

Folk Hatred and Folktales
The Nationalist Politics of the *Children's and Household Tales*

The Brothers Grimm in Kassel, 1813

Toward the end of 1813, with Napoleon's armies defeated at Leipzig by a large coalition of Austrian, Prussian, Russian, and Swedish troops, the two Hessians Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm announced their contribution to the ongoing anti-Napoleonic war effort. Born in 1785 and 1786, they were still young men, in their late twenties. Throughout the fall, the military and political situation had been turbulent in the city, then the capital of the Napoleonic vassal kingdom of Westphalia.¹ In September 1813, Russian troops on their way through Europe arrived at the outskirts of the city. Surrounded by hostile contingents, the French king of Westphalia, Jérôme Bonaparte, decided to retreat; he had then ruled the constructed state since he was installed as its ruler by Napoleon Bonaparte, his older brother, in 1806. He did ride back into Kassel the next month, when Russian troops proved too weak to hold the city; after Napoleon's defeat in the massive battle at Leipzig in October 1813, however, Jérôme knew he could not hold on to Westphalia and fled to France.² The month after, the former German ruler of Hesse, the Elector Wilhelm I (1743–1821), returned to Kassel from Prague where he had lived in exile for more than half a decade.³ The Grimms were in the cheering crowds as the old Hessian ruler and his entourage passed through the city gates. In an article a few years later, Wilhelm called 1813 the “year of redemption.”⁴ Napoleon's regime had come to an end, the Hessian ruler restored.

The first task of the Elector was to raise an army in the war-weary state where young men had been mobilized to fight in the large Napoleonic armies. Wilhelm I was obliged to call up almost 25,000 men for a battle with the French army whose commander refused to accept the terms set by his European enemies.⁵ This final anti-Napoleonic mobilization was the cause to which the Grimm brothers publicly committed themselves in late 1813. In an announcement in an academic journal published in Heidelberg,

the Grimms urged readers to sign up as subscribers for a forthcoming rendition of the Middle High German narrative poem *Der Arme Heinrich* and made it known that the generated funds would support voluntary corps.⁶ Two of their brothers – the slightly younger Ferdinand and Carl Grimm – joined the Hessian troops;⁷ Jacob and Wilhelm worked on an edition of an old German literary text, with the purpose of converting it into to a genuinely popular work, a “*Volksbuch*”⁸ – that was to be their contribution. The Medieval-Germanic scholarship would serve a patriotic cause.

As the survey of local conditions in Kassel at the end of the Napoleonic wars indicates, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm did not exactly live in Germany. They had grown up in Hesse-Kassel, a landgraviate of moderate size in the mosaic of the Holy Roman Empire. During their childhood, the small state was governed by a locally dominant autocrat, the landgrave Friedrich Wilhelm, who, to his great satisfaction, was elevated to the more prestigious position of an Imperial Elector in the Holy Roman Empire in 1803, albeit only three years before that empire was dissolved.⁹ With roughly half a million inhabitants, the Electorate of Hesse was neither a negligible statelet nor a European power such as Prussia or Austria. It was overwhelmingly rural and had one significant town, which was Kassel, with a population of around 20,000. Eyewitness accounts from the time did not speak much of the region’s prosperity; in the Grimms’ lifetime, Hesse was still a land of “indigence in good years, hunger in bad.”¹⁰ Nor did it count as a renowned center of artistic or academic culture;¹¹ over their scholarly and sometime political careers, the Grimms would emerge as two of the most illustrious Hessians of their epoch.¹²

In the preceding century, the landgraviate’s primary or at least most well-known “export industry” had been state-organized auxiliary troops,¹³ Hessian contingents contracted out by the landgraves to fight campaigns for other powers.¹⁴ A fairly small state, it nonetheless maintained a large and well-trained army, which provided men in the upper strata with career opportunities and the landgraves who collected subsidies from other kingdoms with financial independence from the Hessian estates.¹⁵ In the eighteenth century, there were more soldiers per capita in Hesse than in the famously militaristic Prussia.¹⁶ The practices of this “mercenary state” are known today primarily because almost 20,000 Hessians infamously served in the British war against the American revolutionaries,¹⁷ an extension of a common practice at the time but one that was increasingly criticized. The notorious arrangement with the British brought in large revenues to the landgrave Friedrich II,¹⁸ who died in the year Jacob Grimm was born, in

1785, but damaged the image of the Hessians, at least in the American sphere.

The brothers Grimm thus grew up in a relatively poor German principality governed by a debt-free regime,¹⁹ a landgraviate shaped by the dominating presence of the military rather than by manufacturing, industry, or commerce²⁰ and ruled by a line of patriarchal autocrats with a declining international reputation; later historians have generally been critical and singled out the early nineteenth-century Hessian Electors' avarice, rigidity, and illiberalism.²¹ In this setting, the Grimms were born into a family of local ministers and judicial officials, settled in Hanau, a region with some textile production.²² Their father, who passed away when they were still children, had served as a local administrative official or district magistrate of the Hessian government, principally responsible for judicial matters in a collection of small towns and villages.²³ Exposed to the threat of downward mobility after the father's early death in 1796, the extended family managed to place the brothers in the main lyceum in the capital and from there they moved to the university in Marburg in 1802 (Jacob) and 1803 (Wilhelm), Hesse's one significant center of higher learning, with about 200 students.²⁴ In Marburg, hardly as great a university as the nearby Göttingen in Hanover,²⁵ both brothers studied law, the obvious choice at the time for anyone striving to obtain a position in public administration.²⁶ The Grimms were thus prepared for administrative and judicial careers in the family tradition and evinced an attitude of regional identification, attached to the landscape and traditions of their childhood, and reverent toward the patriarchal, patrimonial ruler,²⁷ the "father of the fatherland [*Vater des Vaterlandes*]."²⁸ When Jacob Grimm spoke about his *Heimat*, his homeland, the historian Johan Huizinga writes, he meant his particular province, electoral Hesse.²⁹

For the young brothers Grimm with their focus on future careers in the Electorate, Germany did not exist as one single, integrated nation-state. Nor did they envision such a state in their early years; they would likely have balked at such a massive enterprise of political centralization in the heart of Europe. The Grimms believed that there were Germans and that they all belonged together, but as subjects of affiliated but still independent individual states, each with its own local traditions and specificities. The conquest or domination of one German state by another or military conflicts between German states, the young Jacob Grimm believed, were nothing but a "sin" and "perversion."³⁰

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, the political order to which the brothers were accustomed was shaken by war, conquest,

foreign domination, and multiple territorial reconfigurations. As young men in the era of the drawn-out and devastating Napoleonic wars, the brothers experienced a great deal of volatility and uncertainty to which they responded with some degree of melancholic nostalgia.³¹ Looking at their personal experience, the most consequential of the period's transformations was the already mentioned Napoleonic occupation of Hesse-Kassel and the surrounding states. After political miscalculations by the Elector Wilhelm I, who had ruled Hesse since the birth year of Jacob Grimm in 1785, Napoleon marched in and seized the country without a single battle in October 1806³² – Hesse experienced a defeat without war.³³ The Elector himself escaped, first to his brother in Denmark and then to Habsburg Bohemia.³⁴ On Napoleon's orders, the Electorate was incorporated into the new and larger Kingdom of Westphalia, to be ruled by his inexperienced and compliant 23-year-old brother Jérôme as a model French state.³⁵ The German population now governed by the French regime would – this was Napoleon's intention³⁶ – come to see the many benefits of a more modern government. In a letter to his brother, Napoleon confidently envisioned that the subjects of his brother's rule would welcome the blessings of a more enlightened and meritocratic regime: "What the people of Germany impatiently desire is that men without nobility but of genuine ability will have an equal claim upon your favour and advancement, and that every trace of serfdom and feudal privilege . . . be completely done away with."³⁷ The first German state to receive a constitution according to the French template, Westphalia was Napoleon's most ambitious attempt to put a French model of governance on display in German lands.³⁸

To demonstrate the virtues of rational, efficient, and liberal French rule, the new Napoleonic regime reorganized local administration, staffed many of its top positions with French civil servants,³⁹ replaced currency and measurements, abolished privileged access of the nobility to certain government offices,⁴⁰ removed special taxes and occupational restrictions on Jews,⁴¹ and promulgated equality before the law and freedom of religion.⁴² Yet the administrative and legal transformation of Hesse was ultimately meant to serve its integration into a universal empire of the French, in which unfettered trade and administrative cohesion in Europe would strengthen Napoleonic superiority.⁴³ This imperialist agenda soon became clear to the German population, which found itself ruled by a French establishment that controlled key civil and military posts. To support the expansive military ambitions of Napoleon, the Westphalian inhabitants were forced to supply new and heavy taxes as well as thousands of men for

war, so much so that even Jérôme, the puppet king, eventually pleaded with his brother to restrain the exploitation of the country's wealth and people.⁴⁴ Napoleon could speak of the blessings of modernization for the local population but focused on revenues and troops, taxation and conscription;⁴⁵ his regime was meant to eliminate feudalism and yet its modernity consisted primarily in the efficiency of its systematic resource extraction.⁴⁶

In 1813, the brothers Grimm welcomed the dissolution of Napoleonic rule in Kassel with relief and even jubilation.⁴⁷ For them, an illegitimate regime finally came to an end. They had not, however, been vocal opponents to its rule. On the contrary, Jacob Grimm quickly found steady employment at King Jérôme's court. While Wilhelm Grimm's periods of frail health kept him at home during most of these years, Jacob served quite faithfully and successfully in the Napoleonic administrative system, in which French was a required language.⁴⁸ From late 1807 and on, he performed the role as Jérôme's court librarian and was, after a couple of years, also selected as an auditor at the meetings of the king's state council, a position meant to prepare promising young men for a future career in government.⁴⁹ By the time Napoleonic troops retreated from Westphalia, Jacob Grimm had served the French king longer than he had the exiled Hessian Elector. Nor was Jérôme's kingship toppled by any popular uprising, despite outbursts of local unrest a couple of times during the French reign, often led by veterans of the Hessian armies, some of whom had fought in America.⁵⁰ French rule was never seriously contested and ended because of Napoleonic losses on the battlefield.

