

Introduction

The Philologist, the King, and the Nation

In August 1846, the folktale collector, grammarian, mythographer, and lexicographer Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) wrote a letter to the Prussian king, Frederick William IV (1795–1861), in which he urged the monarch to support the German-speaking population of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, the areas between Denmark and the German lands.¹ At the time, the Danish king, Christian VIII, was also the duke of the twin duchies and in the summer of 1846, he had publicly declared that they must allow female succession, a reform that would secure continued Danish rule; the Danish royal family was running out of male heirs.² This attempt by the Danish crown to preserve Danish influence over Schleswig and Holstein disturbed German nationalists, among them Jacob Grimm and the five co-signers of his letter, all of them prominent academics in Berlin. A Prussian commitment to protect the German-speaking inhabitants would, Grimm wrote, lift the spirits of the duchies' Germans and help contain the ambitions of the Danish king. Grimm's letter to the king insisted on the principle of nationality: Germans should not be ruled by non-Germans, a "german area [*deutsches gebiet*]" not be chained to a "foreign country [*ein fremdes land*]."³

The argument in Grimm's address to the Prussian king drew on his expertise in Germanic languages and ancient history. It should be recognized as law, Grimm asserted, that those who speak the same language are members of the same nation: "[A]ll who speak the German tongue also belong to the German people and should be able to count on the mighty help of Germany in a time of need."⁴ He quickly added that ancient German tribes, such as the Cimbri and the Teutons, had historically populated the areas.⁵ The primordial communities had not been Danish, he claimed, and hence any Danes in the duchies were latecomers, without a strong historical claim to the territories.⁶ To Grimm, all German speakers

belonged to the German nation and the German nation was entitled to a specific territory, namely the territory that German speakers had occupied since the time of the first Germanic tribes. Presented as a sincere expression of patriotic concern couched in rhetorical conventions of humility toward royalty, the group of scholars headed by Grimm implied that they possessed politically relevant knowledge: the Prussian king could benefit from philological and historical input on where the true borders ran between peoples.

Grimm's letter indicated a subtle shift between old and new ways to conceive of politics, legitimate rule, and territorial disputes. Grimm lauded the Prussian king's "sense of justice," his "strength," and "wisdom"⁷ – traditional virtues ascribed to monarchs. However, he defined the tension over Schleswig and Holstein as a national conflict, one between two distinct peoples who should be disentangled and separately governed. He did not discuss any royal or dynastic rights but instead suggested that knowledge of diachronic linguistic study, ethnic history, and historical occupancy should decide the fate of the duchies. The main purpose of the address may even have been to reconcile monarchy and nationality; it sought to stir the king into action, but with the aim of protecting the linguistic and spatial integrity of the nation. The philologist Jacob Grimm wanted to mediate between the king whom he served and respected and the nation that he had studied and even mapped out.

Against the background of this letter, I would like to introduce a figure: the "philologist king." I use this phrase to mark a departure from the philosopher king, who appeared at the beginning of the history of Western political thought. In the writings of Plato, especially the *Republic*, the philosopher king names a coincidence of authority and knowledge that could come into being if a ruler would begin to philosophize or a philosopher could be prevailed upon to assume the burdens of rule.⁸ According to Plato, both are remote possibilities,⁹ since the ruler with governing experience has to ascend to the heights of a genuine philosopher, but actual philosophers tend to look at human affairs as a distraction from the super-sensible world of forms¹⁰ and deem the "honors of this present world . . . mean and worthless."¹¹ This unlikely coincidence would, however, be the condition for the salvation of the city,¹² because only the ruling philosopher or the philosophizing king would concentrate on "the greatest and most necessary of all things,"¹³ namely to ensure that the human community approximate an ideal condition in which everyone would receive what is good and fitting for them.¹⁴ The philosopher king could only begin to establish this condition in the city by virtue of a singular focus on justice,

which ultimately rests on knowledge of the ideas, the self-subsisting entities that constitute the only real world.¹⁵ In Plato's view, the phenomenal world available to the human senses merely represents an imperfect derivation of the ideas, knowable for those with access to the ordered structure of the actual universe.¹⁶

In Plato's conception of the philosopher king, metaphysical knowledge should serve as the proper foundation of governance. Jacob Grimm did not quarrel with Plato, but by seeking to advise the king and nudge him in the right direction on the basis of his historical and linguistic expertise, Grimm implied the need for a different convergence of knowledge and authority than the one envisioned in the venerable Platonic tradition. Grimm stood for the application of methodically retrieved and highly detailed empirical knowledge of languages and the history of groups of speakers to the political project of establishing non-arbitrary units of rule. In so doing, he sought to promote philology, the scrupulous genealogical study of literary and linguistic development on the basis of surviving textual documents,¹⁷ as the discipline best able to uncover the preconditions of legitimate authority. Thorough and systematic knowledge of grammatical change as well as legal and literary history was essential to understanding how culturally distinct peoples had evolved over time in particular locations, each one defined and united by an individualized language. Germans could and should be separated from Danes, and neither people ruled by non-national, alien regimes. Only a new alliance between historically oriented scholarship and political government would ensure a stable and peaceful human order of differentiated nations. In this sense, Grimm's nationalist interventions encapsulated an epochal shift away from a conception of political rule guided by philosophical thought to one guided by the study of multiple cultures and their distinctive traits. Grimm wished for a "philologist king." The historically evolved nation, not eternal metaphysical ideas, should stand as the ultimate reality of the state.¹⁸

Known today as an iconic collector of folktales, legends, and myths, as a grammarian and dictionary builder, Jacob Grimm was a political figure of his time. Shaped by ideas circulating after the French Revolution, he believed that rule could only obtain legitimacy if it was respectful of an already extant people's identity; that the people could only be adequately defined in linguistic and historical terms; and that the philologist, equipped with a rigorously achieved understanding of the people's cultural and linguistic past, could reliably perform its demarcation, even in a situation of competing claims about its extension and territorial home. Grimm was a nationalist in the sense that he believed in the congruence of

the political order with the national community,¹⁹ but the notion of a “philologist king” captures his belief in the vital function of disciplinary knowledge for the establishment or restoration of such congruence. The king, Grimm believed, had to be philologically well informed.

