

Kleist's *Berliner Abendblätter* and the Grimms' "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering": Old News

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Abstract

The essay reads a bizarre anecdote that appeared in the *Berliner Abendblätter* (1810-1811), edited by Heinrich von Kleist, which Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm reprinted in their first edition of folktales (1812/1815). The publishing decisions around this story illustrate connections between these apparently very different editorial projects, as well as historical affinities among the anecdote, the novella, the folktale, and the news story. By closely examining a tale that the Grimms and Kleist published, we can see that the very reasons that made it compelling around and just after 1810 may be related to the Grimms' decision to drop it from their later collections. The old news in this tale, and in others the Grimms omitted, ultimately did not align with their re-envisioning of the German past.

Shortly after 1800, Heinrich von Kleist and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm were working on very different projects that nevertheless intersected. Kleist was publishing the daily *Berliner Abendblätter* (*Berlin Evening News*, 1810-1811), and the Grimms were compiling their first edition of folktales (1812/1815). In the following, I examine the Grimms' reprinting of a story from Kleist's newspaper to demonstrate affinities in these authors' editorial projects as well as between the folktale and the news story. In 1810 and shortly thereafter, the simultaneously horrifying and folksy anecdote "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" clearly belonged in both the daily news and the tale collection. But while Kleist included similarly wild stories in his novellas published around the same time, the Grimms eventually moved such anecdotes out of their collections—and thus rewrote the past. As we will see, tales like "Slaughtering," which were essentially bizarre quasi-fictions presented as fact, served journalistic and literary publishing agendas early in the nineteenth century. But a close examination of this tale reveals that the reasons why it *was* published in 1810 by Kleist and in 1812 by the Grimms may be connected to the Grimms' decision to *omit* it from their collections beginning

in 1819. The Grimms' forward-looking project of constructing German nationalism necessitated reshaping the past to accommodate the future they envisioned.

Like the *Berliner Abendblätter*, the Grimms' first tale edition was a mélange of archetypal and non-archetypal narratives, including fragments of stories from other cultures translated into German, sometimes in dialect. From 1819 onward, though, the Grimms were working on much more standardized, literary collections that they felt better served the emerging proto-national interest.¹ The eventually omitted tale "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" enables us entry into the publishing landscape just prior to 1819: a landscape characterized by a robust interplay of genres and porous boundaries between representations of the past and the present.

The Appeal of "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" to Kleist and the Grimms

The thirty-eighth issue of Kleist's *Berliner Abendblätter* included a gruesome story entitled "Von einem Kinde, das kindlicher Weise ein anderes Kind umbringt" (About a Child Who Killed Another Child in a Childish Way).² It reports that in the town of Franecker, in West Friesland, a group of children played "butcher" and "pig" with gory and deadly results. A passing councilman happens to see the children in the roles of butcher and cook draining the blood of the child who had played the pig. He puts the "butcher" on trial before the town council. The little boy is given the choice of an apple or a coin: if he takes the apple, he will be freed, and if he takes the coin, he will be killed. The boy "laughingly grabs the apple" (ergreift den Apfel lachend) and is absolved of all responsibility.

The author then refers to this violent yarn as a "moving story from an old book" (rührende Geschichte aus einem alten Buche).³ The book was doubtless Jörg Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* (*Little*

¹ Jacob Norberg relates the Grimms' folktale collecting and editing to their nationalist aims in *The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); see here especially 58–63.

² "Von einem Kinde, das kindlicher Weise ein anderes Kind umbringt," issue no. 38, November 13, 1810, in Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke*, Brandenburger Ausgabe, eds. Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle, vol. 2.7, *Berliner Abendblätter I* (Basel: Stroemfeld, 1997), 195–96. All translations are mine.

³ Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter I*, 195.

Wheel-Wagon Book) of 1555, in which a tale appeared with the same title and nearly identical content. And the anonymous author of the re-telling in the *Abendblätter* likely was Achim von Arnim, who was working with Wickram's collection in other contexts.⁴

The *Berliner Abendblätter* were published every evening, except Sundays, from October 1, 1810, until March 30, 1811. Kleist revealed himself as the editor in an "Erklärung" (Declaration) that appeared in the nineteenth edition, on October 22, 1810. In that statement, Kleist explained that he intended the purpose of the paper to be the "advancement of the national interest in general" (Beförderung der Nationalsache überhaupt).⁵ It might not be immediately apparent how the mélange of graphic police reports, bizarre news, and tales that filled the *Abendblätter*'s pages could serve that purpose, and yet the ephemera that constituted the paper were part of the huge increase in literary production around 1800 that contributed to an emerging culture's sense of itself.⁶

Kleist promised that his newspaper only contained "the newest and the truest" (das Neueste und das Wahrhafteste).⁷ His aims were aligned with Karl Philipp Moritz's 1784 prescription for newspapers: according to Moritz, news should focus on local and recent happenings and prioritize reporting "individual facts from individual people" (einzelne Fakta von einzelnen Menschen). What we think of as "big events" (große Begebenheiten) may ultimately emerge from these seemingly minor pieces of evidence, whereas relaying big events alone provides little understanding of how

⁴ Jörg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*, eds. Werner Witt and Andreas Vogt (Tübingen: Klöpfer & Meyer, 2010) 169–70. This edition follows volume 3 of *Georg Wickrams Werke*, ed. Johannes Bolte, Tübingen 1903. There are no essential differences between the Wickram text and the version that appears in the 38th edition of the *Berliner Abendblätter*. Reinhold Steig affirms the connection to Arnim in *Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe* (Berlin and Stuttgart: Spemann, 1901) 203. Steig adds that Arnim repurposed Wickram's "Von einem Kinde, das kindlicher Weis ein ander Kind umbringt" in his unfinished second volume of his novel *Die Kronenwächter* (published posthumously in 1854, likely substantially revised and reworked by Arnim's widow Bettina von Arnim).

⁵ "Erklärung," issue 19, October 22, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 98.

⁶ Sean Franzel argues that the ephemerality and miscellaneity of the *Berliner Abendblätter* both reflected and contributed to an emerging modern sense of time closely associated with new forms of media around 1800. I adopt his application of the term "ephemera" to the *Berliner Abendblätter*, from "Kleist's Magazines: Archiving the Ephemeral in the *Berliner Abendblättern*," *German Studies Review* 40, no. 3 (2017) 487–507.