Still, the brothers Grimm clearly felt uneasy about French dominance under Jérôme. In an autobiographical piece from 1835, Wilhelm Grimm recalled the initial shock and sense of indignity he felt at the Napoleonic occupation of his hometown about three decades earlier and spoke of his unease at encountering foreign people with foreign ways and hearing a "foreign, loudly spoken language in the street and pathways" of Kassel.⁵¹ The retrospective comment might have been shaped by subsequent experiences and accrued political views, but Kassel did change dramatically under Jérôme Bonaparte: the city swelled from 20,000 to about 30,000 inhabitants as it became the seat of a French court and attracted new French and Francophone residents, only to shed most of this quickly added population after the Napoleonic retreat.⁵² No other city, Wilhelm Grimm asserted, had experienced as many dramatic changes during the period.⁵³ In a similar account of his years as a librarian, Jacob Grimm did not linger on his visceral reaction but

noted that the French king of Westphalia, although always friendly in his manner, nevertheless preferred to rely on his French civil servants, something that Jacob found “natural [*natürlich*].”⁵⁴ The French and Germans in Kassel politely conducted government business across cultural and linguistic lines and yet gravitated toward their conationals. These moments of discerned difference in the brothers’ autobiographies might seem trivial but point to a political climate in which members of a German-speaking intelligentsia had begun to invoke cultural particularity to complain about the awkwardness and inappropriateness of foreign rule in German lands. The new French political and administrative elite thought they brought a superior and more equitable system of administration that would benefit the subjects, but to the Grimms, this elite clearly acted as a French regime and relegated German culture and language to a subordinate position.

The return of a German prince in 1813 and the abolition of a French-speaking administration did not necessarily satisfy Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm over the long term. With a steadily growing reputation in pan-German academic circles, the brothers would eventually grow quite frustrated in the stagnant environment of Kassel, complain about poor compensation, and resent the Hessian ruler’s indifference to their accumulating achievements.⁵⁵ When they were recruited to the University of Göttingen at the end of the 1820s, one of the most prestigious German universities, they chose to relocate and crossed the border between Hesse and Hanover to begin work in a more urbane atmosphere, Jacob as professor and Wilhelm as university librarian. The brothers’ expression of enthusiasm for the Elector’s return in 1813 was also not motivated by a purely ideological passion for restored German cultural integrity in government. Their various efforts to welcome the Hessian Elector back to Kassel and help rebuild Hessian rule, including its military capacity, may have had something to do with their hopes for uninterrupted employment. In the post-Napoleonic Hessian Electorate, Wilhelm Grimm obtained a position as a junior librarian whereas Jacob was dispatched as a secretary for the Hessian diplomatic mission to Paris and Vienna. The brothers Grimm were aspiring civil servants in a mid-size state who, in a moment of tumultuous regime change, sought to secure the favor of the returning traditional elite. As part of that effort, they drew on their scholarly expertise to produce a scholarly work – an edition of *Der arme Heinrich* – to raise at least symbolic funds for a mobilization effort that would let the Elector fulfil his obligations and achieve renewed European recognition as the legitimate ruler of his land.

Yet the sequence of regime changes had affected the political imagination of the brothers Grimm. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm supported the returning Hessian ruler but did not necessarily share his conception of his role, and their interest in old Germanic works as well as circulating folktales was tied to their commitment to a new, cultural criterion for legitimacy. Having served a French regime in a quickly assembled dual-language kingdom, they had begun to envision a new kind of intimacy between ruler and ruled, one that a returning German prince would not automatically satisfy. In 1813, the Hessian Elector himself thought he was arriving to reclaim his patrimony, of which he had been deprived.⁵⁶ Even after the era of the French Revolution and Napoleonic reforms, most hereditary German monarchs viewed states and territories as their personal property, to be augmented or abandoned at will;⁵⁷ to the traditional elites, dynastic lineage was still the key to legitimacy.⁵⁸ The brothers Grimm, however, had come to believe in the virtues of a cultural fit between a ruler and a people with an independent, historically rich collective life, a people that could not change its inherited character according to the needs or whims of a regime. For German supporters of the French regime, the Kingdom of Westphalia was a “state without a past,”⁵⁹ unburdened and forward looking, but precisely this lack of historical and cultural foundation was a problem for the Grimms.

The brothers Grimm thus greeted the return of the Hessian Elector to Kassel with enthusiasm in 1813, but they had, through their experiences and studies during their twenties, already discovered the nation. Sensitized to manifestations of cultural difference under the Napoleonic regime, they saw even mild cultural frictions and separate languages as politically pertinent facts. Interestingly, Jacob Grimm’s complaints about Jérôme Bonaparte did not principally take aim at his poor character or incompetence, and Grimm recognized the king’s amiable nature and goodwill.⁶⁰ The French king, Grimm wrote to his friend the Romanticist author Achim von Arnim (1781–1831), failed to take an interest in the people, in a cultural sense. Jérôme never tried to learn German, Grimm noted, and lacked both “love and knowledge [*Liebe und Erkenntnis*]” of the German people.⁶¹ Symptomatically, Jacob Grimm detested the queen of Westphalia more sharply, a German princess from Württemberg who behaved in an “un-German [*undeutsch*]” manner.⁶² This requirement of genuine Germanness worked as a criticism of foreign rule, but Grimm’s notion of a close linguistic and cultural connection between government and governed deviated from a purely dynastic or religious legitimation of monarchical rule and could thus potentially be applied to all forms of

princely rule, even when the ruler was from a German house. For Grimm, any prince or king in Germany had to exhibit a new kind of proximity to a people and possess knowledge of and show genuine love toward its cultural character. Without such appreciation and affection, the rule would be awkward, brittle, unfitting, and illegitimate.

For the young Grimms, then, vernacular tongues and geographically concentrated cultures ultimately determined the boundaries of legitimate government, a principle that would be anathema to most traditional monarchs, who would have dismissed any linguistic limits to plans of expansion.⁶³ According to the brothers, the genuine father of the fatherland must speak the language of its inhabitants, and ruler and ruled should hail from the same people. In their implicit, still inchoate view, the exiled Hessian Elector did not exactly return to a scattered bunch of people who could now be properly re-subjected to their rightful patriarch: instead, he returned to a cultural whole with an independent existence, to a German people. The formerly patrimonial ruler appeared legitimate insofar as he stood in a more intimate cultural relationship to the population;⁶⁴ access to rule had become reserved for those who credibly represented a German cultural community, for those who could govern as non-alien figures with respect for the people's linguistic and ethnic cohesion. This people who now required some form of political recognition (if not democratic enfranchisement) was conjured, one could add, in the folktale collection that Jacob and Wilhelm compiled during the years of Napoleonic reign, the famous *Children- and Household Tales*. Folk narratives lovingly assembled, widely disseminated, and properly understood, the Grimms would even imply, could help prove and strengthen a cultural identity to which monarchical rule would have to adapt.

Military Mobilization and Folktale Collection

In the euphoria of 1813, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm put their scholarship in service of the anti-Napoleonic cause; the sales of a translated edition of a medieval German narrative, *der Arme Heinrich*, would help raise funds for the war effort. In the announcement of their edition, Wilhelm Grimm suggested a somewhat strained analogy between the theme of the medieval manuscript and the hardships of the patriotic war against Napoleon. Like the knight in the poem who was to be cured of leprosy by the willing sacrifice of a virgin of modest background who longed for the afterlife, contemporary Hessians could, in this "happy time" of warfare, sacrifice their lives for their fatherland.⁶⁵ The preface to the actual volume continued in a similar vein. It

recounted the scene of the Hessian men pulling the returning Elector's carriage through Kassel's gates in 1813 and then, a little later, raising their swords in anticipation of battle,⁶⁶ out of love and loyalty for the fatherland, unbroken by years of foreign domination; "Hessian blood will fight for the fatherland . . .!"⁶⁷

The Grimms' exercise in patriotic crowdsourcing was not, however, an immediate success, or a success at all. About 150 people signed up to pay for the edition, the majority of them residing in Hesse, and most members of that regionally concentrated group were in some way personally connected to the brothers Grimm. The call to fund German sacrifice was heeded by the editors' social circle.⁶⁸ The translation was also delayed and only appeared in the summer of 1815,⁶⁹ when the Congress of Vienna had already taken place and the major battles for the future of Europe were over, at least for the time being.

