1, pp. 212–55.

9 The universities in Germany were very much the bases for the propagation of nationalist ideas in nineteenth-century German lands and themselves represented a

school and the nation is a little more complex and Grimm neither lauds nor calls for its complete national extension. If anything, he approaches state-mandated primary education as the relative novelty that it was, acknowledging its rapid rise in Prussia and elsewhere in German lands without quite considering its existence inevitable.<sup>10</sup>

Grimm opens his reflections on the school with a question, a fundamental one, namely whether schooling is or is not necessary: ‘Must human beings go to school?’ (musz denn der mensch zu schule gehen?).<sup>11</sup> His answer to this question is no. Human beings do not in fact have to go to school, since they can learn plenty of things, all that they really need, at home, from their parents, their siblings, and their neighbours. The son of the farmer learns to work on the farm, the daughter in the household learns how to manage it, and both learn how to speak the language of their environment. No pedagogically informed instruction outside of the familial unit and hence no public institution staffed by a distinct group of instructors is needed for children to learn the tongue spoken by the parents, the language which could legitimately be called the mother tongue.

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German-national network with national scientific journals and professional congresses. See Charles McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany 1700–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 9. Grimm himself was an active member in the university networks, as a practitioner and proponent of *Germanistik*, the fledgling German national (and nationalist) philology. He had a prominent role at the first national congresses of Germanists in the 1840s. See Katinka Netzer, ‘Die Brüder Grimm und die ersten Germanistenversammlungen’, in *Die Grimms – Kultur und Politik*, ed. by Bernd Heidenreich and Ewald Grothe (Frankfurt: Societätsverlag, 2008), pp. 290–326.

- 10 Schools were in no way a nineteenth-century invention. Richard Gawthrop describes a school-driven literacy campaign in Germany that went on for about two centuries and points to examples such as the establishment of hundreds of schools in Prussia in the 1730s and of laws that made schools compulsory in the eighteenth century. See Richard L. Gawthrop, ‘Literacy Drives in Preindustrial Germany’, in *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Robert Anrove and Harvey Graff (New York: Plenum, 1987), pp. 29–48. Still, Gawthrop’s editors mention that Prussian military defeat contributed to a renewed and intensified emphasis on the achievement of mass literacy via schooling after 1807. See Robert Anrove and Harvey Graff, ‘Introduction’, in *National Literacy Campaigns*, ed. by Anrove and Graff, pp. 1–28 (p. 4). And schooling also changed, in that a focus on religious conformity under church supervision was replaced, in the nineteenth century, by a creation of a national body of literate and loyal citizens. It is this state-organized schooling that is Grimm’s concern.
- 11 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, I, p. 222. All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

And yet human beings do go to schools, and Grimm knows well the rationale behind compulsory education in nineteenth-century Europe, namely the achievement of universal literacy. The basic aim of mass schooling is to ensure that all children 'without exception' (ohne ausnahme) learn how to read and write in a medium of communication with a wide, national reach; this set of skills has become so vital that Grimm does not quite feel the need to outline its particular purpose.<sup>12</sup> His silence indicates perhaps that literacy no longer possesses one exclusive purpose, such as the religious one of basic access to the Bible, but rather constitutes a fundamental general requirement in the institutional and media landscape of the day.<sup>13</sup> Yet the language that the pupil is supposed to learn to read, write, and properly speak in school as a future member of a literate national citizenry is not exactly the mother tongue, but rather the language of the schoolteacher, which, for Grimm, in no way ranks as of superior quality. On the contrary, he claims, native rules of language, the 'angeborene sprachregel,' are routinely abused by teachers.<sup>14</sup> Compulsory primary education organized by states has become inescapable, Grimm concedes, but does not, from a purely linguistic standpoint, constitute an advance.

Grimm recognizes the general importance of teaching rudimentary reading and writing, although he objects to frequent and perhaps ineliminable flaws in instruction. The unity of a written German language, Grimm announced in a preface to the 1822 edition of his *German Grammar*, is indispensable<sup>15</sup> for it serves as a continual reminder of a shared German descent and a medium of present German

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12 Ibid.