⁷ "An das Publicum," issue 5, October 5, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 32.

they came about.⁸ Moritz explains that a report of two workers fighting in the street “may be more important for the human observer in understanding the national character than a comparison between Russia and the Ottoman Porte” (kann, in so fern er den Charakter der Nation bezeichnet, für den Menschenbeobachter wichtiger sein, als ein Vergleich zwischen Rußland und der ottomannischen Pforte).⁹ The highly specific and local anecdote could be more explanatory, and hence more powerful, than the big story. And the ephemeral, the local, and the seemingly minor could contribute to the work of the nation in ways different from, but no less important than, canonized artworks.

At least some of the “news” in the case of “About a Child Who Killed Another Child in a Childish Way” seems to be the reminder that this very old subject matter has recently been made new again. According to the anonymous author in the *Berliner Abendblätter* (again, probably Arnim), Zacharias Werner used material from the folktale in his 1808 play, *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar* (*The Twenty-Fourth of February*), which had already been a success in Weimar and Lauchstädt.¹⁰ Goethe attended the Weimar premiere in February 1810. In the *Abendblätter*, the author expresses hope that retelling the older story here will encourage a Berlin theater to mount a production of Werner’s play, ideally with actor (and Prussian national theater director) August Wilhelm Iffland in a lead role.¹¹ Reinhold Steig points out that those associated with the *Abendblätter* criticized Iffland for performing

⁸ Karl Philipp Moritz, “Ideal einer vollkommenen Zeitung.” In *Werke in zwei Bänden*, eds. Heide Hollmer and Albert Meier (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997) 2: 864. All translations are mine.

⁹ Moritz, “Ideal einer vollkommenen Zeitung,” 865.

¹⁰ The *Abendblätter* piece affirms that *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar* was seen “in Weimar und Lauchstädt schon oft mit einem so lebhaften Antheile [...] als vielleicht kein Werk eines modernen Dichters” (with such lively interest [...] as perhaps no other work by a modern author), *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 195–96.

¹¹ Reinhold Steig, *Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe* (Berlin and Stuttgart: Spemann 1901), 201. As additional evidence that Achim von Arnim likely wrote this piece, Steig observes that Arnim met playwright Zacharias Werner and Goethe in Weimar in 1808. Werner wrote to Iffland in May 1809, proposing the actor appear in his play. Iffland never did. Günter Blamberger, Sybille Peters, and others have described the feud Kleist had with Iffland, who had blocked Kleist’s plays from being performed in Berlin; Kleist’s desire to take revenge on Iffland in a sustained way was potentially a motivator for the publication of the *Berliner Abendblätter*. See Blamberger, *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2012), 389–91, and Peters, *Heinrich von Kleist und der Gebrauch der Zeit. Von der Macht der Berliner Abendblätter* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 22–24.

in “classical and old dying pieces” (classische und alte abständige Stücke), and preferred that he also choose “modern Romantic dramas” (modern romantische Dramen).¹² The play *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar*, which borrowed material from the folktale of 1555, clearly fits into the latter category.

The connection of this old slaughter-story with something “modern” and “Romantic” is not as surprising as it might seem: accessible, entertaining, short pieces were at the heart of the style of “news” printed in the *Abendblätter*, a style that prevailed in various spheres of public activity at the time. Moritz’s theory and Kleist’s practice of the modern newspaper, Arnim’s folktale collections, and even modern laws all prized legibility and connection with readers, including relatively uneducated readers.¹³ “Modern” and “Romantic” meant fresh, dramatic, and gripping, to be sure, and it also could mean folksy, popular, and broadly comprehensible. And, “modern” and “Romantic” often meant a purported connection to something old, to something that had been told before, and ideally to something that could be repackaged as German.¹⁴

Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm published a very similar version of “About a Child Who Killed Another Child in a Childish Way” in the first volume of their first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*, published in two volumes in 1812 and 1815), which they titled “Wie Kinder Schlachtens miteinander gespielt haben” (usually translated as How Some Children Played at Slaughtering). Although the Grimms were borrowing from Achim von Arnim’s

¹² Steig, *Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe*, 201.

¹³ The primary author of the *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussischen Staaten von 1794*, Carl Gottlieb Svarez, explicitly desired the law to be comprehensible to the public, and to that end published the *Unterricht über die Gesetze für die Einwohner der Preussischen Staaten von zwei Preussische Rechtsgelehrten* in 1793. See Hermann Conrad, *Die geistigen Grundlagen des Allgemeinen Landrechts für die Preussischen Staaten von 1794*, in *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Geisteswissenschaften* 77, 50. Sitzung, am 16. Oktober 1957, in Düsseldorf (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1957) 17, 11.

¹⁴ While the nationalist aims of German Romantics such as Kleist, Arnim, and the Grimms in the nineteenth century are well-documented, Karl Philipp Moritz laid the groundwork for understanding national character in terms of connections between the seemingly trivial and the big and ambitious: for instance, when he recommended that papers include stories that highlight “every useful invention, however small” (jede nützliche Erfindung, sie sei so klein sie wolle), as these can revive “inventive industriousness, a quality of the German” (erfindrischen Fleiß, ein Eigentum der Deutschen), “Ideal einer vollkommenen Zeitung,” 862.

collections during this time, they cited Kleist's *Berliner Abendblätter* as their source for the tale.

Wilhelm Grimm had a subscription to the paper and eventually owned the entire 1810-1811 run.¹⁵

In the same 1812 volume, the Grimms added a second version of "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering." Whereas the variant they took from the *Berliner Abendblätter* essentially reproduces Jörg Wickram's 1555 folktale, the second tale is a sparse description of the tragedy with no apparent resolution in a "trial." The Grimms took this version from Martin Zeiller's *Miscellanea* of 1661; it laconically relates an incident in which two boys, having watched their father butcher a pig, decide to re-enact the scene. In this case, the boys' mother, giving a third child a bath upstairs, overhears the deadly game and, upon discovering that one of her children has killed the other, stabs the son who played "butcher." When she returns to the child in the bath, she finds him drowned. The mother then hangs herself, and her despairing husband dies shortly thereafter.¹⁶

The Grimms left out the supernatural ending that appears in Zeiller's seventeenth-century text, which relates that the pope living at the time of the tale's events attempts to retell the gruesome story in a brief poem. Despite his poetic skill, he fails and offers a financial reward to whoever can write the story down. A poor student also fails, but the devil succeeds, capturing the story's nightmarish essence in a distich. The Grimms' second version of "Slaughtering" eliminates not only the religious references, but also the fact that the tale seems to defy re-telling by humans, even by the pope, at least in poetic form. Zeiller's version, on the other hand, implies that the tale cannot be retold (by mortals, in any event) while at the same time 1) retelling it, 2) retelling the tale of how only the devil could retell it, and 3) including the devil's distich. The Grimms may have wanted to

¹⁵ Franzel proposes that by collecting the *Berliner Abendblätter* in their entirety, Wilhelm Grimm "anticipated Kleist's admission into the literary canon," "Kleist's Magazines: Archiving the Ephemeral in the *Berliner Abendblätter*," 492. Sybille Peters affirms that Wilhelm Grimm's complete subscription is the reason why all issues of the *Abendblätter* are available today, in Ingo Breuer, ed., *Kleist Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung. Sonderausgabe* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 168.