The Grimms' delayed edition of *Der arme Heinrich* was not the only patriotic text published to raise funds for the Hessian war effort during the Wars of Liberation, and not the most rhetorically stirring. A volume entitled *War Poems of the Germans* [*Kriegslieder der Deutschen*] with thirteen poems and a versified dedication to German warriors represented an example of literature more directly in the service of war, from the same Hessian region.⁷⁰ Written by a poet with the pseudonym Veit Weber der Jüngere, the songs pursued two primary strategies to strengthen the resolve of the reader. One group of poems invoked values and attitudes that should motivate mobilization against the Napoleonic troops, such as "national pride,"⁷¹ the defense of German freedom, and German imperial unity.⁷² Another set was devoted to a sequence of stylized stations of soldierly experience: bittersweet departure from home, exhilarating advance, the evening before battle, the attack, and the victory. By combining the celebration of German ideals with a concatenation of glorified war scenes, the booklet sought to provide the reader with a vocabulary and narrative that rendered individual participation in war meaningful and promising. Like the Grimms' edition, it was a volume intended for the educated reader. A literary motto was attached to each poem, the majority of them drawn from the works of Friedrich Schiller, and one poem called for the defense of the freedom of German scholarship or *Wissenschaft*, celebrating the life of study and student camaraderie to which the educated young soldiers eventually would return.⁷³

The Grimms' version of *Der arme Heinrich* and the war poetry of Veit Weber der Jüngere were two parallel efforts to stir the Hessian population and enlist the efforts of patriotic German subjects more broadly to fight the

conscription-based French armies, the size of which were unprecedented in European history;⁷⁴ the Napoleonic wars inaugurated the age of massive *Volksbeeren* [people's armies].⁷⁵ The authors also belonged to the same circle in Kassel. Behind the pseudonym Veit Weber the Younger one finds Paul Wigand (1786–1866), an old school friend of Wilhelm Grimm and correspondent of both brothers throughout several decades, who, like Jacob Grimm, worked in the administration under Jérôme Bonaparte⁷⁶ and would enjoy a long career as a locally based jurist and legal historian. In late December 1813, just before he left Kassel for Hessian diplomatic service, Jacob Grimm wrote a letter to Wigand, thanking him for the volume of war songs that he had just received as a gift.⁷⁷ In his response, Grimm also included the announcement of the brothers' own forthcoming medieval text, with the wish that Wigand subscribe and disseminate the news about the edition. In the final days of the "year of redemption," the two friends exchanged their respective contributions to the wartime propaganda efforts. The swap suggests an equivalency between the projects, and a shared purpose: the struggle against Napoleonic dominance. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm as well as their friend Paul Wiegand all hoped for a French defeat.

The brothers published other collaborative works during this period, including the first editions of the world-famous *Children's and Household Tales*, the main source of their enduring worldwide reputation. The preparation dates of the two volumes of folktales even framed the Wars of Liberation. The preface to the first volume of tales is dated to October 1812, and hence it was compiled under Jérôme's reign, before Napoleon's defeat in Russia and the unraveling of French imperial power. The preface to the second volume was finished about two years later, in September 1814, and the book appeared in 1815, when the Congress of Vienna was underway; by that time, Napoleon had been vanquished and a quarter century of warfare had come to an end. The timing of the publications had little to do with war, as opposed to the Grimms' edition of *Der arme Heinrich* and their friend Wigand's martial poems. The Grimms' Berlin-based publisher Georg Andreas Reimer's main concern was to release the first volume of tales around Christmas time to ensure solid sales.⁷⁸ Compared with the edition of the medieval poem, the *Children's and Household Tales* was from the very beginning a book for families, despite its scholarly apparatus. If the edition of *Der arme Heinrich* had been dedicated to female members of the returning royalty, the Electress of Hesse and her daughter,⁷⁹ and was in this way associated with regime change, the *Children's and Household Tales* were dedicated

to a friend, Achim von Arnim's wife Elisabeth (or Bettina) von Arnim (1785–1859) and her child, little Johannes Freumund von Arnim.⁸⁰ The readers of the folktale collection found themselves in a less political and more intimate, domestic sphere.

The prefaces to the folktale volumes spoke only in vague terms about contemporary turmoil and the end of a traditional world and did not enthusiastically greet the opportunity for sacrificial service to the fatherland. The tone was instead infused with nostalgia for plain German folk life, domestic sociability, peasant festivities, and countryside sceneries – placid vignettes unattached to any specific political occurrences. While Wilhelm Grimm argued that folktale motifs exhibited affinities with grander and more heroic genres such as ancient epics and myths,⁸¹ he believed that the folktales themselves evinced simplicity and innocence of spirit.⁸² The gathered tales, Wilhelm also indicated, constituted a fund of national literature in the sense that nothing in the tales had been borrowed from another tradition.⁸³ While the collection of tales was not a repository of martial values and attitudes, to be evoked with pathos in a popular struggle for recovered national German or local autonomy, they did represent a cultural space to be cherished and protected, the mundane but cozy places around the hearth and the kitchen, typically tended to by women. Initiated sometime in 1807, during the first years of Napoleonic occupation,⁸⁴ the collection may seem clearly separated from the events of war and political transformation, and yet they were presented as documents of a quiet, traditional life endangered by unspecified forces of change.

The war effort was in fact not far away from the minds of the brothers in the final phases of editing the first couple of volumes of tales. At the end of his own copy of the first volume, Jacob Grimm added a little note close to Wilhelm's final sentence in his preface. The date of completion for the introductory text, October 18, 1812, Jacob scribbled in the collection, was one year before the victory over Napoleon on the battle field outside Leipzig: "Precisely one year before the Battle at Leipzig [*Gerade ein Jahr vor der Leipziger Schlacht*]." ⁸⁵ In a minimalist fashion, Jacob Grimm retroactively inscribed the first collection of household tales into the context of the anti-Napoleonic wars, and he even suggested that the folk narratives might be mysteriously connected with the military triumph over the French emperor. This would mean that the modest, the simple, and the neglected for him stood in a relationship to the geopolitical and world historical, an attractive idea to Jacob Grimm who was known for unflinching attention to apparently insignificant minutia and love for the small, non-prestigious, and

provincial.⁸⁶ The noted coincidence of dates also ascribed to the collection a latent prophetic or even combative quality – the first little volume of gathered stories had anticipated the resurgence of the native over the alien, the German over the French.

Jacob Grimm himself thus indicated a relationship between the *Children's and Household Tales* and the large-scale military and political clashes of his time. Scholars have followed Grimm and long debated the nationalist value of history's most famous folktale collection. With their book, the Grimms certainly promoted a favorable public image of the creative vitality of common people,⁸⁷ but the publication and republication of the tales over time successfully established a cultural object of broad appeal to German readers who, with its help, could understand themselves as the collective inheritors of an old folk culture. By presenting the narratives as expressions of a German folk, the Grimms contributed to the plausibility of a unified collective German subject, a national community with a shared tradition. Out of cultural materials of sometimes quite different provenance including a number of tales from French Huguenot families and more aristocratic circles,⁸⁸ two bookish aspiring civil servants⁸⁹ managed to forge an image of a national rather than exclusively local folkloric literature. By conjuring a reassuring, sociologically underspecified vision of a vaguely rural and artisanal world,⁹⁰ they invited readers into a trans-regional, cross-class solidarity.⁹¹ In this way, the Grimms converted brief stories people told now and then, here and there, into supposedly distinctive manifestations of the German people and its putative collective soul.

Again, however, the brothers released their collections of folktales alongside other projects in a broader *ensemble* of nationalist works meant to articulate and promote regional and pan-German self-assertion. It is in the context of a more comprehensive picture of genres that one can identify more precisely the ideological service that the collection started in 1807 performed through its carefully constructed hominess, modesty, simplicity, and innocence. The aim of the rest of this chapter is to reconstruct a set of nationalist genre preferences, or the elements of what one could call the nationalist *literary repertoire*. The combination of genres – folktale and military song, rustic vignette and hortatory announcement – that we have already encountered in the Grimms' and Paul Wigand's contemporary works exemplifies a recurring constellation of textual forms in the early nationalist public sphere. These forms were often-used literary means with which the Grimms and their contemporaries in German lands conjured a German people that had, it was argued, always existed in its particularity

but was now in desperate need of preservation and military defense. The nationally defined people possessed a historically deep existence but must protect itself and fight against forces that might well annihilate it – that would be the statement that one could distill from the *combination* of genres that characterized early nationalist literary productivity, the peculiar coexistence of ventriloquized innocence and simplicity (folktales) with calls for struggle and sacrifice (war songs).

For the Grimms, then, military mobilization and folktale collection were to some extent complementary activities, and the first generation of German nationalists as a group coordinated propagandistic rhetoric and folksy narratives. The tales of the brothers Grimm were not an overtly political work on their own, but their distinct ideological meaning becomes visible in a broadened literary context. To understand this vital relationship between genres, however, one must first grasp the particular structure of German nationalist ideology in the Napoleonic period.

National Particularity and Statehood in Napoleonic-Era Nationalism

The Napoleonic period in Germany saw the emergence of a fairly coherent nationalist creed. Its development can be summarized in the following way: under the pressure of French occupation and mass war, an already articulated anthropological vision of humanity as composed of a plurality of culturally particular nations became a tool of rhetorical mobilization for resistance in the hands of intellectuals who began to imagine a new and ultimately popular basis for legitimate political rule; the exercise of power, they demanded, must be appropriately rooted in cultural particularity and assume the form of national autonomy. The early German nationalists, mostly Protestant German philosophers, historians, legal scholars, publicists, and educators, thus fused the Enlightenment idea of self-government as legitimate government with a conception of a naturally differentiated humanity to argue that culturally discernible peoples constituted separate units of rule.⁹² Specifically, they reacted to French conquest and Napoleonic hegemony with its combination of administrative modernization and fiscal and military exploitation⁹³ by formulating a politicized anthropology,⁹⁴ a vision of collective self-determination on a cultural and linguistic basis.