Grimm devoted his life to scholarship, professed his preference for undisturbed quiet, and admitted that he was relieved not to have to make political decisions.²⁰ In that sense, the philologist shared the Platonic philosopher’s supposed reluctance to amass power and govern;²¹ Grimm, too, had little care for the honors of this present world. He did, however, declare interest in giving rule a proper, even scientific foundation, by making the philological knowledge of the nation the basis of the territorial order. Throughout his life, he repeatedly spoke with confidence about the proper boundaries of nations and did so in a period during which borders in Central Europe were redrawn many times and tiny states integrated into larger units. At the time of Grimm’s birth in 1785, there were several hundred German political entities²² – kingdoms, electorates, duchies, landgraviates, margraviates, bishoprics, imperial cities – loosely integrated in the patchwork that was the Holy Roman Empire; Germany was a “maze of dwarfish principedoms”²³ or a “confused archipelago of principalities.”²⁴ In the year of Grimm’s death, in 1863, that number had been reduced to just below forty units, after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire; the Napoleonic conquest and reconfiguration of German lands; and the reorganization of the continent’s politics at the Congress of Vienna, which resulted in the construction of a confederation of sovereign German states, the *Deutscher Bund*. The plethora of principalities had been consolidated into a smaller number of sovereign entities, with two dominant states (Prussia, Austria), seven midrange states (Bavaria, Württemberg, Hanover, Sachsen, Baden, Hessen-Darmstadt, and Hesse), and about thirty microstates or statelets.²⁵

Grimm’s youth in particular coincided with a period of political volatility and apparent malleability. Areas changed hands several times over short time periods and principalities were conquered, reallocated, restored, or absorbed, and boundaries redrawn.²⁶ The young Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859) would themselves experience regime changes and political reconfigurations in their hometown Kassel in Hesse, where Jacob, the older brother, worked as a civil servant under more than one ruler. During the brothers’ lifetime, then, the shape and internal organization of Germany did not seem settled once and for all. Jacob Grimm may have had an ambivalent, flickering interest in day-to-day politics, but he was consistently and sometimes passionately preoccupied with the delineation of units *for* politics in an era during which those units were being redefined.

The notion of a philologically informed ruler thus appeared at a particular juncture, when old borders were being erased or revised, and, equally important, traditional feudal and religious justifications of local princely rule were losing their self-evidence. It was in this context that the philologist arrived as a proponent and guardian of a new focus and foundation of politics: the nation, the linguistically and culturally defined people, with its ultimate origin in a supposedly authentic and natural community, the ancient tribe. As the address to the king indicates, the brothers Grimm and most of their fellow nationalists never fundamentally disputed the wisdom and rightness of a strong monarchical government²⁷ even in the post-revolutionary age of its destabilization and desacralization. They did, however, repudiate the prerogative of kings and lords to seize, purchase, or abandon areas as if they were private possessions, without regard for the nationality of their inhabitants; this was in fact still the attitude of traditional autocrats and conservative thinkers.²⁸ Like many of their fellow nationalists in early nineteenth-century Europe, the Grimms believed in a new principle of legitimate rule: rulers and ruled should hail from the same cultural and linguistic group, like reign over like,²⁹ and the king be one among many of the same ethnic kind.³⁰ Royal regimes, shorn of religious sanctification or private-patrimonial rights, could secure legitimacy only if they recognized and persuasively represented cohesive national communities.³¹ As in the letter to the Prussian king, the philologist Grimm ultimately sought to facilitate the marriage of constitutionalized monarchy and geographically bounded nationality. Decidedly not a radical, he stood, he declared to a newspaper just before the elections to the first German national parliament in 1848, for “a free, united fatherland,” but one ruled by “a powerful king,” which meant that he repudiated all “republican desires [*republikanische Gelüste*].”³² By means of such a program, monarchy could lend political unity and capacity to the nation, and the depth and dignity of the nation could help renew and revitalize monarchy – within clearly delineated borders.

Jacob Grimm and his brother Wilhelm believed that modern rulers would benefit from philological counsel, not exactly on how to acquire and maintain power – the philologist could offer no Machiavellian know-how – but on how to identify and respect the particular and naturally evolved linguistic and ethnic character of populations. Grimm would even go further and demand that the king evince an attachment to one and only one people. Legitimate government was, for him, not first and foremost a matter of a just distribution of goods, protected basic rights, or popular consent, but of a close cultural *fit* between rulers and ruled. Even if the philologist could

not direct the king or tell him how to rule by offering prescriptions grounded in philological expertise, the best king in Grimm's eyes would be a ruler who was a friend of the vernacular word, emotionally tied to one particular people rather than desiring to rule over many. This king would ideally possess something of the philologist's intimate knowledge of and love for the *Volk*, construed as a national community of familiarity and solidarity. Instead of a philosophizing ruler, a ruler with the soul of a philosopher,³³ there would be a philologizing king, a king with the heart of a philologist.