13 Michael Mann provides a basic list of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institutions and societal fields that in some way required and promoted literacy: the military and navy supplied officers with manuals and maps; merchants dealt with contracts and accounts; the legal profession and any encounter with it involved paperwork; and, finally, paperwork was also required by state administration. Of course, people of the age also saw a rapidly increasing volume of newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, handbooks, and novels. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986–93), II: *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (1993), pp. 37–38.

14 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, I, p. 229.

15 Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*, ed. by Wilhelm Scherer and others, 4 vols (Berlin: Dümmler, 1870–98), I (1870), repr. in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Werke*, ed. by Ludwig Erich Schmitt and others, 47 vols (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985–), X: *Deutsche Grammatik I*, ed. by Elisabeth Feldbusch and Ludwig Erich Schmitt (1989), p. xiii.

community. Such linguistic unity could hardly be achieved without mandatory schooling, since the school introduces it to the totality of the nation's children. Even when it is taught imperfectly, instruction in, and use of, German across all institutions of education, from primary school to the university, represents for Grimm a triumph of the national over the foreign and the classical.<sup>16</sup>

Many decades before his lecture to the Academy in Berlin and some years before he commenced his grammatical studies, however, the young Jacob Grimm was less willing to accept the intrusion of teachers into a spontaneous familial and social process of language learning. In a letter that he wrote as a young man to his mentor Friedrich Carl von Savigny, the era's prominent authority on the history of Roman law and Grimm's mentor from his earliest university days, one encounters a slightly more principled resistance to instruction in German to German-speaking children. Educational reform, he writes in 1814, means that the natural linguistic competence fostered in small-scale communities may well be disturbed. To learn a language at school is to learn to apply a set of rules, whereas the language spoken at home is learned naturally, without the mediation of explicitly stated conventions. Those who go to school, Grimm writes, learn to read and write their supposed 'mother tongue' as an explicit set of rules and begin to see their language as if it were foreign, while simultaneously being deprived of their local dialect.<sup>17</sup> It is appropriate to learn Latin or Greek in school, he claims, since the acquisition of these traditionally taught languages does not disturb the automatic absorption of local speech, but that which is already one's own should not be presented, through formalized teaching, as if it came from without. The native, 'das einheimische', does not amount to a kind of knowledge or defined skill to be acquired; it comes, it should come, as naturally as breathing.<sup>18</sup> The German native tongue is rendered alien by the teacher.

But when Grimm is speaking to the Academy in Berlin in 1849, this early opposition to the teaching of German seems to have faded. In his estimation, inadequately trained schoolteachers corrupt young

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16 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, I, p. 233.

17 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Briefe der Brüder Grimm an Savigny aus dem Savignyschen Nachlaß*, ed. by Wilhelm Schoof (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1953), p. 170.

18 Grimm and Grimm, *Briefe an Savigny*, p. 170.



speakers with their faulty teaching of grammar, but there is no longer any debate over alternatives. It is evidently not too late to pose a fundamental question — must human beings really go to school? — and yet much too late to believe in a society without national schooling; the question of schooling has become philosophical and anthropological rather than political, for the political battle against universal schooling, if there ever was one, has already been lost. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, after Grimm's letter to Savigny, German liberals and conservatives, that is, figures across the political spectrum, had come to accept mandatory schooling as a basic feature of society and an instrument for (liberal) reform or (conservative) social control.<sup>19</sup> The educable masses and the schooled society were no longer, as they had been in the eighteenth century, visions or ideas; they were realities to be shaped or modified but no longer to be eliminated.

Instead of demanding limits to the school system and its curriculum, the older Grimm marvels at its sheer scale in the mid-nineteenth century. There are, he writes in his 1849 address, 15 million people in Prussia, and 30,000 schoolteachers, roughly one for every group of 50 pupils according to his calculations. The other German-speaking lands employ around 50–60,000 teachers, a figure that Grimm believes may be larger than in other European countries and hence testifies to the pan-German commitment to schooling: 'Deutschland ist ein wahres land der schulmeister.'<sup>20</sup> All in all, about 80–90,000 schoolteachers contribute to the rise and dominance of a more or less uniform national language.