¹⁶ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Berlin, 1812-1815, II (Munich: Sauer, 1994), 203. Their source, Martin Zeiller, in turn cites "Wolfius in seinen *Memorabilibus*," which likely refers to Johann Wolf's *Lectiones memorabiles et reconditae* of 1600.

eliminate the level of complexity afforded by Zeiller's ending, as well as the implicit challenge to Christian authority represented by having the devil be the source of the tale.

Like a number of other tales that appeared in the Grimms' first edition, neither version of "Slaughtering" made it into their second edition in 1819. It would be easy to assume that the Grimms dropped "Slaughtering" because it resembled a morality play or traditional lore more than a fairy tale proper, and generic considerations indeed played a larger role in the collections beginning with the second edition.¹⁷ Achim von Arnim discouraged the Grimms from continuing to include it, saying he had heard a mother complain that she wouldn't be able to give her children a volume that contained such a story.¹⁸ Wilhelm Grimm initially insisted that "Slaughtering" was only a "Märchen," but that it was a fairy tale that taught him something real: hearing it from his mother made him cautious when playing.¹⁹ Grimm scholars, including Heinz Rölleke, state that despite Wilhelm's justification, the Grimms eventually omitted "Slaughtering" because it was too violent.²⁰ However, this explanation seems assumptive when one considers that a tale like "Von dem Machandelboom" (The Juniper Tree), which includes decapitation of a child and cannibalism, *was* included in every one of the Grimms' published collections—as were any number of other tales with scenes of graphic brutality.

Again, however, my argument here is that although the horrifyingly compelling events of "Slaughtering," as well as its ephemerality and inherent ambiguity, likely contributed to Kleist's decision to publish the tale in the *Berliner Abendblätter* in 1810, the Grimms' decision to erase it from

¹⁷ Steig presumes that the Grimms dropped *Slaughtering* "weil es doch eher Sage als Märchen ist." *Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe*, 203.

¹⁸ Reinhold Steig, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Märchen und Sagen der Brüder Grimm," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 107 (1901): 277–310, here 263. Cited in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Brüder Grimm. Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Ausgabe letzter Hand mit den Originalanmerkungen der Brüder Grimm*, ed. Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010), 493.

¹⁹ Steig, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Märchen und Sagen der Brüder Grimm," 266. Cited in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Brüder Grimm, Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 493.

²⁰ See for example Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Brüder Grimm, Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 493.

their tale collections beginning in 1819 is connected to that same mix of horror, ambiguity, and ephemera. The term “ephemera,” which Sean Franzel uses to describe much of the content of the *Berliner Abendblätter*, also suits several of the stories the Grimms omitted after the initial volumes of 1812 and 1815. Kleist and the early Grimms implicitly adopt Karl Philipp Moritz’s understanding of the signature differences between the minor, the local, the specific, the workaday, and the popular on the one hand and the transcendental, the aesthetically autonomous, and the canonized on the other.²¹ And all these authors, engaged around 1800 in the project of advancing the national interest via language, literature, and culture, find that “individual facts from individual people” helped serve that project.

After 1815, however, the Grimms shaped their collections much more explicitly for literate, middle-class, Christian families who might wish to read the stories to children. Such families were core consumers in the German Confederation after the 1815 Congress of Vienna, and the increasingly popular Grimm collections featured in ever more households’ libraries. What Kleist called the “advancement of the national interest in general” was, for the Grimms, better served after 1815 by sharply revising a select group of tales into something more like literary prose than by reproducing old stories in essentially unexpurgated form.²²

The final issue of the *Berliner Abendblätter* was published on March 30, 1811, just under eight months before Kleist’s death. By then, the paper’s early success had dwindled. We do not know whether Kleist would eventually have reached a conclusion similar to the later Grimms about how well, or poorly, ephemeral collections of anecdotes, rumors, reports, and tales were serving the

²¹ I am indebted to Franzel’s understanding and descriptions of these differences in “Kleist’s Magazines: Archiving the Ephemeral in the *Berliner Abendblätter*,” 487–507, especially 487–90.

²² Jakob Norberg’s book *The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) deeply and broadly explores the Grimms’ complete history of contributing to and shaping the nationalist project via their tale collections and other work. Maria Tatar discusses the Grimms’ publishing history and sales during the nineteenth century in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), especially 11–20, 252.

emerging national interest and its increasingly literate public. But in the early 1810s, curiosities and collectibles such as the contents of Kleist's paper or the more ambiguous and challenging folktales in the Grimms' collection were part of a colorful media landscape that was helping shape a modern national consciousness. The robustness and variety of this landscape, which Moritz, Kleist, and the Grimms all inhabited, certainly were partly due to the explosion in paper production and print capacity from approximately 1770 onwards. At the same time, the miscellaneity, brevity, and newsworthiness characteristic of the papers, journals, and tale collections in this period resembled the style and content of flyers, pamphlets, and other brief popular texts produced in the printing press's earliest days.²³

In the following two sections, I read "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering," and then continue to explore reasons why the Grimms might have let the tale go, before returning in the final section to Kleist's *Abendblätter* and the intersection of news and tale therein.

"How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" As a *Thatsache* To Be Forgotten

Neither version of "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" fits anywhere in the extremely comprehensive Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of folktale types.²⁴ The fact that the tale is non-indexed and does not appear in the Grimms' most widely sold and famous later nineteenth-century tale collections could have erased it from the history of tales. But Jack Zipes and others who have helped bring the tales from the Grimms' 1812 edition back into public consciousness have spurred the realization that "Slaughtering" clearly was told and retold from at least the late Middle Ages

²³ For much more on this history, see for example Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *Divine Press, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impressions to the Sense of an Ending* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁴ The Aarne-Thompson-Uther index now is available online at the Kalevala Society Foundation site: <https://edition.fi/kalevalaseura/index>.

onward.²⁵ “Slaughtering” does resemble many canonized tales in that its horrors happen in the confines of the family unit. But those horrors are heightened because children are perpetrators, and the tales’ “newsworthiness” seems due at least in part to the inclusion of information about the crime’s aftermath.