A New Image of the Brothers Grimm

With its focus on the brothers Grimm as supporters of a new type of ruler, a philologist king, this book seeks to make two contributions. First, it sets out to transform the established image of the brothers Grimm as homey folklorists, lovers of German words and stories, by situating them more systematically and thoroughly in the intellectual and political context of their day. By doing so, however, it also wants to cast light on early nineteenth-century nationalism and its intellectual exponents, the academic entrepreneurs of modern politicized nationhood, with particular attention to the relationship between new methods of knowledge production and established political institutions and forms of authority.

For us today, the fame of the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm is above all tied to the enduring success of their early book *Children's and Household Tales* [*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*]. This volume, translated again and again into numerous languages, has come to define the fairy-tale genre and turned the brothers Grimm into world-famous storytellers. Many Germans also associate the brothers Grimm with the still used multivolume German dictionary that they began late in their careers, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. A more productive scholar than his brother, Jacob Grimm published an enormous work of German grammar, *Deutsche Grammatik*, quickly recognized as a pioneering work of linguistic history, which established the so-called Grimm's Law on the basis of observed regularities in sound shifts across time. Many commentators see the link between the scholarly projects of folktale collection, dictionary compilation, and diachronic grammatical analysis and the attempt to cultivate or even generate a national consciousness among a growing nineteenth-century reading public. "Nationalism," a contemporary historian of Germany writes, "was . . . a cause of the educated middle class, who defined (even created) the idea of a German nation with their grammars, dictionaries, and collections of folk tales."³⁴

This is not an uncommon claim, but the historian neglects to tell us that the authors of the most celebrated and influential German grammar, German dictionary, and German folktale collection were Jacob Grimm and his brother. Behind the phrase “the educated middle class,” one finds two actual individuals, a pair of philologists, Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, and the two really were immensely prolific. The poet Heinrich Heine jokingly speculated that Jacob Grimm had sold his soul to the devil to complete single-handedly the colossal German grammar, and that tome was only one of his many contributions.³⁵

The importance of the brothers Grimm for the rise of German national consciousness has rarely been under dispute, and their wish to “stimulate national sentiment” is well documented.³⁶ German scholars have also mapped out the political opinions of Jacob Grimm especially,³⁷ reconstructed his relationship with emerging ideologies of his era,³⁸ and sometimes also criticized, or even ridiculed, his somewhat dilettantish relationship to the realities of political life.³⁹ Nor have scholars neglected to consider the value commitments that guided the revision and progressive embellishment of their influential folktale collection. American folklorists and literary scholars, for example, have uncovered the editorial efforts of Wilhelm Grimm in particular to remove references to sexuality and deviant behavior⁴⁰ and reinforce the early nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology of honesty, diligence, and industriousness.⁴¹ In this way, studies have rightfully focused on how the Grimms and their fellow collectors explored the world of popular dialects, tales, and tunes to forge a secular, cross-class vernacular culture that could facilitate national integration.⁴² Grimms’ tales are still one of the most famous examples of how university-educated, broadly “middle-class” enthusiasts contributed to cultural nation building in the nineteenth century.

This book intends to show, however, that the Grimms’ energies or at least their hopes and dreams were also directed toward the princes, electors, and kings who governed German lands, and it sets out to capture with greater precision than before how the brothers envisioned the relationship between their own scholarship and national-political projects, and the tie between the authority of philological research and the power of traditional elites. The Grimms, who were lifelong civil servants employed or sponsored by very traditional leaders, saw themselves not just as public educators of the people but as mediators between rulers and ruled. As nationally oriented philologists, the Grimms cared about and sought to give definition to the *Volk*, but they were also attentive to the current regimes they knew so well and believed that kings should receive proper philological advice of the kind exemplified

in the 1846 letter to the Prussian ruler. This reconstruction of philology's vocation, as illustrated most prominently by Jacob Grimm, points to the political purpose of a new set of research disciplines devoted to the exploration of national being, such as vernacular literary and historical legal studies. Grimm's voluminous reconstructions of German grammar, German legal antiquities, and the history of German tribes ultimately belonged to a vision of a mutually reinforcing alliance between politics and knowledge production deemed appropriate to an era of politicized national collectives. We can thus locate the philologist's efforts in a constellation composed of three elements, where the scholar appears as a mediator between the king, on the one hand, and the linguistically and culturally defined people, on the other. The philologist could mobilize disciplinary knowledge to broker a new relationship between regimes and peoples on the basis of shared nationality.

This book's focus on the triad king–philologist–people is more appropriate for an era in which the memory of the French Revolution and the notion of popular consent to rule pervaded the political imagination⁴³ and news of regicides, republics, and new law codes circulated among broad population groups,⁴⁴ but which was nonetheless still politically dominated by restored, consolidated, or constrained monarchies. Even after the era of transatlantic revolutions, European kings retained massive possessions, remained heads of state, led armies, conducted diplomacy, managed bureaucracies, cultivated courtly rituals, and even exploited new forms of mass communication;⁴⁵ intellectuals responded to the situation by seeking to reconcile a recognition of popular freedom with the persistence of traditional rule.⁴⁶ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were representatives of their age: they were neither radical democrats set on toppling the king nor staunch monarchists who rejected ideas of popular influence and constitutional checks on government. Instead, they believed in forms of adjustment between a unitary people and an informed, moderate, and loving king, within the frame of a philologically outlined nationhood. Political rule could become less intrusive and coercive, more adaptable and sensitive, if the people could be reminded of their evolved historical and cultural character and disentangled from arbitrary political boundaries indifferent to nationality, and if the princes and kings could gain a deeper understanding and more heartfelt appreciation of the nation's invaluable particularity. By seeking to reawaken the people and gently rein in the ambitions of kings, the philologist wanted to worked toward a more harmonious coincidence of nation and monarchical rule.