Against this backdrop, Grimm has ceased to question the institution of the school and chooses instead to focus on the political fights that have emerged within it.<sup>21</sup> In particular, he wants to make sure that the comparatively low status of the elementary schoolteachers is

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19 Karl Schleunes, *Schooling and Society: The Politics of Education in Prussia and Bavaria 1750–1900* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 96–97.

20 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, 1, p. 229.

21 For an overview of German and specifically Prussian teachers' socio-political situation, including their struggle for an elevated reputation, the gulf between schoolmasters and credentialized academics, the subordination under local pastors, the poor teacher training, and the reluctance of communities to pay for instruction, see Anthony La, *Prussian Schoolteachers: Profession and Office, 1763–1848* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

maintained, against the efforts of the group's more restless and radical representatives, whose alleged ties to communists Grimm deems quite plausible.<sup>22</sup> As a delegate to the Frankfurt assembly in 1848, Grimm reports, he found himself inundated with schoolteacher requests for higher pay and elevated legal standing, both of which he considers unsuitable to the important but still modest schoolhouse tasks. Human beings must go to school and hence there must be tens of thousands of primary schoolteachers and yet this stubborn fact about German society does not, Grimm feels, need to be glorified in a way that would suggest any meaningful social proximity of the schoolteacher to the educated teachers 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, of which Grimm's own efforts in Germanic philology were perhaps a symptom, was blurring the social border between the *literatorus* and the simple teacher.<sup>23</sup> Yet maintaining the barrier is clearly important to Grimm. The poorly trained schoolteacher, he insists, does not deserve the status of a civil servant employed by the state.<sup>24</sup>

In 1849, then, Grimm seems to have partially overcome some of his anti-institutional impulse, his emphasis on the natural, the native, and the local, and come to recognize an accomplished fact: that schools and schoolteachers are everywhere, in every German land, province, and village, and that Germany is well on its way to being a fully 'schooled society', in which school attendance has been installed as a non-negotiable obligation.<sup>25</sup> The ubiquity of the school

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22 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, 1, p. 228.

23 For the role of Latin as a conspicuous social border around the learned in a traditional European society composed of legally constituted estates, see Heinrich Bosse, 'Gelehrte und Gebildete – die Kinder des 1. Standes', *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, 32.1 (2008), pp. 13–37 (p. 14).

24 When elementary education was a responsibility of the church, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the pastor would usually hand the task of this mostly religious instruction to (only rudimentarily trained) sextons, and the position of the teacher for a long time remained associated with the simplest of artisans, without social standing in the community. Despite the rise of state-mandated schooling and dedicated teacher seminars in the nineteenth century, the teacher remained a low-status figure, worlds apart from the prestige of university professors. See for instance Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700–1815* (Munich: Beck, 1987), pp. 284–88.

25 Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: Beck, 1983), p. 451.

does not, however, suddenly render it a more appropriate vessel for the mother tongue. For Grimm, the separation between the genuine ‘Muttersprache’, simply absorbed within the natural confines of the family, in proximity to the loving mother, and the schoolmaster’s rigidly taught idiom remains in force. Still, the older Grimm tries to soften the sharp opposition between the two figures. Rather than posit a clear polarity of mother and teacher, he searches for some way to let one approximate and take the place of the other.