Among the small, nationally oriented intelligentsia in various German lands dominated by the French, this rudimentary argument seems to have achieved the status of common sense, with the origins, benefits, and values

of cultural plurality variously explained and justified, sometimes with reference to natural evolution, sometimes to divine providence.⁹⁵ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were highly conscious of the emerging nationalist conversation; they read, commented on, and occasionally crossed paths with some of the most prominent nationalist thinkers of the period, men about a decade or two older than they were. The two young Hessians were peripheral figures in relation to this forming nationalist discourse, and it was in any case hardly a mass-based movement until around the 1830s,⁹⁶ but the Grimms absorbed and frequently approved of the ideas and arguments they encountered in pamphlets and essays dedicated to the problem of legitimate modern rule, or more specifically to the question of who was entitled to rule over Germans.

By the end of the Napoleonic wars, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), whose major works were published in the late eighteenth century, had emerged as the most influential German-language thinker of cultural particularity. Seeking to resist both the authority of misconstrued classical models over a complex and evolving European literature and the perceived superiority of French civilizational achievements uncritically emulated by German aristocracies,⁹⁷ Herder had insisted that peoples and their cultures should not be ranked on one scale, according to their approximation of a supposed universal ideal. Instead, all human communities could and should be appreciated in their uniqueness, as distinctive embodiments of a plastic human capacity for development. In contrast to animals, Herder argued, humans were relatively unformed and only acquired definite traits through learning processes. Since humans spread out over the globe and interacted with diverse environments, their traits and skills would always be peculiar to them, molded by specific sets of circumstances, prepared for specific sets of problems, and finally also expressed in specific aesthetic forms.⁹⁸ There was, according to Herder, not one kind of excellence to be aspired to by all human beings at all times but competencies, virtues, and sensibilities that had evolved in response to different landscapes over time; “the good,” he wrote in the mid-1770s, is “*distributed* across the earth.”⁹⁹ Herder, one could say with only slight exaggeration, discovered the wondrous multiplicity of nations, peoples, and cultures and often jubilantly celebrated it.¹⁰⁰

Herder had arrived at a vision of the fundamental elements of humanity, a textured “social ontology”¹⁰¹ according to which humankind necessarily consisted of a plurality of peoples, each shaped by its own location and history, guided by its local values, and employing its native skills. Such a vision served to disable the application of a single (French) standard of

cultural achievement onto a German sociocultural landscape well before French military conquest of German lands. In the resulting nationalized conception of the world, humanity appeared as a multiplicity of groups, each one held together by its shared language and culture rather than its members' political acceptance of some common sovereign power or contractual association with one another.¹⁰² Human beings in the abstract, somehow untouched by a local geography and climate, beyond all historical contexts, did not exist; there were, Herder believed, only ever culturally individualized realizations of humanity.

As French military dominance extended over larger and larger territories after Herder's death, and Napoleon dispatched the old political arrangements of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 to consolidate numerous German statelets into larger vassal kingdoms or satellite states, some educated Germans believed they faced a powerful wave of centralization and regimentation; all the world would be remade, it seemed, in the image of French rule. Under these conditions, even writers who had initially greeted the French Revolution as an inspiring liberation began to invoke the irreducibly national composition of humanity and give it a hardened political application. The cultural and linguistic contours of humanity, they now insisted, imposed constraints on legitimate rule, and French control over all of Europe was neither desirable nor viable. The key conceptual move consisted in the articulation of cultural particularity, *Eigenthümlichkeit*, and political independence, *Selbstständigkeit*. The primary task of each people, the Jena-based professor Heinrich Luden (1778–1847) pronounced in his well-visited lectures on the study of history (published in 1810), was to “to retain its independence [*Selbstständigkeit*], to remain free and autonomous from the rule of any other people, in order to retain the possibility of freely developing its particular [*eigenthümliche*] character.”¹⁰³ In Luden's view, some form of universal imperial domination would run counter to the innermost mission of each historical community and consequently had to be resisted. The nation was not just a unique cultural community; it represented an ideal unit of rule. This politicization of cultural communities may have affected the way in which they were conceptualized: whereas Herder could understand cultural development and learning within but also across human groups as a ceaseless “Protean” process¹⁰⁴ in which traits, skills, and expressions flourished and vanished, the nationalists of the Napoleonic period assumed a greater degree of communal closure around a more stable set of shared traits, for the reason that culture had now become the ground of territorial and political claims. *Eigenthümlichkeit*, particularity, they believed, had to

be more sharply defined, and nobody would define it with greater precision than the grammarian Jacob Grimm.

The historian Heinrich Luden was well known as an opponent of French rule; writing in his exile in Russia, the Prussian statesman Baron von Stein (1757–1831) singled out Luden in a strategy paper as a dependable and popular scholar to be deployed in an anti-French public relations battle, along with other publicly recognized thinkers such as the theologian and nationalist preacher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).¹⁰⁵ The historian Luden, however, was far from the only one to argue for the political salience of cultural distinctiveness. In an 1813 pamphlet that Jacob Grimm praised in a letter to his friend Paul Wigand,¹⁰⁶ the Munich-based reform-oriented jurist Anselm von Feuerbach (1775–1833), later known among other things for a book on the wild child Kaspar Hauser, narrated the course of events in Europe from the French Revolution to the present and noted the fragility of Napoleon's achievement. When peoples that were linguistically, culturally, and morally different nonetheless were forced into political unity, Feuerbach wrote, the result was a composite prone to dissolution.¹⁰⁷ Here again one can discern the principle of a necessary congruence between historical and cultural community and state extension, in the negative form of a reaction to overextended French rule about to lose its grip over the peoples of Europe.

This emphasis on the cultural distinctiveness of peoples was not only a matter of pragmatic convenience, as if rule simply became more cumbersome for all parties if conducted over cultural and linguistic rifts. It was, for some prominent voices, an urgent question of national survival, at least during the years of apparent French invincibility. Some argued that Napoleon's victories and the rule of his family did not just constitute evidence of foreign supremacy and humiliation to German states but would over time mean the complete extinction of German culture and therefore had to be resisted by the entire people. In an 1810 historical survey of the persistence of vanquished peoples, "About the Means of Maintaining the Nationality of Defeated Peoples," the Göttingen historian of antiquity Arnold Heeren (1760–1842), another figure noticed by the Prussian statesman Baron von Stein, claimed that peoples dominated by mightier powers frequently vanished from the records of history.¹⁰⁸ Disappearance was a terrible but realistic prospect. To determine the possibility of averting this fate, Heeren listed some of the defining features of nations and then assessed which ones were particularly vulnerable and which ones it would be most damaging to lose. A people's loss of its own language would be fatal, Heeren claimed, and lead to its dissolution. Luden

echoed this sentiment in his lectures: the loss of independence for a people would surely threaten its particularity, expressed in religion, traditions, art, science, and law, which in turn would “annihilate [*vernichtet*]” the people; it would simply cease to exist.¹⁰⁹

The poet, essayist, and historian Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860), who was directly employed by Baron von Stein¹¹⁰ and probably both the earliest and the most notorious champion of radical anti-French sentiment,¹¹¹ envisioned a similar fate for Germans: French rule, he stated in an 1813 pamphlet on the river Rhine as a border, would lead to the “effacement and extermination [*Auslöschung und Ausrottung*]” of German cultural particularity.¹¹² Jacob Grimm read Arndt’s Rhine tract with approval in early January 1814 and wrote to Wilhelm that it contained much that was “right and true,” although he did not consider it exhaustive from a scholarly point of view.¹¹³ Like Arndt, Grimm believed that Germans needed to reconquer the left bank of the Rhine, but not primarily for military-strategic reasons, to fortify the defense of Germany, but because the region was simply not French. The population, Grimm claimed with definitiveness, “is and speaks German [*weil es deutsch ist und spricht*].”¹¹⁴