The Character of Nationalism

Attention to the figure of the philologist king will facilitate a deeper understanding of the Grimms' vocation in the political world of their era and more broadly illuminate the ambitions of modern, nationally oriented philology. In addition, the focus of this study will cast some light on the peculiar character of nationalism itself, which has often been regarded as politically influential but philosophically feeble, lacking the developed justifications that rival ideologies possess.⁴⁷ Liberalism, socialism, and conservatism have all been philosophically articulated by key figures in the history of political thought, such as Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, and Edmund Burke. By contrast, defenders of nationalism have been rare and the canon of nationalist philosophical works correspondingly slender;⁴⁸ the principle of nationality, one historian claims, was developed by narrow "second-rank thinkers"⁴⁹ and its doctrines, the sociologist Ernest Gellner writes, "are hardly worth analyzing."⁵⁰ But celebrated political philosophers did not simply decline to work out a defense for the nation; they did not quite appreciate nationalism's force and persistence. While prominent thinkers imagined and prophesized the growth of bureaucracy (Max Weber), the revolutionary upheavals of modern society (Mikhail Bakunin), the spread of conformism in egalitarian societies (Alexis de Tocqueville), or the accelerated rate of technological change and the eruption of class conflict (Marx), the struggle for national self-determination arguably found no prophet or early analyst among the most illustrious minds.⁵¹ Among those who did develop a philosophy of nationalism, German thinkers around 1800 predominate.⁵² Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) is known for his enthusiastic celebration of the dynamic plurality of culturally distinct human communities. In his *Addresses to the German Nation* from 1808, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) proclaimed the necessity of a vigorous, organized political defense of such communities as shared sources of meaning and objects of morally valuable attachment. Yet Herder and Fichte are exceptions and hardly count among the most revered and famous political thinkers.

The philosophical and normative deficit in nationalism persists to this day. Few political theorists attempt to justify the special solidarity within a nation or the integrity of national borders, although there are a handful of exceptions.⁵³ The perpetuation of strong national group loyalty is rarely viewed as an important political goal in itself and is frequently seen as an obstacle to the formation of more inclusive and tolerant societies, although the active dismantling of enduring cultural

identities is perhaps not understood as a moral priority either.⁵⁴ In view of the relative paucity of normative arguments for nationalism, the anthropologist Benedict Anderson famously suggested that it is simply not a conceptually articulated ideology to be compared with liberalism or conservatism, but something more akin to a religion in its appeal to finite individuals' hopes for a some kind of afterlife in the form of an indefinitely enduring collective, namely the national community.⁵⁵

This obviously does not mean that nationalism throughout its history has lacked supporters among scholars or intellectuals, although they have not gained much respect in the realm of political thought. This study of the philologist king as an ideal is intended to explore the character and logic of the ambitions and efforts of nationalists, as exemplified by the careers and thought of Jacob Grimm and his brother Wilhelm. The brothers were not philosophers or politicians or activists, but rather librarians, collectors, editors, lexicographers, and grammarians,⁵⁶ who for the most part were employed by German princely states of different sizes. They searched through archives for manuscripts; compiled enormous inventories of poetic, narrative, mythological, historical, and legal materials; and transcribed tales and legends that circulated among people of their time, all to retrieve, organize, and disseminate the traces of an ancient but localizable German collective life as an object of indispensable significance even to the state and its head, the king. In this endeavor, the Grimms were not alone but emerged as two of the most prominent and groundbreaking representatives of a much larger group of professional and amateur scholars in folkloristics, historical linguistics, literary and legal history, and national historiography, fields devoted to the exploration, or the demonstration, of the historical depth, character, and spatial home of the German nation. There were, one can say without much exaggeration, entire academic disciplines or subdisciplines with particular scholarly-technical skills dedicated to the delineation and substantiation of the nation.⁵⁷ Nor were the Grimms internationally isolated; Jacob Grimm's Serbian contemporary, ally, and counterpart Vuk Karadžić (1787–1867), to name just one example, similarly forged links between linguistic study and national demarcation.⁵⁸

Even so, the political purpose in the Grimms' efforts can sometimes be hard to discern, in part because of their peculiar, non-philosophical or even anti-philosophical style of presentation, in which methodical accumulation took precedence over explicit argumentation. Jacob Grimm's late work on the history of the German language was a huge compilation of surviving textual data on ancient German communities, but its slender introduction briefly stated that the whole was political "through

and through,” and Grimm sent a copy to the Prussian king.⁵⁹ The sheer mass of the evidence itself, the immense accretion of details, should apparently be seen as a consequential political act, meant to establish the undeniable historical reality of shared nationhood in all its antiquity and particularity. The librarian and archivist Grimm gravitated toward a kind of argument by exhaustive inventory, and to some, he embodied an overgrown philology, a love of words inflated to gargantuan proportions. Contemporary Hegelians, schooled in a sophisticated philosophy of the period, could complain that Jacob Grimm’s works represented vast heaps of materials barely “penetrated by spirit” – untouched by reflection.⁶⁰