Most tales in the Grimms’ collections, like even the most outlandish stories in Kleist’s newspaper, were presented as if true: as if the facts in the stories were facts in the world. In other words, there are no overt indications that anything in even the wildest anecdotes and tales did *not* happen; there are no unreliable narrators, and occasionally—especially in the tales the Grimms omitted from their second edition onward—specific locations are mentioned. “Slaughtering” is an excellent example of what Johannes Lehmann describes as a text type common in the *Berliner Abendblätter*: “Anecdotes that [...] are subordinate to the claim to facticity and which at the same time are presented as complete stories, as tellable and re-tellable facts” (Anekdoten, die [...] dem Anspruch auf Faktizität unterstehen und die zugleich als abgeschlossene Geschichten präsentiert werden, als erzählbare und weitererzählbare Thatsachen).²⁶ The anecdote presented a specific relation between story and fact that made it, in some respects, ideal for the type of daily news Kleist was printing—as well as for the Grimms’ early tale collections.

Lehmann explains that around 1800, a “matter of fact” (*Thatsache*, or *Thatbestand*) was not understood in today’s sense of a “fact,” but rather “in the sense of a narrated and represented story or rather plot” (im Sinne erzählter und dargestellter Geschichte bzw. Handlung).²⁷ The most convincing and compelling plots were clear and easily comprehensible, and could be attested to

²⁵ See for example Jack Zipes, “How the Grimm Brothers Saved the Fairy Tale,” *Humanities: The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities* 36, no. 2 (2015). Accessed at <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2015/marchapril/feature/how-the-grimm-brothers-saved-the-fairy-tale>

²⁶ Johannes Lehmann, “Faktum, Anekdote, Gerücht. Zur Begriffsgeschichte der ‘Thatsache’ und Kleists *Berliner Abendblätter*,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 89, no. 3 (2015): 307–22, here 319.

²⁷ Lehmann, “Faktum, Anekdote, Gerücht,” 307. Lehmann notes that the word “Thatsache” was used by Johann J. Spalding in 1756 “zur Übersetzung von ‘matter of fact,’” 307, 309. A “matter of fact” presumed narration, as opposed to a “Faktum” (“fact”) that precedes narration, 307.

because they happened, at least implicitly, in front of witnesses. *Thatsachen*, in other words, are stories—but, Lehmann continues, stories that take place “am besten vor aller Augen und so, dass diese sich zugetragen habende ‘Thatsache’ etwas beweist” (in the best case, for all to see and in a way that makes the transpired ‘matter of fact’ prove something).²⁸ The *Thatsache* should communicate “Anschaulichkeit und [...] verstandene Erfahrung” (clarity and [...] understood experience).²⁹ An indispensable component of the well-told *Thatsache* is its capacity to make events *evident* in ways that non-narrated events are not: namely, evident to those not present at the initial scene. Beyond a well-communicated, compelling plot, the *Thatsache* needed some contextualization in relevant frameworks of authority. Whereas the *Wahrheitsbehauptung* (truth claim) in the medieval epic often relied on narrative connections to religious authority as well as on the assertion that the narrated events had been witnessed, the evidentiary power of retold folktales like “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” relied more often on narrative connections to legal authority, as well as on the continued emphasis on witnessing.

The power of “Slaughtering” arguably resides not in purported facticity, but in its representation of children—potentially of all children—as simultaneously capable of horrendously bloody crimes and as innocent of the same, as determined by witnesses and by legal authority. Although “Slaughtering” is taken from an “old book,” the Grimms and the *Berliner Abendblätter* re-tell it as a story with present-day power—a power attested to by the simple fact of its retelling, but also by Wilhelm Grimm’s insistence that it still could teach valuable lessons, and by the *Abendblätter*’s affirmation that the play *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar* had renewed the material in a compelling and popular way. Similarly, the admittedly often “entstellten” (distorted), yet multiply witnessed and attested-to, *Thatsachen* in the *Abendblätter*’s police reports evoked a sense of present urgency and

²⁸ Lehmann, “Faktum, Anekdote, Gerücht,” 312.

²⁹ Ibid.

persuasiveness, not because the *Thatsachen* happened precisely as reported, but rather because they were presented both as singular and as potentially repeatable—a presentation enhanced by the fact that the paper came out every day.³⁰ Kleist's strategies, in the police reports, folktales, short stories, and other pieces in the *Abendblättern*, of “reactivating” old news by editing, revising, and re-representing it in the present in this respect, were not dissimilar to the Grimms' editorial techniques. When the Grimms translated, revised, and re-represented older tales from a panoply of pasts, cultures, and languages, they produced entire collections of narratives that were clearly not factual yet were full of truth claims and references to corroborating authorities. In “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering,” the indicative mood and straightforward, no-frills descriptive style certainly enhance the evidentiary power of the tale's terrible *Thatsachen*. But the meaning of the tale's first version in the Grimms' 1812 edition (and in the 1810 *Berliner Abendblätter*) ultimately depends on the determination of the “butcher” child's guilt. And his “trial” is less a fact-finding procedure than a meaning-making narration.

At first read, the trial scene in “Slaughtering” seems like a remnant of pre-Enlightened juridical processes, a holdover from Jörg Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* of 1555 rather than any kind of reflection of or response to current law, such as the *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten* of 1794. If anything, the horrific tale with child perpetrators, a child on trial, and an arguably ironic happy ending could be read as an implicit criticism of pre-Enlightened law, and thus as a form of support for new legal codes like the *Allgemeines Landrecht*. But the Grimms' decision to include “Slaughtering” in their first edition may indicate more than either a desire to re-tell an old, arguably highly entertaining story or to preserve knowledge of pre-modern ideas about the law. Instead,

³⁰ The reference to the narratives of *Thatsachen* being “entstellt” is in “Polizei-Rapport,” issue 4, October 4, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 24.

“Slaughtering” is an exemplary mix of re-narrations of memories of the old, ostensibly “German” past with a sense of reporting something that could happen today—something both “new and true.”