The professors and writers cited earlier – Luden, Heeren, Feuerbach, Arndt – saw cultural particularity and statehood as entwined. For this group born in the 1760s and 1770s, cultural and linguistic nationhood required and justified self-government, and the loss of independent statehood would entail cultural impoverishment or even cultural death. For some early nationalists, the shared worry about the menace of national erasure inspired nothing less than profound desperation. In his twelfth lecture in the *Addresses to the German Nation* held at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin during the early years of French occupation in 1807 and 1808, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) discussed the German nation’s means of persistence under foreign rule and argued that literature alone could not possibly sustain Germanness – only an independent state structure could.¹¹⁵ A permanent alien occupation, Fichte predicted, would diminish German literature, for authors write to shape public consciousness, even to exercise a kind of rule in the realm of the intellect, and a language unconnected to a state would decay in public status, prove less attractive to authors eager to determine a shared future, and eventually deteriorate and perish.¹¹⁶ Authorship could thus not be sustained without the promise of substantial moral influence guaranteed within a resilient political structure. In fact, Fichte continued, a nation shamefully unable to maintain its self-determination might very well give up its language, too, and simply merge with its evident masters.¹¹⁷ This

prospect of permanent political submission and collective cultural and linguistic extinction, however, must fill individuals with dread, because only the nationally defined people with its language and distinctive way of life held the promise of longevity, a kind of earthly eternity.¹¹⁸ Individuals may die, Fichte argued, but a people as a whole appears to preserve the life form that shapes every person and to which he or she also contributes; it functions as the vessel of the individual's legacy. The erosion of national particularity and the effective dissolution of a distinct people under long-term foreign rule would thus deprive the members of a nation of their sense of futurity, of the permanence and meaning of their deeds and their legacy, causing them to look at the world in disgust and wish they would never have been born.¹¹⁹ Like Arndt and other nationalists, Fichte expressed a fear of imminent cultural extinction. Jacob Grimm read Fichte's lectures with enthusiasm and, in a letter to Wilhelm, he wrote that a popular version of the lectures ought to be published for as broad an audience as possible.¹²⁰ To his mentor Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861), he declared that Fichte's *Addresses* was one of finest works ever written.¹²¹

In the Napoleonic era, then, an already established, Herderian vision of an internally plural humanity, once devised to challenge French and hence aristocratic cultural prestige, became more sharply politicized under the pressure of French conquest and rule. To this fairly small academic elite of politicized and radicalized Herderians,¹²² humanity was not just variously embodied and hence naturally divided into distinct communities, but each community had the obligation and the right to ensure its continuity and resist its own demise. The nationalist writers of the period from 1806 to 1815 transmitted, in their tracts, lectures, and pamphlets, a more narrowly focused and rigidly instrumentalized anthropology, a politicized social ontology. Their concept of the nation itself represented an "arming of culture."¹²³ The core premise, inherited from cultural debates at end of the eighteenth century, was that humanity existed only in the form of a diverse ensemble of culturally particular peoples, and the shared discovery in the early nineteenth century, born of military and political collapse, was that such peoples were vulnerable and under threat and must defend themselves aggressively. Nationalists believed that nations could not possibly be invented on the spot, but that they could and must be protected.

This formula was explicitly articulated in the tract of another Herderian, the Prussian-born educator Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), mostly known for heading a nationalist gymnastic movement that spread across German lands, often eyed suspiciously by princes. Jahn deemed it impossible to engineer the qualities and virtues that characterized a particular

people. Such qualities were instead always the result of the people's historically drawn-out and quiet process of coming together into eventual unity: "No thousand-year-old oak," he wrote, "ever grew in a hothouse [*Keine tausendjährige Eiche erwuchs im Treibhaus*]." ¹²⁴ In fact, no missionary religion, no reformation, no great cause whatsoever could ever advance without allying itself with the energies of an already extant people. Jahn stood for an ethnicized approach to the world, in which political projects initiated by great individuals were dependent on the slowly and spontaneously evolved peoples who resolved to support them; Mohammed would have been nothing without the power of the Arab people, and Luther's achievement was enabled by the release of collective German energies. ¹²⁵ Yet Jahn's 1810 tract *Deutsches Volksthum*, which outlined in greater detail than any of the writings of his contemporaries the appropriate regional divisions, legal arrangements, educational institutions, cultural celebrations, and linguistic conventions for a German future, clearly stated that nationality could be preserved through conscious organization. ¹²⁶ Jahn's writings thus called for an active, even militarized, defense of a spontaneously evolved cultural substance. Both Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm met Jahn on some occasions, read his work approvingly, followed his activities, but thought him a little voluble. They were, in the end, primarily scholars, whereas Jahn was one of the most prominent organizers and propagandists of early German nationalism. ¹²⁷

This review of Fichte, Jahn, Arndt, Luden, and the others members of the small German nationalist intelligentsia reveals a nationalist pattern of argumentation. They all espoused the premise of a valuable plurality of distinct and bounded peoples but also pointed to the fragility and susceptibility of individual nations to military conquest and subjugation and called for their forceful defense. This line of reasoning implied a novel conception of political legitimacy. To this loose group of nationalists, the cultural character of a people in effect constituted a test of aptness for any political rule; regimes had to be culturally fitted to nations. This did not exactly entail a commitment to the active participation in politics by all citizens of a state, to full-fledged popular sovereignty and democracy; however, the nationalist rejection of foreign conquest and occupation relied on a vision of cultural consonance between the nationally defined people and its political elites. Governing competence or dynastic genealogy had to make room for a new criterion of legitimate rule, namely the shared nationhood of ruler and ruled. This greater accommodation of the people understood as a historically particular collective looks like an advance over traditional conceptions of royal sovereignty, but the

emerging democratization of political discourse was entangled with an increasing demonization of a collective enemy. Nationalist propaganda often demanded a greater degree of representation of the German people in politics, but the political egalitarianism was coupled with an incitement of a general, popular hatred pitted against the collective enemy – a genuine folk hatred.

The entwinement of more inclusive politics and mobilization of collective affect was embodied in the figure of Ernst Moritz Arndt, the most widely disseminated nationalist author of the Napoleonic era, and probably one of the most prolific. His pamphlets, among them the February 1813 statement on the task of a Prussian militia, was printed in tens of thousands of copies,¹²⁸ and his poem “What Is the German’s Fatherland? [*Was ist des deutschen Vaterland?*],” a lyrically virtuosic argument for German unification, came to epitomize the period’s literary production.¹²⁹ Arndt excelled at the rhetoric that Paul Wigand and Wilhelm Grimm dabbled in, namely the call to Germans to do battle against French armies in the name of their shared national culture. However, Arndt did not just oblige his Prussian employers and encourage Germans to resist and fight the French emperor. Realizing that German rulers were pressured by massive, conscription-based Napoleonic armies and somewhat reluctantly had to drum up patriotic support in the larger population, he followed up the call for militia mobilization, approved by members of the Prussian administration, with further pamphlets on the importance of a national constitution that would allow all estates, including the peasantry, an expanded role in government. Arndt linked support for a more comprehensive enlistment of male Germans, a vision that never really came to pass,¹³⁰ to the redistribution of political influence away from the aristocracy and the clergy and toward the peasantry and bourgeoisie,¹³¹ partly inspired by a Swedish model;¹³² he was born in Swedish Pomerania, the son of an independent peasant.¹³³ He first made language the overriding criterion of political membership, helped define fellow nationals of all groups and classes as loyal and honorably masculine combatants in war,¹³⁴ and finally argued that readiness for sacrifice in battle entitled larger numbers of people not just to partake in the previously aristocratic reserve of military glory but to participate in the political process. Warfare on an unprecedented scale should also bring the nation closer to some form of representative government.¹³⁵ If military violence had to involve the entire people, then politics must, too;¹³⁶ the soldier should be a citizen, the citizen a soldier.¹³⁷

Arndt combined his call for maximal mobilization of Germans, to be rewarded with expanded political participation, with a dark image of the French as an enemy nation. Political inclusion was thus tied to a more comprehensive form of national closure and stricter territorial and cultural exclusion.¹³⁸ For Arndt, nation had to stand against nation, people against people. In an infamous pamphlet from 1813 entitled “On Folk Hatred,” Arndt argued that the natural and mild disinclination that conationals with a common culture and common language typically feel toward the character of another culture should be sharpened in a time of war and assume the form of collective hate, of *Volkshafß*.¹³⁹ Only such a shared passion with its galvanizing effect upon people would ensure a vigorous popular resistance to the military enemy.¹⁴⁰ In Arndt’s view, the age of mass warfare inaugurated by Napoleon required mass affect. Every able man should take up arms to fight the populous foreign army, and every German national should be roused out of slumber and actively direct hatred not just toward a French imperial regime but the French as a collective.

Hate, however, would not just incite people and make them ready for active resistance to the enemy. As an enhancement of the natural but latent aversion of one culture to another, hate would render regrettably fluid cultural borders more permanent;¹⁴¹ Arndt was drawn to hatred because it could serve to rigidify separations. Due to its conserving nature, the affect of hatred solved a pressing problem for Arndt, a problem that he shared with many of his nationalist peers, namely the perceived fragility of human cultural plurality.¹⁴² Luden, Heeren, Fichte, and others believed that humankind was naturally differentiated and diversely realized, and yet particularities that comprised it were also always under threat and could face extinction – this was a central conundrum of early German nationalism. Collectively felt hatred would, Arndt believed, serve to fortify the cultural boundaries by making the people as a whole more unyielding, more determined to hold on to what they were and reject what was foreign: “proud and noble hatred” would “separate and hold apart” that which was “diverse and unequal.”¹⁴³ In this way, folk hatred would stabilize the plural composition of humanity and do so in a way that would not require policing by a coercive agent. In 1813, Arndt stood for the most radical version of a politicized, indeed militarized Herderian social ontology. The defense of the people’s distinctiveness had to be ensured by the people itself, by means of a collective affective barrier.