Still, Grimm’s assemblages of relics and scraps were meant to quell any doubt about the long historical existence of a uniquely German population in a particular geographic location, a unit understood as a necessary precondition for the claim to contemporary statehood. One of Grimm’s chief strategies of nationalist persuasion was indeed the collection, the literary “treasure trove”:⁶¹ the collection of German tales, the collection of German legends, the collection of German legal antiquities, the collection of German words. His work sought to assemble compilations that could inspire and concentrate affective attachment, solidify and sacralize the vernacular, and even be advanced as repositories of a genuinely *collective* intellectual or artistic property that could give body to the imagined community. The nationalist Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm never formulated an explicit set of interlocking doctrines but rather put together a series of textual objects, most widely known among them the *Children’s – and Household Tales*, that could serve as points of communal identification meant to anchor a new public self-image shared across societal strata and political hierarchies in a particular space. Few have so consistently delivered to the reading public materials devised to promote easy acceptance of a common heritage. To refer again to Benedict Anderson, the Grimms may be two of history’s most famous “visionary drudges,”⁶² tireless compilers of plausible-seeming evidence for “nation-ness.”⁶³ The philologist scholar assembled, transcribed, edited, and published and by so doing sought to establish a distinct and located nationhood as an obdurate, undeniable fact of political life.

Nationalism and the Value of Particularity

The expression “philologist king” points to an envisaged relation between disciplinary knowledge and the exercise of political rule in the era of modern

statehood. Jacob Grimm claimed that philological experts with their patiently gathered wealth of genetic information about history, law, grammar, and religion could ensure that modern rule – more centralized and more territorially consolidated than in previous times – would correspond to discernible geographic boundaries of peoples and protect their documented historical lives. Yet, the reference to the Platonic figure of the philosopher king is also meant to signal the polemical edge of philologically informed politics. The scholar of language and literature really did want to dethrone a version of the philosophizing ruler. Looking at early nineteenth-century central Europe, one could claim that the vision of a philologist king appeared in the wake of the devastation wrought by a philosopher king of sorts, which is to say that he appeared in the German lands occupied by a French, Napoleonic administration intent upon a rational reordering of the polity according to universalist principles. In general terms, the figure of the philologist king was conjured to resist an alliance of enlightened universalism and imperial rule that sought to break with obsolete and obstructive institutions, sweep away the encrustations of the past, and install a more efficient and uniform system of administration.⁶⁴ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm intensified their study of ancient Germanic literary works as a politically relevant domain of objects when they lived and worked in the French vassal kingdom of Westphalia, ruled by Napoleon's younger brother Jérôme Bonaparte (1784–1860), who had been tasked with introducing Germans to a rationalized form of rule.

In short, the philologist presented himself as the loving protector of the particular and the local against the onslaught of modern imperial rule committed to universal principles of societal organization. The groundbreaking studies of comparative linguistics in the nineteenth century, to which Jacob Grimm made absolutely central contributions, were predicated on the rejection of the ideal of one universal language.⁶⁵ There were, to Jacob Grimm and his peers among Romanticist linguists, only ever a plurality of empirical languages, affiliated but clearly differentiated and idiosyncratic idioms that had evolved in time and space.⁶⁶ The capacity for speech did unite humankind, but this human ability only became manifest in the diversity of irreducibly particular tongues.⁶⁷ Languages should be cherished for their individual peculiarities rather than eliminated as failures to realize universal norms or unfortunate barriers to transparent global communication.

This commitment to particularity emerged early in Grimm's writings. "Every individuality," the young Jacob Grimm wrote in an 1811 review of the Danish philologist Rasmus Rask's (1787–1832) introduction to Old Norse, "must be held as sacred, also in the realm of language; we ought to wish that

even the smallest and most despised dialect is left to itself and its own nature and does not suffer any brutality [*Gewaltsamkeit*], since it is certain that it secretly possesses virtues even compared to the largest and most honored language.”⁶⁸ As the reference to brutality signals, the repudiation of one quasi-universal yardstick for judging local phenomena, along with the loving attention to the minute characteristics of those phenomena, possessed a political dimension. The demand that the ruler must know and love the nation, be willing to adapt to its evolved character, and respect its internal dynamism was meant to prevent injuries to local society perpetrated by arrogant and ignorant supra-local, imperial regimes. Grimm represented a politicized cultural nominalism, for which skepticism about universals supported skepticism of empire building and central control.⁶⁹ Politically imposed “uniformity [*Uniformität*],”⁷⁰ and “uniformization [*Einformigmachung*],”⁷¹ Jacob Grimm wrote in letters to his brother Wilhelm and his teacher Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861), was only meant to render territories and subjects legible and pliable by an overbearing center of power. The modernizing French regime in Grimm’s own region did not constitute an advance, but a condescending violation of evolved communal life.

Philology was the study of particularity, and the philologist king would be sensitive to the varied texture of communal life. However, Grimm was not an entirely consistent defender of the local and the particular. His loving valorization of the small and neglected, no matter how rare, parochial or obscure, would seem to contradict his advocacy of the unified German nation, which was obviously a much larger unit than a cluster of villages or a small province. In the quotation cited earlier, Grimm first speaks of the value of dialects, not national languages.⁷² In the very same review, though, he also pointed out that even Danish, spoken by more than a million people around 1811, would be powerfully influenced by German, the mightier Germanic tongue. He did not seem to mind such a relation of dominance between larger and smaller languages. The German language and German literature, he wrote, would “rule” over smaller idioms but not do so in an “ignoble” way [*die deutsche literatur herrscht auf keine unedle weise*].⁷³ It looks as though Grimm was ultimately willing to compromise the integrity of the small for the rise of the great, at least if the latter was German.