The schoolteacher is not the mother and yet, it turns out, is not far removed from the maternal body. In his 1849 lecture, Grimm likens the schoolteacher to another figure, 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:

such a teacher, who like a wet nurse holds her breast toward the infant, pours the still simple food of the first knowledge into the boy, nourishes, prepares, and instructs him in all things

solch ein lehrer, wie die amme ihre brust dem säugling hinhält, flöszt dem knaben die noch leichte speise des ersten wissens ein, nährt, baut auf und meistert ihn in allen dingen.<sup>26</sup>

This is in no way a slip on Grimm’s part, but an attempt, however awkward, to give the teacher a place in relation to the nationalist iconography of the mother tongue. The teacher cares for and fosters the child and provides it with the first light serving of knowledge — this is the gist of Grimm’s more accommodating treatment of the school. Hallowed words for teaching and instruction in classical languages, he then points out in a footnote, derive from ancient terms for wet nurse; the position of the teacher as the substitute for the mother has an ancient pedigree.<sup>27</sup>

The metaphor of the ‘Amme’ is meant to sanctify the local (male) teacher, without of course granting him a more elevated social status vis-à-vis instructors in the higher levels of the educational apparatus. Grimm means to establish the teacher’s relative nearness and closeness rather than his intrusiveness and strangeness, and does so by feminizing him. Yet following the logic of Grimm’s image, we could say that at

<sup>26</sup> Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, 1, p. 224.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

school the children learn not a mother tongue, but the tongue of their surrogate mother. After the introduction of state-mandated education in the mid-nineteenth century, after the establishment of schoolhouses in each and every German town, all of which provide training in the reading and writing of a transregional language, the population learns to write and perhaps also to speak neither a genuine mother tongue nor an essentially foreign language, but some close substitute for the most natural idiom.

Grimm's attempt to mediate between the mother tongue and the school takes the form of a trope: teaching involves the substitution of the mother, and the language taught is a surrogate mother tongue. This addition of the wet nurse to the iconography of the maternal seems like a necessary compromise. The age had installed the mother as the primary source of a child's early language acquisition and even as the guide to alphabetization, and Grimm then complies with this logic by calling schoolteachers surrogate mothers: the two figures emerge as aspects of a maternal instructor — the mother teaches lovingly, and the teacher is like a mother. The ideological motivation for this arrangement ought to be clear: if the age of mass schooling and its proliferation of teachers puts some pressure on the iconography of the mother-child relationship that is supposed to anchor the naturalness and intimacy of the mother tongue, then the unity of the nation, and with it the idea of legitimate political rule in the era of the nation state, can be preserved by the extension of the maternal through the presentation of the teacher as wet nurse, the traditional replacement for the mother as the icon of intimacy and naturalness. At the moment that the Romantic vision of the 'Muttersprache' is brought into contact with the fact of mass schooling, the teacher must appear as a motherly figure — such is the form of Grimm's solution.

'Must humans go to school?' The answer is no if humans are to learn to speak their mother tongue, but the answer is yes if they are to become members of a nation millions of people strong. And the answer is emphatically yes if they are 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 and occupations, mass schooling emerged as a potentially effective means of forging a more compact and disciplined citizenry, in a manner analogous to the

way that ecclesiastical authorities has used education as a device to ensure conformity with proper religious beliefs.<sup>28</sup> And mass education remains a preferred instrument for governments who 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.<sup>29</sup>

The sociologist Ernest Gellner 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 communicative ease across a large region and in the process builds a widely shared attachment.<sup>30</sup>

But attachment to what? Co-nationals, Gellner writes, are loyal not to the same king or the same God but essentially to the same school culture, which formed them and to which they owe their social membership. This may have been an intuition shared by nineteenth-century governing elites that found themselves increasingly reliant on armies raised by conscription rather than on mercenaries. Facing the threat of defeat and dissolution, these elites set about expanding the school system, partly in order to provide a public good to a population on which they now depended militarily, partly to homogenize that population's varied cultures and give a consistent national shape to its allegiances.<sup>31</sup> The school system represents a historical bargain between rulers and populations through which schooled subjects achieve literacy and numeracy of increasing utility within a national territory, but are also introduced to standardized nationalist narratives designed to ensure the uniform cultural identity of these subjects.

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28 Gawthrop, 'Literacy Drives', p. 41.

29 Darden and Mylonas, 'National Mass Schooling', p. 1447.

30 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 34–37.

31 See Alberto Alesina, Bryony Reich, and Alessandro Riboni, 'Nation-Building, Nationalism and Wars', National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 23435 <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w23435.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2017].