All nationalists of the period devoted themselves to the defense of national particularity, the forced erasure of which supposedly would deprive the people of its memory, identity, and orientation and despotically flatten the rich cultural topography of the world. In response to this challenge, Fichte

urged the construction of a national apparatus of mass education,¹⁴⁴ which would over time strengthen and unify Germans as Germans, and Jahn introduced a long list of institutional and ritual supports for German peoplehood. Arndt, as we have seen, propagated popular hatred. These three projects appear as functionally equivalent; they were all meant to safeguard German particularity and, by extension, human cultural plurality. Arndt's aggressive solution differed mostly in that it required much less of an organizational, infrastructural investment. Incitement of popular hatred directed against the imperialist enemy was a quicker fix than educating all Germans in the Fichtean manner or structuring a shared culture according to Jahn's plan. The question with relation to the Hessian brothers Grimm, however, is what role their early philological project played in the nationalist imagination, alongside proposals for comprehensive institution building (Fichte), organized public life (Jahn), and collective hate (Arndt). What was the ideological meaning and purpose of a collection of humble folktales in the era of continental war and belligerent nationalism? How did the folktales, so carefully framed by the brothers as modest, natural, and innocent, fit into the structure of early nationalist ideology?

Folk Hatred – and Folktales

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm read and discussed Fichte, Arndt, Jahn, and other nationalist authors, all of whom were a little older than they were, born in the 1760s and 1770s rather than the 1780s. They were familiar with the nationally oriented rhetoric of their time, had read the key nationalist pamphlets of the era, and occasionally wrote opinion pieces themselves on the necessary defense of German culture in journals of the era, most notably the *Rheinischer Merkur*.¹⁴⁵ Both brothers certainly wanted the French to retreat from Kassel and depart from all German lands, but they were young scholars and antiquarians, not publicists or pamphleteers, and their writings were not exactly expressions of passionate or strategic hatred. During his long work trips to France, Jacob Grimm reported that he wished to leave Paris as soon as he could and he did express a strong aversion to French law,¹⁴⁶ but the propagation of hatred seems like it would have been an alien endeavor to him, an excessive rhetoric, although he understood that hatred may be a reaction to oppression or “pressure [*Druck*]” by a foreign power.¹⁴⁷ What, then, could be the link between the nationalist vision of comprehensive mobilization and even collective hatred and the folktales gathered by the brothers Grimm throughout the period of French reign?

The political endeavors of Arndt and others were quite closely connected to the more scholarly efforts of the Grimms because the latter obligingly gave substance to key elements in the nationalist argumentation. The infinitely valuable collective particularity that nationalists like Luden, Arndt, and Fichte invoked must, at some point and in some way, also be exemplified. The distinctive ways of being, folk traditions, values, and expressions that defined the people and must be defended so vigorously also had to be demonstrated to exist – and to exist *prior to* the enterprise of an organized political and military defense of the nation. The fundamental assertion of collective cultural particularity required plausible documentation. This was the self-appointed task of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: their early collections and scholarly publications served to substantiate the politically indispensable claim to cultural and historical *Eigenthümlichkeit*.

The brothers and their peers among scholars reoriented humanistic study around the value of cultural particularity, or “own-ness,” to use a more literal translation of *Eigenthümlichkeit*. Wilhelm Grimm very frequently invoked particularity in his texts,¹⁴⁸ and it was a more pervasive term in Jacob Grimm’s works than the more famous concept *Volksgeist*, the people’s spirit.¹⁴⁹ In an ambitious review of Old Norse literature published in an academic journal some five years after the end of the Napoleonic wars, Wilhelm Grimm articulated the broad Herderian shift toward nation-ness that he and his fellow German scholars had already performed: the purpose of humanistic study was to discern and preserve national particularity, he argued, rather than to perpetuate a shared European, classical heritage and hold it up as a universal normative model for all human self-cultivation. The “task of education,” he wrote, “is not to assemble a collection of all retrievable samples of excellence” but instead “to promote the natural development of our own particularity [*Eigenthümlichkeit*].”¹⁵⁰ The study of the ancients was the key to self-understanding, Wilhelm Grimm admitted in his programmatic text, but because people remained shaped by their own origins and historical paths, scholars must turn away from a pantheon of decontextualized templates of classical greatness and instead fix their attention on the unfolding peculiarity of their very own culture. In his article, then, Wilhelm Grimm captured the nationalization of humanistic study and Germanic philology’s focus on native particularity, but he also rendered his discipline compatible with nationalist politics, which depended for its plausibility on the existence of a historically anchored way of life, a national specificity.

Broadly speaking, nationalist propagandists such as Arndt worked in tandem with less obviously propagandistic scholars such as the Grimms,

because the organized political and military defense of the people in its cultural particularity needed proof of that posited particularity, the spontaneous and distinctive cultural life of that people. There were certainly concrete ways in which Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales* figured on the periphery of a nationalist campaign, but the very notion of a document of authentic folk life alone occupied a crucial place in the nationalist logic of ideas. Early nationalism depended on scholarly validation, some robust supply of evidence for the people's ongoing, historical life. Such evidence could come in multiple forms, and early nationalism was inspired and sustained by a range of activities undertaken by amateur collectors, enthusiasts, and academics.¹⁵¹ Philologists compiled dictionaries of living languages and dialects; ethnographers observed folk customs and festivities; folklorists transcribed and anthologized circulating songs, tales, and legends; literary scholars edited, updated, and published ancient or not-so-ancient manuscripts; collectors gathered rustic artifacts and put them on display, and so on. As Miroslav Hroch has pointed out, scholarly activities typically predated the formation of nationalist mass movements;¹⁵² they constructed an object that an audience could then cherish, identify with, and swear to protect. Networks of scholars thus helped establish in an objective-seeming fashion the enduring and autonomous life of the national people, and the reality and distinctiveness of its expressions. This supposedly already well-defined collective constituted the all-important "pre-political ground" that justified the struggle for nationally circumscribed political power.¹⁵³ Early nationalism, one could claim, was a very scholarly ideology, even an ideology with a predilection for the literary; it relied for its persuasive force on collections of songs, tales, customs, legal relics, and all sorts of other material that rendered the national character legible.

The nationalist creed articulated by such figures as Arndt or Jahn thus reached out for ethnographic and historical scholarship: the political demand for national self-rule required a preexisting nation, and this nation and its history had to speak and display itself in compilations of rustic tales. The task and the achievement of the scholars who then captured the nation in its expressions were neither overtly political nor completely unpolitical but served a function in the nationalist argumentation. The scholarly projects took place in a pre-political space, as they furnished evidence of the nation's prior existence that could then be invoked as the basis for legitimate political rule. The Grimms' book of tales was not a pamphlet meant to rouse or amplify the anger of the people against a foreign occupation force, but it would be wrong to view it simply as a volume

for the Christmas market, although it was certainly published with reading parents in mind and several of their friends and acquaintances greeted it as a perfect gift for children.¹⁵⁴ The collection instead served its political purpose precisely by *not* focusing on the explicit political consciousness of the nationally defined people but instead on its cultural productivity – its modest, simple, innocent, delightful, historically anchored communal life.

Were the *Children's and Household Tales* ever perceived as nationalist by contemporary readers? Not so much by the brothers' circle of friends, who treated the book as an anthology of stories for children and even faulted the brothers for having published too scholarly a collection, with too many unsuitable tales, but without the appeal of added visual imagery.¹⁵⁵ Over time, many of the canny suggestions from the early readers would also be implemented. After the success of the shortened English-language version published in London in 1823, scholarly notes were shed, brutal tales edited or omitted, and pictures added; the book may have been culturally German but the media strategy was imported from the English book market.¹⁵⁶ Yet the book's early publication history still circumstantially suggests that it participated in a broader nationalist project. The first publisher of Grimms' folktale collection, the Berlin-based Georg Andreas Reimer, was perhaps the premier nationalist publisher at the time of Napoleonic occupation and the Wars of Liberation. He supported the anti-Napoleonic struggle personally¹⁵⁷ and entertained connections with many of the most prominent nationalist writers. Reimer was a very close friend of the nationalist theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, provided living quarters to Ernst Moritz Arndt once the nationalist writer had lost his professorship in Greifswald under French rule, and his house served as a gathering place for circles of German patriots.¹⁵⁸ Reimer also brought out several of the era's most influential nationalist statements, among them Arndt's poems and pamphlets such as "Catechism for German Soldiers" as well as a book on German gymnastics by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.¹⁵⁹ A further relevant project housed by Reimer's company was the journal *The Prussian Correspondent*,¹⁶⁰ edited by a series of figures such as Schleiermacher and Achim von Arnim, and partly dedicated to war reporting; Wilhelm Grimm read it with interest and also contributed an anonymous report from Kassel in 1813.¹⁶¹

During the beginning of the nineteenth century, Reimer thus emerged as an important German-language publisher on nationalist topics,¹⁶² and his receptivity to the folktale collection indicates its compatibility with the Romantic-nationalist profile of the catalogue as a whole. However, the

Grimms did not exactly approach Reimer because his positions harmonized with theirs; it was the writer Achim von Arnim who initiated the contact,¹⁶³ and Reimer published Arnim's tales and songs, along with works by Jean Paul, Ludwig Tieck, and the Schlegel brothers, all famous Romanticist authors. The mere co-presence of several different genres – Arndt's pamphlets and Grimms' tales – in the catalogue of one single publishing house does not imply any essential interconnection between them, some obvious alliance between the nationalist pamphlet, on the one hand, and the collection of folk materials, on the other. The correspondence between Grimms and Reimer was almost entirely pragmatic; they discussed, and eventually bickered, about adequate compensation.¹⁶⁴