Grimm did have to grapple with the inevitable tension between local ways of life and an emerging national culture, the subtle charms of the dialect and the standardized language for a much larger, integrated communicative space. He genuinely deplored the erosion of local practices and

idioms and yet considered a homogenized written German language an indispensable achievement that could not be bought too dearly.⁷⁴ Entangled in this contradiction, Grimm increasingly came to view the nation as an “enlarged particular,”⁷⁵ the most extensive unit that could still plausibly be viewed as a form of individuated being. If rule could be made national, it would resist, by means of careful adjustments to the trends of standardization and centralization, the waves of even greater, imperial ambition. To Grimm, the nation-state appears to have emerged, over his career, as the only possible modern vessel of the particular, a political form that would prevent the triumph of a vaster and more coercive, more uniform and homogenizing (French) imperial rule. The fortified, sovereign nation-state was a compromise, a last protective wall for the particular.

Despite the love for locality and tradition, Grimm did not wish to reverse all political changes and territorial consolidations that had been established in post-revolutionary Europe. He was not exactly a conservative figure, did not consistently believe that one could return to intensely local and individualized forms of life, and he certainly did not hope to restore destabilized hierarchies and reintroduce the traditions of dynastic or theological justifications that supported them. His advocacy for the German nation and national unification were, on the contrary, quite disruptive, as was shown in the conflict over territories such as the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein, the topic of Grimm’s 1846 letter to the Prussian king. Rather than demand continued adherence to traditional principles of political legitimacy resting on notions of divine sanction and royal patrimony, the philologist Grimm insisted on a new political sensitivity to the historically formed body of the national people, which represented the ultimate object of all his scholarly investigations. Grimm above all spoke for the entirely modern, national principle of legitimizing of political power⁷⁶ and sought to represent that principle to the rulers of the day. In his mind, the best king would not be philosopher, a lover of universally valid wisdom and hence fit to govern anyone, but a philologist, a lover of the vernacular language and national character with all their particular traits and hence attached to one, now more unified people.

The Paradoxes of Nationalism

The focus on Jacob Grimm and his brother reveals a figure who stands for a particular conjunction of ruling and knowing or claims to possess a combined epistemic and political authority. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of more than one type

who sought to bridge political and intellectual activities. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, so-called enlightened despots gathered philosophers around them to create a court culture of wit and flair, but also to draw on their assistance in the project of augmenting absolutist power through rational reform; Voltaire (1694–1778), an iconic figure of the Enlightenment, was a guest of the Prussian ruler Frederick the Great (1712–1786). In the early nineteenth century, new forms of mass communication such as the regularly appearing newspaper spawned the figure of the political journalist and committed intellectual who operated outside of state institutions and encouraged the members of the reading public to think critically about, resist, or even overthrow traditional regimes; the philosopher and journalist Karl Marx (1818–1883) comes to mind, or the previously mentioned poet, essayist, and correspondent Heinrich Heine. However, this study of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, two linguists and folklorists who spent most of their lives as civil servants attached to court libraries, state-funded universities, and academies with royal support, suggests that we must pay attention to another type, who was neither a philosopher close to the enlightened despot nor a radical intellectual in the expanding public sphere. The political philologist presented himself as an expert on nationhood who sought to connect people and ruler, facilitate the adjustment of government to vernacular culture and in this way play a pivotal role in the momentous transformation of modern European political space after the French Revolution, the Napoleonic conquests, and the contested restoration period that followed.

By looking at the Grimms as nationalists, this book pursues a series of goals. It aims to enhance our understanding of the ideological background to the world's most read folktale collection, *The Children's- and Household Tales*, expand and deepen the picture of the brothers Grimm by reconstructing their self-appointed task of mediation between ruler and ruled, sharpen our appreciation for modern vernacular philology as a nation-building enterprise, clarify the inherent need of nationalist ideology for certain kinds of cultural knowledge, and explore the political imagination of a core group of the German nationalist intelligentsia. The first point about the *Children's- and Household Tales* warrants some elaboration, given the popularity and ubiquity of the Grimms' stories. While scholars have often tried to tease out the nationalist message *in* the folktales with sometimes meager results,⁷⁷ this study takes a different approach by situating the collection in the context of a *repertoire* of genres deployed by nationalist intellectuals; the political function of the folktales as a medium of a supposed national spirit emerges more clearly when we

see how the folktale collection appeared in coordination with the hortatory poem or the militant pamphlet.

In a sense, it was the Grimms' wish that the literary voice of the people *not* be compromised by current politics, since their claim about the need for a nationally oriented state depended on the prior historical existence of the national people and their spontaneous, independent folk culture. Early nationalism spoke with a peculiar double voice: the assertive, militant voice of struggle and sacrifice but also the plain, folksy, apparently nonpolitical voice of the fairy tale, folk song, legend, and joke. Indeed, nationalism will emerge in this book as perhaps the most literary of ideologies, since it absolutely required documentation of an already ongoing, ethnically particular life, which could then serve as the legitimate basis of statehood. As a result of this key nationalist assumption, two scholars of folklore and folk narratives – the brothers Grimm – could view themselves not just as disciplinary experts or guardians of rustic traditions but also as purveyors of knowledge and materials of crucial value to the forming state.

This examination of the brothers Grimm and their preferred areas of study, style of argumentation, ideological assumptions, and explicit interventions will also bring the tensions and paradoxes within nationalism into sharper relief. A sequence of chapters in this book reveals the types of problems that Jacob Grimm encountered while tirelessly assembling and promoting a national cultural heritage for the purpose of achieving congruence between the nation and the state. Even for Grimm himself, nationalism emerged as a program increasingly riddled with inconsistencies and paradoxes. There were cracks and conflicts that he could not paper over, between the idea of royal rule and the notion of a politically active national people, between the preservation of local particularity and the wish for national unity, and between the clearly imperial roots of philology and its present nationalist mission.