Early German nationalists certainly observed the close link between universal schooling and state loyalty. The school as an instrument of military preparation appears in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, delivered in French-occupied Prussia in 1807, which the young Grimm was moved to hail as one of the finest books ever written.<sup>32</sup> A system of national education supervised by the state rather than by the church or local authorities, Fichte claims, would undoubtedly be a costly enterprise and yet it would prove an exceptionally wise investment in that state's future military capacity. With great confidence, Fichte envisages a straight path from the state schools to the military barracks; a properly schooled people would be a people ready for mobilization and unyielding in war.<sup>33</sup> Around the time that Fichte gave his nationalist lectures, Prussian elite reformers explored the possibility of a large-scale expansion and reform of schooling after the humiliating defeat to Napoleon in 1806; they, too, considered investments in primary education a means to winning future wars. Schools could increase fighting incentives by linguistically integrating and instilling patriotism in an otherwise scattered, culturally fragmented, and hence reluctant population.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Fichte, Grimm exhibits no overt militarism in his 1849 lecture on educational institutions, but does understand the school curriculum as a means to reduce foreign influence on German culture and chooses to express this view in martial rhetoric. Cultural and literary accomplishments, he writes, must be achieved with one's 'own weapons' (*eigenen waffen*), that is, in and with the national lan-

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32 Grimm and Grimm, *Briefe an Savigny*, p. 73. Fichte did not discover the link between schooling and national loyalty. According to Heinrich Bosse, discussions of a system of national education (*National-Erziehung*) took place among governing elites in the Holy Roman Empire, as well as among academics in the so-called *Polizeywissenschaft* as early as the 1770s. See Heinrich Bosse, *Bildungsrevolution 1770–1830*, ed. by Nacim Ghanbari (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012), p. 59.

33 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, ed. by Alexander Aichele (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2008), p. 182.

34 Philippe Aghion, Torsten Persson, and Dorothee Rouzet, 'Education and Military Rivalry', National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 18049 <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w18049>> [accessed 1 June 2017]. The authors note that literacy rates in Prussia were very high prior to 1800 but that illiteracy became virtually negligible in the male cohort born between 1837 and 1841; the post-defeat push of the state administration mattered.

guage rather than a classical or transnational one.<sup>35</sup> And the emergence of German as a fully developed literary language, which culminates in distinctive masterpieces such as Goethe's poems, justifies the desired dominance of the vernacular across the institutions of learning, including the university.

But the idea of a nation in arms has not disappeared completely from Grimm's lecture on education. The most revealing moments may be those when he calls the tens of thousands of schoolmasters a vast army of teachers, 'ein heer', and mandatory primary education the 'heerstrasse für alle kinder', the military road for all children.<sup>36</sup> At the level of metaphor at least, the agents of instruction are associated with the massive armies that first appeared in the Napoleonic age; if nothing else, scale allows for an association between the school and the military.

We could say that Grimm pictures the individual schoolteacher in the era of mandatory schooling as both a surrogate mother and a member of a military-scale collective, a wet nurse and a foot soldier. This oddly split characterization of the teacher, dispersed across the pages on primary education, is not an unfortunate case of mixed metaphors but reflects the necessary ideological construction of nationhood. The national subjects taught at school are the potential members of a future army ready to battle and die for their nation — one prominent ideological aim of education was and is to generate a loyal national citizenry. At the same time, the national language must remain a mother tongue, that is, the linguistic criterion of this national membership must be naturalized in such a way that the national collective, however large, retains the semblance of a familial community. The schoolteachers of the nation prepare the children for the defence of the state and must in precisely this capacity plausibly stand in for the mother as the icon of symbiotic intimacy, for the maternal body that guarantees the depth and authenticity of national belonging. Given nationalism's double preference for the maternal and the martial, it is ideologically fitting that Grimm's schoolteacher appears over the course of the lecture as both a substitute mother and an infantry soldier.

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35 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, 1, p. 233.