The trial scene in the Grimms’ first version of “Slaughtering” centers on the offering and taking of an object, an important act in older Germanic law, and one re-depicted in numerous tales. Even tales that do not explicitly include a court scene or references to the law highlight objects with symbolic legal functions.³¹ Alice Eisler notes, for example, that the shoe in “Aschenputtel” (Cinderella) is a nod to an older Germanic juridical procedure, in which taking off a shoe symbolized transferring one’s possessions. She continues: “Cinderella consequently wins her property by putting *on the slipper*” (Aschenputtel gewinnt so folgerichtig ihr Gut durch *Anziehen des Pantoffels*).³²

The juridical function of objects is much more explicit in “Slaughtering,” in which a child literally is on trial. And the objects in question are significant as well. The Rhenish gulden is, of course, a form of money, *Geld*, a word that Jacob Grimm, in his work on the history of law and legal terms, says historically encompasses “a very general expression of the terms compensation, payment, substitution” (ein sehr allgemeiner ausdrück für die begriffe genugthuung, zahlung, ersatz). *Geld*, like the verb *gelten*, conveys a sense of repair, and Grimm notes that for Frisians *jeld* means atonement (*Buße*). Guilt (*Schuld*), Grimm explains, means owing a debt (*Bußfälligkeit*), understood in monetary terms.³³ But the child in “Slaughtering” knows better than to take the object that essentially indicates a debt already paid, and in the form of a Rhenish gulden at that. This gulden was a gold currency produced in the Rhein region beginning in 1386 and was likely considered high quality.³⁴ Taking the

³¹ Alice Eisler, “Recht im Märchen,” *Neophilologus* 66 (1982): 422–30, here 422.

³² Eisler, “Recht im Märchen,” 422.

³³ Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1828) 649.

³⁴ Arthur Suhle provides a detailed regional history of various coins and their compositions in Germanic territories, in *Deutsche Münz- und Geldgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zum 15. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1964).

coin would truly signify guilt, as the little boy would be displaying greed and avarice in grasping for gold, not, for instance, the relatively innocent desire to use the coin to buy food or other necessities.

The symbolic connotations of the apple, an object that appears in numerous folktales and religious traditions, are well known. And “Slaughtering” may re-represent the apple’s associations with forbidden knowledge as well as its wholesome, innocent appearance. The boy who murdered his brother takes the apple, knowing what he has done, and he laughs as he takes it. Although he technically is guilty of killing another child, he is deemed innocent because he takes the object that represents what the gold coin does not: knowledge rather than worldly transactions, and nourishment—or, care of the self—rather than greed.³⁵ By taking the apple, the boy demonstrates an intention to grasp the fruit of knowledge instead of the coin of compensation. The compensation and repair that the gulden would entail are unnecessary, as no crime has been committed. And yet by demonstrating intent, and by grasping (arguably) knowledge as well as nourishment, the boy reveals that he is capable *of* intent—but only of the intent to play, not to commit a real murder. It is also significant that the object-centered trial takes place in public, before a council, and that the judge gives the boy the choice between the gulden and the apple after being advised by “an old wise man” (ein alter weiser Mann).³⁶ The council proceeds on the basis of old wisdom, and conducts a trial so outdated, yet so familiar, as to seem, in a sense, timeless.

“How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” is an old folktale that also fulfills all the criteria of the *Thatsache* around 1800, and it thus fits the Grimms’ as well as Kleist’s projects. It is told in clear terms, invokes familiar contexts of authority, and makes the reader “witness” to its events by

³⁵ It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore tangential connotations of the apple, but it potentially also could be connected figuratively to the *Reichsapfel*, the medieval crown and symbol of sovereignty and authority. The *Reichsapfel* often is compared to a globe; seen in this context, the little boy takes the world in his hand when he takes the apple. André Grabar discusses the history and connotations of the *Reichsapfel* in “Zur Geschichte von Sphaira, Globus und Reichsapfel,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 191, no. 2 (1960): 336–48.

³⁶ Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 195.

employing a narrative style that positions the reader as a direct observer of both the murderous game and the folksy trial (or, in the case of the Grimms' second version, the entire family's doom). Although the apple, with its multiple meanings, and the boy's laugh make the reader unsure whether justice has been done, the "matters of fact" in the story nevertheless assert unequivocally that all these events happened (i.e., the transpired events are "proven" by the straightforward, indicative, and oft-repeated narrative). Although the tale is not indexed, it nevertheless appears to belong in the continuum of tales that involve or depict the law, but the law as *Thatsache* rather than the law as a fact that precedes narration. In Alice Eisler's words, folk tales communicate "less [...] what the law *is* than [...] a feeling of what the law *should* be" (weniger [...] was Recht *ist*, als [...] was dem Gefühl nach Recht sein *sollte*).³⁷

Children do not play much in the Grimms' tales, whether in the omitted stories or in those that were published later in the nineteenth century. Instead, they are often fleeing terrible danger or working terribly hard. But "Slaughtering" anticipates a "matter of fact" (*Thatsache*) narrated by Sigmund Freud: that play is the child's form of work, and that it is a very real action in the world.³⁸ The children in the tale who play by imitating work are doing something so old, so natural, and so self-evident that the deadly consequences are not just shocking—they disrupt any sense of reliable order. Even the resolution of the trial is neither comforting nor conclusive; the trial merely ends the matter of fact. "Slaughtering," in this respect, is very similar to other tales the Grimms published in their first edition and later eliminated: it defies the archetypal plot that characterizes nearly all

³⁷ Eisler, "Recht im Märchen," 423.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Der Dichter und das Phantasieren," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, eds. Anna Freud, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1972), 213–23.

canonized tales.³⁹ As of 1819, the Grimms had committed fully to the pattern of loss, quest, tasks, help, and reward that gave tales a reliable, if extremely repetitive, structure.

The Grimms did agree that, in Jakob Norberg's phrasing, "the modest, the simple, and the neglected [...] stood in a relationship to the geopolitical and world historical." Norberg adds that Jacob Grimm in particular "was known for unfailing attention to apparently insignificant minutiae and love for the small, non-prestigious, and provincial."⁴⁰ The brothers' aims for an ideal collection of folktales were hence aligned with Moritz's abovementioned prescription for the ideal newspaper, which should deploy the individual to connect to the general, and which should enumerate the specific to make the all-encompassing comprehensible. This in turn aligns with Kleist's approach to collecting, editing, and revising ephemera (including police reports, local news, and folktales) in the *Berliner Abendblätter*. But as their nationalist project developed in their editorial practices, after 1815 the Grimms aimed to convey a sense of the *past* that was more compatible with *present* modern, post-Enlightened, yet also overtly Romantic ideals. To do this, they needed in effect to replace the "old news" of earlier ambiguous, ephemeral anecdotes with a new, more straightforward vision of the past.