To begin with, Grimm had to face the ideological limitations of nationalism as a set of beliefs focused on the nature and integrity of the political unit that nonetheless had no obvious, internally generated response to a series of fundamental political questions, such as the selection of leaders, the distribution of goods, or the ultimate location of sovereignty. Over time, Grimm also did come to see more clearly that institutions and policies that contributed to nation building often enforced the erasure of cherished local cultures, a melancholy development that he regretted and yet had to accept as an inevitable cost. Nationalism, which professed the sacred significance of pluralism in an international setting, entailed regimentation and homogenization within the national unit; it set about to

eliminate “all kinds of fragmentation, localism and regionalism.”⁷⁸ Finally, the political desire to make the state align with the nation was premised on the natural coincidence of language, people, territory, and authority, a bundling that was difficult to uphold once studies of ancient tribal or barbarian life, conducted by Grimm himself, revealed a turbulent history of formative cultural encounters – often recorded in the textual sources of dominant empires. In this way, a close investigation of Grimm as the representative of philologically informed rule will demonstrate how he had to confront the peculiarly thin or incomplete character of nationalism, nation building’s tendency to root out local individuality, and historical patterns of migration and mingling within the frame of empire. The philologist set out to facilitate a new kind of national rule but ended up revealing its costs and contradictions.

Chapter Outlines

The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism contains six chapters, each of which looks at a key aspect of the Grimms’ nationalist political thought; the book is thematically rather than chronologically or biographically structured. It opens with an analysis of Grimm’s mature political project, as formulated and presented a couple of years before the 1848 revolutions, and then moves to the nationalist function of the brothers’ most famous and enduring literary work, their globally recognized and widely imitated collection of folktales. In this way, the first half of the book presents the central political interventions of the brothers Grimm, namely their vision of the grammarian and lexicographer as an expert arbiter of legitimate state extension, and their portrayal of the collector and editor as a redeemer of national being and the natural poetic voice of the folk. The second half of the book then looks more closely at paradoxes and contradictions in their outlook, such as Jacob Grimm’s hesitation and even obfuscation in debates over the ultimate locus of political sovereignty, his ambivalence about the modern institutional tools of top-down nation building, and his muted admission that the discipline of philology may originally have been an imperial project rather than a national one. A summary of each chapter follows and helps clarify the sequence of arguments.

The Philologist King: The first chapter portrays the vision of a philologist king by reconstructing Jacob Grimm’s political thought in the 1840s when he emerged as a leader of the new association of Germanist philologists in 1846 and a prominent delegate in the first German national parliament formed in 1848. Speaking in different venues, Grimm declared his

commitment to national unity supported by disciplinary knowledge of language, literature, law, and myth. In particular, he claimed that the philologist could demarcate national collectives on the basis of verifiable knowledge of grammatical differentiation and by so doing provide states with a sound, even scientific foundation that would ensure legitimate rule. The chapter analyzes how Grimm put forward research findings about the grammatical and phonetic distinctiveness of different European and especially Germanic languages to suggest epistemically authoritative answers to questions about non-arbitrary, linguistically, and culturally grounded political units in the post-revolutionary era. Grimm did not wish to subvert monarchy even in revolutionary moments, but he insisted on the coincidence of royal rule with a national homeland, the boundaries of which could be traced by the philologist.

Folk Hatred and Folktales: The second chapter moves back in time to the first decades of the nineteenth century to reconstruct the biographical and historical background to the most widely known project of the brothers Grimm, the *Children's- and Household Tales*. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm began the collection when they were in their twenties and Jacob worked as a civil servant in Kassel, partly under French rule. While previous researchers have sought to identify clear nationalist strands in the collection itself, this chapter offers a different approach. By surveying the larger repertoire of genres preferred by leading nationalists of the time, such as propagandistic pamphlets and war songs, the chapter uncovers the specific ideological function of the folktale collection as a literary proof of a cultural nationhood that arguably predated political structures and, according to the brothers, should impose constraints on the extent of rule. Influenced by the tumultuous geopolitical situation during the Napoleonic wars, the brothers believed that the state should coincide with the German nation and thought that the independent existence of this cultural unit was most authentically corroborated by collections of materials such as their folktales. Nationalism was, to the brothers Grimm, a creed crucially dependent on literary and historical documentation, which they could supply.

The Prince of Germany: The third chapter looks at Wilhelm Grimm's early conception of the philologist as a redeemer of national being, formulated at the time of his early work on the folktale collection. Grimm was decisively shaped by the university teacher and mentor of both brothers, the law professor Friedrich Carl von Savigny, who was known for his belief that the historicist legal scholar served as the primary custodian of the national legal corpus. Following Savigny's example, Wilhelm Grimm

argued that the philologist must strive to retrieve, clarify, disseminate, and thereby guard the nation's folk culture. The nation represented a viable basis for rule, but the nation's history was not generally known; rather, it had to be explored, preserved, and transmitted by publicly oriented scholarship. In this sense, there was a vital philological dimension to modern conceptions of political legitimacy, and the philologist had to assume the important, even glorious task of reconstructing and reintroducing politically crucial cultural materials. Inspired by the folktales' own imagery of resurrection and rejuvenation, the young Wilhelm Grimm even pictured the philologist as called upon to reawaken the nation from its slumber: the philologist was a redeemer.