36 Ibid., pp. 229 and 222.

Through his constellation of metaphors, Grimm captures the paradoxical task of the school to sustain the idea of an intimate linguistic communion and community across generations while also preparing large cohorts for military duties in the service of the state. If anything dampens his enthusiasm for schooling, it is, again, its deleterious effect on local habits of speech; it is primarily as a scholar of folk tradition that Grimm deems the price of mandatory education high. As mentioned, Grimm noticed early on how schooled children tended to unlearn the dialect that may have been almost entirely incomprehensible to German speakers of other regions, and the older, distinguished member of the Prussian Academy remains aware of the fact that the schoolteacher's tongue amounts to a sustained assault on local cultural integrity in the considerably varied German lands.<sup>37</sup> An early linguist, Grimm views schooling as something that is accompanied by the threat of a future retreat and even extinction of the linguistic variety internal to Germany.<sup>38</sup> The consolidation of a single national language, which he clearly embraces, must ultimately happen at the expense of an existing welter of dialects, a loss that he regrets. And something of a political motive may play a subdued role in Grimm's hesitation. Fearful of the cultural uniformity enforced by a coercive state eager to dissolve the semi-opacity of local communities and integrate them into a larger collective, Grimm knows that the language of the schooled nation is never introduced into a linguistic vacuum but does damage, irreparably, to existing linguistic subgroups for the sake of their greater transparency to a centralized authority.<sup>39</sup> 'Of all state simplifications', James Scott writes, 'the imposition of a single, official language may be the most powerful' — and such an imposition is made possible by means of schooling.<sup>40</sup>

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37 To root out dialects, some so coarse as to be considered animal-like, and replace them with a purer national idiom was often the expressed aim of education. See Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, pp. 37–38.

38 For an evocative study of linguistic extinction in modern Europe, see Barry McCrea, *Languages of the Night: Minor Languages and the Literary Imagination in Twentieth-Century Ireland and Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

39 Grimm read and was inspired by Benjamin Constant's discussion of modern political uniformity in *De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation, dans leur rapports avec la civilisation européenne* (1814). See Roland Feldmann, *Jacob Grimm und die Politik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1970), p. 151.

40 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 72.



But Grimm's reserved stance is still most obviously motivated by a scholarly concern for the preservation of his research material. Grimm notes in his lecture that the academic achievements of comparative grammar and mythology depended partly on the turn to scorned idioms, allegedly unsophisticated languages, and neglected folk traditions, which helped uncover a more complete picture of linguistic change.<sup>41</sup> Grimm thought that dialects embodied regional diversity and, because they had been relatively untouched by elites, preserved archaic linguistic forms with greater fidelity.<sup>42</sup> From the point of view of the grammarian and cultural historian, local variation is to be salvaged and cherished, not smoothed out. The achievement of national literary and cultural greatness does require the spread of a standardized literary German throughout educational institutions, but this very standardization marginalizes and endangers the local material 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, which is Grimm's prime example of canonical vernacular literature, would at the same time contribute to the gradual elimination of rich local dialects and speech patterns and hence attenuate connections to the past and deprive grammatical studies of important clues.

The nationalist cause of achieving German literary and cultural greatness is at odds with the linguist's and folklorist's interest in maintaining or at least honouring a historical-cultural diversity of German culture. But 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 chooses instead to see a coordinated process of nation-building in which the school system can contribute to both the homogenization of the vernacular *and* the preservation or perhaps the musealization of linguistic remains. Yet again, Grimm seeks to accept and accommodate the school system without betraying his appreciation of the local, native, and intimate.

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41 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, I, p. 216.

42 Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008), p. 135.