The constellation of complementary nationalist genres published by Reimer, however, did reappear in the works of more than one author. In the decisive year of 1813, Jahn published a succession of pamphlets written with the intent to marshal German forces against the French. "*An das deutsche Volk*," for example, exhorted all German men to take up arms against the "country-thief [*Länderräuber*]" and "people-annihilator [*Völkertilger*]" Napoleon.¹⁶⁵ Jahn also compiled an anthology of German "martial songs [*Wehrlieder*]" to encourage a more compact general resistance against foreign domination;¹⁶⁶ the first item in the anthology was unsurprisingly his former teacher Ernst Moritz Arndt's poem on the border-setting, boundary-drawing German language.¹⁶⁷ Yet Jahn was also interested in less propagandistic genres of literature. Already in his 1810 tract on national organization, he had called for collections of folktales and legends, even a "German *Thousand and One Nights*."¹⁶⁸ After Wilhelm Grimm had met Jahn in Kassel in March 1814, he related to his brother Jacob in a letter that the guest liked their *Children's and Household Tales* very much and that Jahn was planning a peacetime journey through German lands, all for the purpose of writing a history of German legends. Jahn, Wilhelm Grimm wrote, "knows the ways of the people well and is familiar with many legends and enjoyed our tales [*Er kennt die Sitten des Volks gut und weiß viele Sagen und hat Freude an unsern Märchen gehabt*]."¹⁶⁹

A quick sequence of pamphlets and hortatory songs during wartime followed by a postwar project of folktale collection – this was also the pattern followed by the proponent of folk hatred, the publicist and poet Arndt. In the year 1813 alone, Arndt wrote a steady stream of pamphlets and gained the reputation of being the most strident anti-Napoleonic writer, an evangelist of German nationhood.¹⁷⁰ A survey of Arndt's places of publication for his war poetry in 1813 and 1814 shows that he sought to print and

disseminate his nationalist songs at the shifting focal point of current military and political events¹⁷¹ – as a publicist, he strove for maximum impact. After the Wars of Liberation, however, Arndt began to moderate his rhetoric of hate-filled repudiation.¹⁷² In the period after the war, he also published a collection of folktales with Reimer in Berlin. In the preface to his 1818 collection, Arndt cited entirely personal motivations for his work.¹⁷³ He had lost nearly all his books during a transport across the Baltic Sea and suddenly deprived of his personal library, he turned to his memories of stories heard in his childhood and youth in Pomerania. The tales were not all of the fairy tale–type made paradigmatic by the Grimms, but often samples of the more locally rooted genre of the legend; even some of Arndt’s obviously fantastic tales mentioned particular place names such as a village on Rügen.¹⁷⁴ Yet the book as a whole, and the further collection of tales Arndt published much later, was partly meant to advertise his self-image as a grounded man of the common people, who had grown up among modest peasants.¹⁷⁵

Arndt’s poem “What Is the German’s Fatherland?” is perhaps the only poem to have survived the period of the Wars of Liberation, and it now serves to epitomize German nationalist poetry; most other similar publications from the period have, unsurprisingly, disappeared from view. The Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales* remains one of the most widely translated and disseminated works of literature, and it has certainly marginalized other German folktale collections. Yet the Grimms’ little known publications in support of resistance to French rule as well as the forgotten folkloric projects of nationalist propagandists such as Jahn and Arndt suggest that nationalist authorship in the second decade of the nineteenth century was defined by a particular *spectrum* of genres. The proponents of nationhood and folk hatred, *Volksthum* (Jahn) and *Volkshass* (Arndt), set out to collect and transcribe folk narratives that could preserve and display the cultural presence of a German people invoked in the pamphlet literature. The more consistently dedicated scholars of folk literature and its connection to ancient mythic materials (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm) occasionally linked their projects more directly to military mobilization, such as in the case of *Der arme Heinrich*. The constellation of different genres – war poem and folktale, aggressive pamphlet and local legend – appeared across several authorships and indicates a connection between genres of military mobilization and genres of cultural substantialization.

Early nationalism, one could say, spoke with two voices, both equally important. Wilhelm Grimm could celebrate the willingness of Hessian

men to take up arms and do battle with imperial forces but also portray the quiet everyday life around the hearth where old stories would be told and retold. The pathetic and the martial could be combined with the ethnographic and antiquarian, although not in one and the same text, but distributed over genres expressive of different affects and attitudes. The supposed addressee of Paul Wigand's war poems was the educated young man excited by the prospect of military advances and victories, and the audience of the folktales gathered and collected by the Grimms around the same time was the traditional household, the family. Yet the genres belonged together as two strategies in the nationalist discourse. Arndt, Jahn, and Wigand were practitioners of the poetry and rhetoric of war and liberation, whereas Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were devoted to the accumulation of folkloric materials. The propagandistic efforts of mobilization for the defense of national political autonomy stood in a relationship with the scholarly or semi-scholarly documentation of national cultural particularity in the form of legends and tales. Nationalism existed in the form of two connected clusters of values, articulated in two groups of genres: calls for military mobilization, martial sacrifice, and collective hatred, on the one hand, and collections of folk stories and vignettes of an endearingly simple traditional life, on the other.

The Nationalization of the Fairy Tale

The folktale collection of the Brothers Grimm was not an overtly nationalist work, prepared to stir fellow Hessians or Germans into immediate action, but it did occupy a definite place in the collective nationalist argumentation of the Napoleonic period. The book was meant to verify the existence of a particular people, to substantiate the notion of a native culture perceived to be under threat, alive and available yet vulnerable and in need of protection. This oblique but ideologically essential work of the collection for a wider nationalist project was discernible in Wilhelm Grimm's two prefaces, one from 1812 and one from 1814. Taken together, the two prefatory remarks established the tales as a genre that was both collective and indigenous. The collection, Grimm claimed, contained no individual voice but only the expressions of a whole people, and no foreign elements but only the expressions of a particular nation. *The Children's and Household Tales* was not the only or the first collection of folktales, but the brothers Grimm most resolutely nationalized the genre by framing it as the expression and joint property of a fatherland.

The first, 1812 introduction related how the tales had been sustained through a communal practice of oral storytelling sheltered by household spaces, and it attributed to the tales the qualities of purity, simplicity, innocence, and naiveté, all of which would be spoiled by an overly sophisticated treatment.¹⁷⁶ Wilhelm Grimm presented the tales as a non-individual artifact separated from any literary education, an authentic representation of non-elite cultural life. The traits ascribed to the tales also indirectly referred to the character of the national collective that told them: the tales were uncomplicated, straightforward, modest, simple – all terms from the lexicon of authenticity. The second text, from 1814, shifted the focus slightly to speak more explicitly of the tales as a people's poetry, *Volksdichtung*, and insisted not only on their soundness and vitality but also on their connection to deeper layers of specifically German or Germanic myth.¹⁷⁷ The tales were, Wilhelm asserted, German both in their origin and their development and nothing in them had been “borrowed” from adjacent national traditions.¹⁷⁸

Scholars and critics have pointed out that the Grimm brothers acknowledged that the genre was not solely a German one and that the folktales of this world did not all spring from a German source. In the 1812 preface, Wilhelm wrote that no people could forgo fairy tales. In the context of all of the brothers' many books, the *Children's and Household Tales* even stands out as a work without the word “German” in the title.¹⁷⁹ In the long list of Jacob Grimm's works, which includes *German Legends*, *German Grammar*, *German Legal Antiquities*, and *German Mythology*, this looks like a conspicuous absence, almost a concession: the tales could not really be called German. Wilhelm Grimm's insistence that the tales had been drawn from a native tradition did not, to him, imply that the genre as a whole was exclusively German, for national particularity or *Eigenthümlichkeit* was not the same as singularity. The collected tales were authentically German yet not incomparable with folk narratives from other regions. On the contrary, the tales were necessarily *comparable*, because the particularity of the national and the German could only emerge through a series of contrasts with similar products from other national-cultural spheres. An ancient and therefore collective literary work was typically “both similar and dissimilar [*sowohl ähnlich als unähnlich*]” to works from other cultures and precisely for this reason “particular [*eigenthümlich*].”¹⁸⁰ According to the Grimms, national particularity must be understood as a discernible and profoundly valuable *inflection* of a shared human culture, not an incommensurable quality. Throughout his career as a scholar, Jacob Grimm would therefore welcome volumes with tales in other languages and still maintain the

peculiarly national character of their own collection, since each national culture occupied a space in the ensemble of nations in the world.¹⁸¹ In his prefaces, Wilhelm Grimm also discussed collections that had appeared in other European languages, such as French and Italian, and assessed them with varying degrees of criticism;¹⁸² the genre was not everywhere the same, but similar stories did belong to many nations regardless of their perceived civilizational status, including African peoples.¹⁸³ Each nation possessed its very own tales, or rather its very own *versions* of tales, unmistakably national and yet not entirely alien to others; the fairy tales exhibited national specificity, but the genre was not bound to one culture only, as evidenced, perhaps, by the enduring worldwide success of the Grimms' tales.¹⁸⁴

Wilhelm Grimm thus presented the folktales as samples of a world genre while maintaining the absolute national authenticity of the collection. The tales were German, neither fabricated with deliberateness by single authors with education and ambition nor shaped by any appreciation for a superior foreign creativity. Instead, they were the expression of a people understood as a culturally autonomous whole. This position has naturally come under an enormous amount of criticism in the scholarship on the Grimms. Commentators have pointed out that a whole group of tales came from France, inadvertently smuggled into the collection by informants with a Huguenot background, and it is clear beyond any doubt that Wilhelm Grimm edited, revised, and honed the tales, creating a smoother, more polished fairy-tale style in the process.¹⁸⁵ Contrary to the programmatic prefatory statements, the tales were in fact both cross-national and works of deliberate authorial craft.