Love of the Fatherland and Fatherly Love: Chapter 4 is the first of three chapters that focus on Jacob Grimm, the more prolific and politically involved of the two brothers. The fourth chapter reconstructs Jacob Grimm's political biography and presents his lifelong government service in German principalities, punctuated by dramatic, public displays of political commitment. Faced with the conflict between rigid, patriarchal rule by monarchs to whom he was often tied as a civil servant and his own vision of the nation as a naturally evolving community of solidarity and even love, Grimm came to hope for the eventual appearance of a loving king, a king with a philologist's heart, genuinely attached to one national people. Jacob Grimm wished to facilitate harmony between the people and the king and in this way help resolve a key political tension of his day, namely the one between princely sovereignty and popular influence. The chapter also reconstructs the curiously thin nature of Grimm's political beliefs: while he was confident, insistent, and at times even strident in debates over the territorial shape of the nation, he was considerably less vocal on other, domestic political issues, including discussions of rights and the distribution of goods in a society increasingly dominated by the so-called social question. In these areas, his nationalism provided no guidance. Grimm concentrated on one particular dimension of political legitimacy – national rule – and had little to say about other aspects of governance.

The Mother Tongue at School: This chapter looks at a persistent problem within nationalist ideology, as it emerged in Jacob Grimm's reflections on the rise of mandatory schooling toward the latter part of his career, in the 1840s and 1850s. School systems can impose a uniform language across a large territory, effectively giving shape to a national people. This became increasingly clear to Grimm himself as he witnessed the emergence of a veritable army of schoolteachers in the mid-nineteenth century. While he approved of greater national unification by means of mass schooling, the rise of public

education also forced him to consider that the nation may not grow from below to delimit the proper reach of a state. Instead, an extant state apparatus could forge a more standardized culture by institutional means, at the expense of the more natural-seeming transmission of language and customs in families and localities. Hence the state and its head may not need a philologist to trace extant national boundaries. Indeed, the school system itself, a necessary institution in the developed modern state, threatened local cultures with extinction and hence deprived regional populations of the memory that Grimm had pledged to protect as a philologist.

The Names of the Barbarians: The sixth and final chapter shows how Jacob Grimm's idea of self-enclosed and culturally autonomous peoples was troubled by the international interaction that he uncovered in his historical work on ancient German tribes, completed in the revolutionary year of 1848. Seeking to unify his knowledge of diachronic linguistics and ethnic history in one final grandiose work of summation, Grimm paid special attention to the one thing that had survived myriad tribes – their names – but conceded that names were always generated by outside observers; names, Grimm admitted, were never chosen, always given. When Jacob Grimm dug as deep as he possibly could into prehistory, he found not proud acts of autonomous self-naming by nations but only boundary-defining *encounters* between groups and peoples. Grimm suspected that such cultural encounters, moreover, had first become visible within the domains of imperial civilizations that housed multiple peoples and languages. In the end, the practice of philology with its comparative grasp of distinct but affiliated languages and cultures was an imperial phenomenon. The nationalist figure of the philologist, Jacob Grimm's own writings ironically suggested, was the inheritor not of the self-enclosed tribe but of the trans-regional, polyethnic empire.

As the chapter outlines indicate, each one reconstructs and critically examines a particular facet of the nationalist imagination, or a particular element in its cluster of interconnected ideals and fantasies: the nation's definable territorial home (Chapter 1), the authentic folk narrative (Chapter 2), the ancient collective poetry of the people (Chapter 3), the passionate attachment to the sacred fatherland (Chapter 4), the intimacy and naturalness of the mother tongue (Chapter 5), and the heroic history of the ancient tribe (Chapter 6).

The Philologist at the Court

A final question should close this Introduction: did the Prussian king ever listen to the philologist's advice? Was there, during the careers of the

brothers Grimm, ever a figure deserving of the title philologist king, a ruler with an interest in the people as defined and studied by the philologist? The Prussian ruler Frederick William IV certainly knew Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. After the king of Hanover had removed the brothers from their professorial positions at the university in Göttingen after a conflict over the kingdom's constitution in the late 1830s, the Prussian monarch approved the recruitment of the controversial but increasingly revered scholars to Berlin in 1840 and welcomed them personally during an audience in 1841.⁷⁹ Jacob Grimm was quite taken by the king's friendly demeanor and felt personal loyalty to the ruler who had put an end to a precarious period in his life without an official, salaried position.⁸⁰ At the time of his recruitment, Grimm was quick to recognize the Prussian king as a man of "noble will" and great promise for all of Germany.⁸¹ The king, a man of "profound though not precise religious conviction,"⁸² was also known for being indecisive, and even easily nudged and influenced.⁸³ Frederick William IV, then, might have been open to advice from a renowned philologist. Yet, while the Grimm brothers returned to the court for social occasions now and then, they never came close to advancing into the role of advisors and never joined an inner circle. In the end, the king was, as one might expect, surrounded by a camarilla composed of noblemen. The one academic who did work closely with the king was the aged but indefatigable naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859);⁸⁴ in comparison, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were entirely peripheral figures. The idea of a philologist king was an animating vision, a fantasy, and very far from an actual courtly reality.

At one point, however, the Prussian king did ask Jacob Grimm to resolve a conflict on the basis of his linguistic expertise. When announcing a new medal of honor to be awarded to Prussian and German men of science and letters, the king encouraged Humboldt to consult with Jacob Grimm after a ministerial dispute about the spelling of a word in the statute.⁸⁵ Should the word for "German" be written with a *t*, as in *teutsch*, or a *d*, as in *deutsch*? The answer, provided in the Grimm's dictionary in an entry written by Wilhelm, was *deutsch*.