How the Grimms Replaced Old News with a New Sense of the Old

Scholarship to date has provided unsatisfying answers to why the Grimms omitted the tales they did from their collections after the first edition. Gory content and non-German national origin are often cited as possible reasons for the omissions. For instance, "Die Hand mit dem Messer" (The Hand

³⁹ Vladimir Propp generally is credited with identifying thirty-one functions that compose the plot of a huge number of well-known tales; these often are condensed into the five-step archetypal plot structure. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

⁴⁰ Norberg, *The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism*, 61–62. Norberg refers here especially to Jacob Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Karl Müllenhoff (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1864), 18 and 27.

with the Knife) is presumed to be too Scottish, and “Blaubart” (Bluebeard) is deemed too French.⁴¹ But the non-German sources of oft-published tales like “Cinderella” (French) and “Dornröschen” (Briar Rose; French and Italian) were well known. And violence hardly prevented the Grimms from continuing to publish tales like “Sneewittchen” (Snow White, in which the queen must dance in hot iron slippers until she dies), “Cinderella” (in which the stepsisters amputate parts of their own feet and eventually have their eyes pecked out by birds), or “The Juniper Tree” (which includes the decapitation of a child and cannibalism).

The problem with the tales the Grimms omitted was not that they were too Scottish or too graphic. Rather, these tales fail to convey the *feeling of* the past, or the *feeling of* what they were constructing as a very old Germanness, that the Grimms aimed to communicate as the nineteenth century progressed. While the omitted tales like “Slaughtering” indeed communicated facts as “matters of fact,” or *Thatsachen*—as unique, and yet potentially repeatable events—the frequently re-published tales moved even further away from portraying life as it could have happened and toward portraying life as it should have happened. They present a version of the presumptively Germanic past that is more useful for the simultaneously idealistic and reactionary project of constructing a new Germany via language.

The Grimms’ version of “Rotkäppchen” (Little Red Cap) exemplifies their modern recreation of the past. The most substantial revision to earlier versions of the tale does already appear in their 1812 edition, and it is precisely this version that reappears in almost unaltered form up to and including the final edition of 1857, making it a solid representative of the types of changes the Grimms favored most. Most earlier versions of “Little Red Cap” end very badly, but the Grimms notably changed the ending so that Little Red is saved—saved so that she can live to learn

⁴¹ For example, see Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Brüder Grimm. Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 643–44, 651–52.

her lesson. After being rescued from the wolf's belly by a huntsman, Little Red thinks to herself: “du willst dein Lebtag nicht wieder allein vom Wege ab in den Wald laufen, wenn dir's die Mutter verboten hat” (‘as long as you live, you will never walk alone away from the path into the forest, if your mother has forbidden it’).⁴² In the Grimms' hands, Little Red becomes a true post-panoptical subject, internalizing the law and becoming her own enforcer. By blaming herself for the wolf attack, she not only survives the next one but also joins forces with her grandmother to kill the wolf at their next encounter.⁴³

“Little Red Cap” is just one of many popular and frequently published tales in which the Grimms presented a version of the past more compatible with post-Enlightenment behavioral norms. “Briar Rose,” like any number of canonized tales, ends with the marriage of heroine and hero. Earlier versions of the tale, however, included post-marriage scenes that depicted the union between Briar Rose and the prince as catastrophically dangerous rather than as the peaceful end of the story. The majority of Giambattista Basile's “Sun, Moon, and Talia” (1634) is dedicated to what happens *after* an already-married king impregnates the heroine, Talia, while she is still asleep. She gives birth to two children, Sun and Moon, but awakens only after they suck the sleep-inducing flax splinter from her finger. The furious queen summons Talia and orders that she and the children be cooked and served to the king. The kind cook hides Talia and the children and cooks the king a lamb dish instead. Believing that he has consumed his wife and children, the king laments: “I, myself, am the wolf of my own sweet lambs” (which is both true and not true). He has the queen burned alive, but spares the cook, who affirms he has saved Talia, Sun, and Moon from “the gall of

⁴² Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Rotkäppchen,” *Brüder Grimm. Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 176. Translation mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 176–77.

that bitch, who desired to slay them, to return within thy body that part which was thine own body.” The king then marries Talia, who “enjoyed a long life with her husband and her children.”⁴⁴

Charles Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (1697) also includes a post-marriage cannibalism threat. After awakening the princess, the prince visits her in secret for two years, during which time they have two children, Morning and Day. Once the prince becomes king and marries the princess, his incensed mother, who “was of the race of the Ogres,” orders that the children and the princess be killed one by one and cooked in a sauce Robert.⁴⁵ Once again, a cook saves all three, the queen mother dies horribly, and the new king is happy with his wife and children, but nevertheless “could not but be very sorry, for she was his mother.”⁴⁶ Both “Briar Rose” source stories violate what became a key element of many published tales after 1819: marriage not only as the end of the story, but arguably as the end of history, since presumably nothing that merits narrating will happen after the wedding. Although a peaceful marriage is ultimately achieved in Basile’s and Perrault’s versions, the union of hero and heroine initially leads to catastrophe.

The Grimms turn Briar Rose’s childhood curse and long sleep into the tale’s main events, eliminate the pregnancy and childbirth, and thus also pre-empt difficult questions about the consequences of marriage. Perrault’s version, in which the queen mother is an ogre, also raises the question of whether the prince could also be part monster, especially as his biological connection to her is reaffirmed in the story’s last lines.⁴⁷ Like the Grimms’ decision to excise the ending of Martin Zeiller’s 1661 version of “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering,” in which the devil is the

⁴⁴ Giambattista Basile, *Il Pentamerone, or The Tale of Tales*, trans. Richard F. Burton (New York: Horace Livewright, 1927), Day 5, Tale 5, 420–25. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/ilpentameroneort0000basi/page/420/mode/2up>.

⁴⁵ Charles Perrault, “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” in Andrew Lang, ed., *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1889), 54–63, here 60.

⁴⁶ Perrault, “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” 63.

⁴⁷ Although what we today think of as the hereditary transfer of physical traits did not become part of medical discourse in a sustained and consistent way until the nineteenth century, the possibility of transmitting corporeal and behavioral characteristics through family lines appears in texts from antiquity onward. See for example Carlos López-Beltrán, “Natural Things and Non-natural Things: The Boundaries of the Hereditary in the Eighteenth Century,” *A Cultural History of Heredity I: 17th and 18th Centuries*, Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte (2002), 67–88.

source and the tale's genealogy implicitly evil, the decision to remove the ogre mother whitewashes the questionable genealogy of the prince. And "Briar Rose" joined other Grimms' versions that replaced complicated subplots and multivalent endings with far neater resolutions.