What interests us here, however, is precisely the collection's indispensable role in the nationalist argument of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. When Wilhelm Grimm described the tales as expressions of a culturally and linguistically contoured people; an inheritance untouched by dominant foreign influences; and an entirely simple, modest, non-manipulative speech, he delivered to a modern national political project the image of an already existing people, enclosed in its own cultural life. The tales were the natural speech of the nation and as such evidence of its very existence. It was this submission of a literary proof of peoplehood that satisfied an inherent requirement of nationalist ideology, perhaps its most central need, namely that a people had to exist and had to have evolved autonomously and spontaneously rather than been conjured or constructed from above. The autonomous cultural unity that Wilhelm Grimm portrayed in the prefaces was the scholar's gift to the German

nationalist project of the early nineteenth century; Grimm supplied literary proof of the pre-political ground for national self-rule.

The close association of the people with popular tales was not an invention of the brothers Grimm; it had been established long before the end phase of the Napoleonic era. The narrative of how the link came to be forged begins, again, with Johann Gottfried Herder. He was the writer who, in a sequence of texts from the 1770s, most decisively and influentially effected the relocation of prestige away from the refined and norm-conforming poetical products of a literary elite toward previously neglected artifacts of the common people.¹⁸⁶ Most fundamentally, Herder revised the cultural vocabulary by converting the raw, vulgar, and unrestrained – attributes associated with the people – into the vital, expressive, and dynamic. He also supplied a collection to render this relocation of cultural value more concrete. Herder's anthology of folk songs, the first volume published in 1778, established a canonical template for collections of popular national poetry,¹⁸⁷ and he also encouraged his contemporaries to prepare anthologies of folktales, although his call initially went unheeded.¹⁸⁸ The thinker most closely associated with the idea of a humanity composed of nations also introduced a genre supposed to demonstrate this plurality of communities in the field of literature.

After Herder, many other attempts followed to render the people legible, make it subject to literary documentation, and ultimately also move it into the realm of social and political claims. The most famous of these project is *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, the collection of songs accumulated and creatively recomposed by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano (1778–1842), two Romanticist authors who came to know Jacob and Wilhelm through their academic mentor in Marburg, Friedrich Carl von Savigny.¹⁸⁹ The Grimms even made contributions to Arnim's and Brentano's Romantic project¹⁹⁰ and would dedicate and rededicate the *Children's and Household Tales* to Arnim's wife Bettina.¹⁹¹ The genre switch from folk songs to folktales had by this time already been made by other authors and amateur scholars, primarily by Johann Karl August Musäus (1735–85), who published *Folk Tales of the Germans* [*Volksmärchen der Deutschen*] in 1782.¹⁹² Musäus's title captured the close connection between the narrative genre and the national subject: the tales belonged to the German people. Even though Musäus was a man of wit and presented the tales as fantasies that would satisfy the human desire for distraction, he still described them as native products and as such also as revelations of a national character.¹⁹³ By the time that the Grimms published their first collection in the early 1810s, then, folktales had been

framed as emanations of a nationally defined people for at least three decades and Wilhelm Grimm's prefaces partly reiterated established assumptions.

Folktale collections were not always prepared to corroborate the existence of a German folk in a way that could support the crystallized nationalist argument. Both before and during the time of publication of the Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, similar narrative materials were assembled for other reasons than serving as evidence of a national folk life. A few years before the appearance of the Grimms' first volume, the pedagogue Albert Ludwig Grimm (1786–1872; no relation) published an anthology of tales, a book of which the Grimms were painfully aware since their own work was frequently confused with this 1809 volume entitled *Children's Tales [Kindermärchen]*.¹⁹⁴ In his preface, explicitly addressed to parents and educators, Albert Ludwig Grimm mentioned that the tales came from the folk, but for him, the origin mattered much less than the contemporary addressee, namely children, who must be provided with cognitively suitable material.¹⁹⁵ The tales, he claimed, should be tweaked and honed through testing their effect upon a young audience, which meant that a supposedly native folk form should not be allowed to control future renditions; the story collection was not primarily meant as a proof of nationhood but should be used as a didactic instrument.

A collection from the year 1800 by Johann Carl Christoph Nachtigall (1753–1819), writing under the pseudonym Otmar, also carried the title *Folk Tales [Volcks-Sagen]*. It pursued a more antiquarian than pedagogical project.¹⁹⁶ In the introduction, Nachtigall placed the tales in the context of the history of peoples. The stories had to be retrieved from a variety of print and oral sources, and they could shed light on the conditions of earlier times as well as the character of differentiated peoples. Here we encounter a near-contemporary research-oriented overview of a variety of sources, paired with claims about the genre's historical and ethnographic value – again, many of the Grimms' assumptions were already in place. Although Nachtigall presented an inchoate cultural theory of folktales as popular narratives that reflected local circumstances including climate, geography, and political constitution, this initial claim was nonetheless subordinated to an overriding conception of every people's necessary trajectory through a series of cultural stages, *Kulturstufen*.¹⁹⁷ The education of each people, Nachtigall claimed, followed a similar path and the tales consequently embodied less a national essence unfolding over time than a particular stage of human development through which *all* peoples had to pass; hence, peoples without contact with one another would tell tales that

exhibited striking resemblances. Nachtigall linked the stories to the people, the *Volk*, but not in a way that fit the nationalist position.

The Grimms, by contrast, purposefully devised their publication so that it suited the literary needs of a nascent nationalist program. Ethnographic collection and scrupulous editing had resulted, Wilhelm Grimm claimed in 1814, in a compilation of narratives that indexed the historical existence of a people with particular indigenous national characteristics, precisely the image of the people required for the nationalist argument. The collection, Grimm declared, was neither overedited to serve literary or pedagogical purposes alien to the material (in the manner of Albert Ludwig Grimm) nor presented as an emanation of the common people without regard for nationality (in the manner of Nachtigall), nor simply offered as a source of pleasant entertainment (in the manner of Musäus). Instead, the *Children's and Household Tales* were nationally focused and untouched by any extraneous pedagogical or aesthetic program. The supposed editorial restraint and the nationalist purpose went together, for the authentic voice of the people would only emerge by means of philological sensitivity to the integrity of the material. The more respect the collector showed toward the original form of the folk narratives, Grimm implied, the better they would serve the nation.

The achievement of the Grimms was not to discover the people's cultural productivity or introduce the folktale as a genre to the educated reading public – these were accomplishments of multiple predecessors. A look at earlier collections reveals instead that Wilhelm Grimm weakened the genre's association to pleasant distraction, pedagogy, or general non-national folksiness and framed the tales more clearly as an emanation of a nationally defined common people. By shedding various earlier programs of entertainment and education, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm thus prepared the folktale for deployment in a forming nationalist ideology.

The Grimms' attempt to raise funds for the Hessian Elector's war effort toward the end of the Napoleonic wars may have been botched in multiple ways, but the brothers performed better in a genre that the nationalists Arndt and Jahn tried their hands on without doing particularly well, namely the collection of supposedly genuine folk narratives. The *Children's and Household Tales* was not an obviously political work, not even in its own day, and the tales themselves certainly did not transmit a nationalist message. By reuniting the genres of the folktale collection and the militant nationalist pamphlet that parted company after their intimate coexistence in the nineteenth-century public sphere, we can nonetheless come to see how the tales fulfilled an ideological function: they provided

evidence of the people's cultural existence and in this way helped secure the imagined pre-political basis of the political claim to national autonomy. The folktale and the call for struggle were two distinct aspects of one interconnected discourse.

There were, however, different kinds of nationalisms in the German lands of the Napoleonic era. The playwright Heinrich von Kleist, a son of a Prussian military family and good friend of the Grimms' later colleague, friend, and ally Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, was not known for his antiquarian interests and left behind no collections of folk materials, wrapped in assurances of a peculiar affection for the home-grown, local, and innocent. Kleist emerged as a passionate nationalist, but recent literary scholarship has shown how his works display the active work of preparation and even manipulation required for the people to embrace the nationalist struggle.¹⁹⁸ The Germanic hero Herrmann's victory in the quintessential German nationalist drama *The Battle of Herrmann* [*Die Herrmannsschlacht*] written in 1808, for instance, happens thanks to much plotting and deception and not through a simple activation of an already existing cultural identity. The dominant hero must work actively to ensure that the conflict he wants to provoke assumes the proper ethnic shape. Popular hatred is crucial for armed resistance, Kleist's play seems to suggest, but it is not somehow naturally rooted in an already present people; it must be incited and channeled.

In Kleist, then, we encounter a convinced nationalist author who did not coordinate the propagandistic and the folkloric, who did not produce works in genres of political mobilization as well as genres of cultural substantialization. Interestingly, Heinrich von Kleist was a favorite author of both of the brothers Grimm. In a letter from May 1816, Jacob Grimm wrote to Paul Wigand about a future collection of posthumous texts by Kleist: "Heinrich Kleist's [*sic*] posthumous work will be published this summer, edited by Tiek [*sic*], along with an account of his life. I will read it eagerly, although I don't usually read new literature with any interest."¹⁹⁹