What reconciles Grimm to the reach of the school system is at least partly the problem of collecting. Several times over his career, Grimm announced or sought to initiate collaborative projects of folklore collection in order to expand the archive of neglected and endangered traditions of German poetry. One year before the two Grimm brothers published their very first volume of folk tales in 1812, for example, Jacob drafted a call, an 'Aufforderung', 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 conjure up a richer image of old German poetry.<sup>43</sup> In the call, Grimm makes apparent why such an enterprise cannot be completed by a few scholars alone. The desired materials, Grimm writes, and especially the purest samples of folk literature, treasures undistorted by any 'false enlightenment', will likely be found in the most remote and even hidden regions of Germany — in mountain regions, closed valleys, and small villages unconnected to major thoroughfares.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, only a considerable number of geographically dispersed collaborators will ever be able to gather the necessary volume of valuable folk expressions. Since specificity and locality was of utmost importance to Grimm, he also encourages the future volunteers to transcribe dialects faithfully, without correcting perceived errors made by uneducated informants, and to record the precise place of transcription; only in this way would scholars be able to piece together a more comprehensive picture of the variegated cultures of Germany. For reasons of completeness, Grimm expresses the hope that they would find a knowledgeable liaison in every single area of Germany.

The large numbers of eager amateur collectors never materialized, at least not to serve Grimm's preferred cultural-nationalist research project, but the vision of an associational infrastructure for collecting folk materials resurfaces in his lecture on the school, university, and academy. Grimm sees that the thousands of German schoolteachers cannot avoid serving as agents of cultural and linguistic homogenization, insofar as they teach a language that is a more or less uniform

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43 Jacob Grimm, 'Aufforderung an die gesammten Freunde deutscher Poesie und Geschichte erlassen', in Reinhold Steig, *Clemens Brentano und die Brüder Grimm* (Bern: Lang, 1969), pp. 164–71.

44 Steig, *Brentano und die Brüder Grimm*, p. 165.

national language across different provinces, but he also states that the school system that puts a teacher in every village could also allow for the systematic collection of linguistic and narrative materials so valuable to research in the field of *Germanistik*.<sup>45</sup> Schoolteachers could retrieve, record, and pass on local speech and tradition from all corners of the German-speaking lands to some centre of study. The mass of teachers clearly contributes to the consolidation of German across regions but they could, Grimm suggests, also be preparing the 'artificialization' of folk culture, the conversion of oral tradition and local habits into objects of scientific study.<sup>46</sup> And the arrangement and ordering of such materials, already conducted with exemplary zeal by Grimm himself, would in turn help provide the nation with a cultural-historical depth that would otherwise be lost.

Grimm imagines the schoolhouse as the site for an exchange of great value to the nation-building project. The schoolteachers are primarily tasked with the dissemination of an increasingly widely read and understood national tongue, but ideally they should also be transferring now-endangered folkloric forms to some centre of research devoted to the scholarly excavation of the varied national past. The rural idioms, local dialects, and travelling stories that Grimm knows will likely vanish over time, not least because of mass schooling, could nonetheless be preserved and moved into the publications of researchers, thanks to the combined efforts of schoolteachers everywhere. If this came to pass, the myriad 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 for which we no longer have actual use, such as royal insignia, are not discarded but moved into the space of the history museum in order to support the constitution of a shared historical identity. Boris Groys has claimed that museums, and by extension anthologies of linguistic and literary materials such as the ones Grimm produced, are tools of cultural recycling that convert the materials marginalized by supposed historical progress into building blocks for a common identity.<sup>47</sup>

45 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, I, p. 230.

46 Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 105.

47 Boris Groys, *Logik der Sammlung: Am Ende des musealen Zeitalters* (Munich: Hanser, 1997), pp. 46–47.

It is partly thanks to this double function, this bi-directional traffic between the peripheral school, on the one hand, and the centres of state administration and research, on the other, that Grimm views the school as a crucial institutional device for nation building. Its agents do work that replaces dialects with standardized German and yet they could also collect samples of local speech to be presented as historical evidence of the gradual emergence of a (surrogate) mother tongue. In Grimm's vision, the army of German teachers will prepare their pupils for a national future and, on the side, help retain for this unified people relics of a national past.

Jakob Norberg, 'The Mother Tongue at School', in *Untying the Mother Tongue*, ed. by Antonio Castore and Federico Dal Bo, Cultural Inquiry, 26 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2023), pp. 85–103 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-26\\_4](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-26_4)>

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