By revising and re-publishing tales with the archetypal plot structure of quest, sacrifice, and reward, by eliminating messy endings, and by increasingly focusing on the nuclear family, on romance, and on binary gender identities, the Grimms summoned a past of a Germany that never was into the present. The Preface to the very first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812 already gives a sense of this future direction. Here Wilhelm Grimm writes that "when we review the riches of German poetry from olden times (we) discover that nothing of it has been kept alive, even the memory of it is lost—folk songs and these innocent household tales are all that remain" (wenn wir den Reichthum deutscher Dichtung in frühen Zeiten betrachten, und dann sehen, daß von so vielem nichts lebendig sich erhalten, selbst die Erinnerung daran verloren war, und nur Volkslieder, und diese unschuldigen Hausmärchen übrig geblieben sind).⁴⁸

The Preface simultaneously valorizes the putatively Germanic folk past while acknowledging that the *Volks poesie* (folk literature, or folk tales) of that past has vanished. In effect, a new past needed to be constructed. As the nineteenth century went on, the new past conformed ever more closely to present behavioral and societal norms. For Germany to be a contender among unified nation-states, and amidst colonial powers that were already fully industrialized, its people needed not only a unified language—they needed a sense of a common past that made sense in the modern

⁴⁸ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* I, Berlin, 1812-1815 (Munich: Sauer, 1994), 5. The translation is from Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, 252. In the second edition of 1819, Grimm changes this section to say that "nothing was left of all those things that had flourished in earlier times; even the memory of them was nearly gone except for some songs, a few books, legends, and these innocent household tales" (von so vielem, was in früherer Zeit geblüht hat, nichts mehr übrig geblieben, selbst die Erinnerung daran fast ganz verloren war, als unter dem Volke Lieder, ein paar Bücher, Sagen, und diese unschuldigen Hausmärchen), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Brüder Grimm. Kinder- und Hausmärchen* I, 15. The translation is from Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, 264. Although the second edition refers to the memory of old folk culture as "nearly" instead of completely gone, by 1819, the first edition of 1812/1815 arguably constituted that memory.

present. While the Grimms supported monarchical rule in principle, they acknowledged that the populace increasingly needed to regulate itself, and that stories that condoned individualism, faith, and the inevitable rewards of hard work would be easy to replicate and to remember. Tales such as “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering,” in which children playing at work results in death, “The Hand with the Knife,” in which an unfailingly hard-working and blameless little girl gets no reward but more backbreaking work, or “The Children of Famine” (Die Kinder in Hungersnot), in which god-fearing innocent children starve, did not make the kind of sense that a post-Enlightened Germany would need.

Earlier, though, when they took “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” from Heinrich von Kleist’s *Berliner Abendblätter*, the Grimms were still preoccupied with collecting a wide variety of tales from a broad array of linguistic and cultural sources, both oral and print—tales that were sometimes archetypal in structure, but oftentimes antipodal, or simply open-ended. Wilhelm’s memory of his childhood fascination with the tale was surely one reason “Slaughtering” appeared in the 1812 edition, but its publication in Kleist’s then-successful paper as well as the interest of Achim von Arnim and others made it worth reprinting. In 1812, “Slaughtering” made sense to the Grimms: it was inherently “newsworthy,” not because it related anything recent or even any facts, but because its entertainingly chilling plot included improbable “matters of fact” (the unlikely “trial” in the first version, the entire family’s sequential destruction in the second) that left the reader to make connections between this individual, “minor” tragedy and larger societal problems and solutions. And “Slaughtering” made sense to Kleist in 1810. His interest in republishing Achim von Arnim’s scarcely edited version of Jörg Wickram’s story from 1555 may have been due to his sharing the hope with Arnim that a graphic, exciting production of the already-popular *Der vierundzwanzigste Februar* would be staged in Berlin. But its re-publication also signifies something about the transition

moment between pre-modernity and modernity, between a pre- and post-Enlightened Europe, and between older and modern narrative forms.

Kleist's *Abendblätter* and the Presence of the Past

Kleist has been given considerable credit for detaching the novella from its immediate generic predecessor, the exemplum, and for introducing the novelistic into the journalistic in the *Abendblättern*. Bianca Theisen explains that “the novella replaces the closed order of providence with an open and increasingly complex world of possibilities. Investigating various possibilities from various perspectives, the novella reflects on its own narrative play on the probable and the improbable.”⁴⁹ Without conflating the different genres of folktale and novella, one could argue that the non-archetypal tale has much in common with the novella’s “open and increasingly complex world of possibilities.” Again, the Grimms effectively shut that door with their later tale collections, privileging repeated resolutions and firm historical ends over ambiguity and multiple narrative levels. Like the *Thatsache*, though, the novella around 1800 often had the style of a historical anecdote, employing tools of fiction and journalistic writing.

In addition to the historical-textual connections between the Grimms, Arnim, and Kleist in the specific case of “Slaughtering,” a larger point can be made that a good deal of the “news” in the *Berliner Abendblätter* resembled (even when it did not directly re-tell) old folktales that the Grimms decided to omit from their published collections as the nineteenth century moved along. Various stories in Kleist’s paper have the aforementioned novella-like characteristics and also vividly resemble tales such as “Slaughtering” and others that the Grimms eventually dropped. For example,

⁴⁹ Bianca Theisen, “Strange News: Kleist’s Novellas,” *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, ed. Bernd Fischer (Rochester: Camden House, 2003) 81–102, here 83. Theisen notes that Boccaccio already significantly shifted the novella from the exemplum but adds that Kleist “levels the distinction between the fictive and the factual, between novelistic and journalistic writing,” 82–83.

in “Mutterliebe” (Motherly Love), published in the seventh issue of 1811, on January 9, Kleist reworks a story of a wolf attack from the 1808 journal *Museum des Wundervollen*. In the source tale, a father fails to save one of his children from a wolf but does manage to attack the animal, and is ultimately saved by his older son and some neighbors. Kleist (the piece’s reteller) transforms the wolf into a rabid dog, and the father into a mother who strangles the dog before dying from being mauled. herself.⁵⁰ Kleist also moves the action from Wollstein, in Germany (today Wolsztyn, in Poland), to St. Omer in France.

Although the dog (wolf) attack supposedly happened in 1803, Kleist retells the story from the 1808 retelling as if it were today’s news—or, perhaps more accurately, as if old news were still news. And yet the tale is obviously at least partly fictive, as Kleist’s edits decisively change the content. Perhaps most notably, Kleist removes the source tale’s “happy” ending. Like the Grimms’ “The Hand with the Knife,” “The Children of Famine,” and “Misfortune” (Das Unglück), all published in the first edition and later omitted, “Motherly Love” is non-archetypal, has no resolution other than death, and is told in the style of newsworthy, horrifying *Thatsachen*.

Even supposedly scientific pieces in the *Abendblättern* like “Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte des Menschen” (Contribution to the Natural History of Man) or social commentary such as “Über den Zustand der Schwarzen in Amerika” (On the Condition of Blacks in America) combine an anecdotal, matter-of-fact style with bizarre content difficult to align with traditional narrative, and they thus transmit, to paraphrase Alice Eisler from here above, less what happened than a feeling of what could have happened. The “Contribution to a Natural History of Man” affirms that two

⁵⁰ Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* II, 39. Kleist took “Mutterliebe” and several other pieces from J.L. Schwarz’s *Museum des Wundervollen, oder Magazin des Ausserordentlichen in der Natur, der Kunst und dem Menschenleben*, eds. Johann Adam Bergk and Friedrich Gotthelf Baumgärtner (Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1803–1811, here vol. 7.2, 1808). Oliver Jahraus delineates the changes Kleist made to the earlier version, and notes that Kleist emphasized an understanding of biologically based “mother love” not as evident in the original. Jahraus does not discuss the change in location from Germany to France. Jahraus, “Intertextualität und Editionsphilologie. Der Materialwert der Vorlagen in den Beiträgen Heinrich von Kleists für die *Berliner Abendblätter*,” *Editio. Internationales Jahrbuch für Editionswissenschaft* 13 (1999): 108–30, here 130, 117–18.

“natural phenomena” (Naturphänomene) were observed in 1809. One woman could drink boiling oil and wash herself with nitric acid, among other feats, without being burned. Another woman, age fifty-two, had been drinking twenty jugs of tepid water per day since the age of eight and remained in excellent health.⁵¹ Like “Motherly Love,” Kleist rewrote this piece based on a report in the *Museum des Wundervollen* (1809). “On the Condition of Blacks in America” is a novella-like three-part report by Louis de Sevelinges, which Kleist translated from the French original, which was published less than a month earlier in the *Mercure de France* (December 22, 1810), a journal not dissimilar to the *Berliner Abendblätter* in many respects.⁵² De Sevelinges relates his observation of an auction of enslaved people in the Caribbean and asserts that what the Africans fear above all is being cannibalized by their European owners.⁵³ “On the Condition of Blacks in America” is a bizarrely folkloristic kind of travel report, full of speculation about what the enslaved people are thinking, and yet appropriating the journalistic style of the detached observer.

Beyond mere anecdote, the aforementioned pieces purport to be real historical documents, providing very precise places, dates, and often names. This is typical of Kleist’s novellas as well: in a sense, by transferring the genre of the anecdote into the novella, Kleist produces a major intervention into literary history around and just after 1800. This was not a completely new move—Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (*The German Refugees*, 1795) already brought the historical anecdote into the novella. But *Das Bettelweib von Locarno* (*The Beggarwoman of Locarno*, 1810) and *Die Marquise von O...* (*The Marquise of O*, 1808) advance the strategy by making the bizarre, simultaneously impossible but purportedly factual anecdote the indispensable center of the narrative.

⁵¹ “Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte des Menschen,” issue 7, January 9, 1811, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter II*, 39–40.

⁵² The *Mercure de France*, until 1724 titled the *Mercure Galant*, was first published in 1672.

⁵³ “Über den Zustand der Schwarzen in Amerika” appeared in three parts, in issues 10, 11, and 12, published on January 12, 14, and 15, 1811. In Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter II*, 53–54, 60–61, and 65–66.

In addition to such far-fetched stories presented as fact, the *Berliner Abendblätter* did include local news, and even occasionally the exact time of day this news happened. Part of the appeal of these pieces was that readers potentially could still experience the news in progress themselves. “Schreiben aus Berlin. 10 Uhr Morgens” (Communication from Berlin. 10 o’Clock in the Morning) reports that “the oilcloth manufacturer Claudius” (der Wachstuchfabrikant Claudius) “will undertake a hot-air balloon flight today at 11 o’clock, with the prediction of his landing spot” (heute um 11 Uhr eine Ballonfahrt unternehmen wird mitsamt der Voraussage seines Landeorts). Depending on the weather and other circumstances, readers of the paper at five o’clock p.m. could maybe still witness the balloon landing.⁵⁴

Texts in the *Abendblättern* could thus involve readers physically in the action they reported or emotionally. Like Karl Philipp Moritz’s ideal newspaper, and like the Grimms’ tales, pieces in the *Abendblättern* were supposed to resonate with the *Volk* (common people)—and the law was as well. The *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussischen Staaten* of 1794 was intended to be accessible to the people, including those who were not well educated.⁵⁵ The young Grimms were already preoccupied with centering the *Volk* at the heart of the national project, something that would only be possible if that *Volk* had access to and knowledge of core texts, and this remained a consistent concern for decades.⁵⁶ By enacting Moritz’s principle of relying on “individual facts from individual people” and

⁵⁴“Schreiben aus Berlin. 10 Uhr Morgens,” issue 13, October 15, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter I*, 65–66. For more on this piece, see Lehmann, “Faktum, Anekdote, Gerücht,” 317. Lehmann also notes that reports such as “Gerüchte,” (issue 6, October 7, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter I*, 26) invited readers to get involved in ongoing crime investigations, “Faktum, Anekdote, Gerücht,” 318.

⁵⁵ The primary author of the *Allgemeines Landrecht*, Carl Gottlieb Svarez, explicitly desired the law to be comprehensible to the public, and to that end published the *Unterricht über die Gesetze für die Einwohner der Preussischen Staaten von zwei Preussischen Rechtsgelehrten* in 1793. See Hermann Conrad, *Die geistigen Grundlagen des Allgemeinen Landrechts für die preussischen Staaten von 1794*, in *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Geisteswissenschaften* 77, 50. Sitzung, am 16. Oktober 1957, in Düsseldorf (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1957), 17, 11.

⁵⁶ Jakob Norberg cites Jacob Grimm’s address at the *Germanisten-Versammlung* of 1846 in Frankfurt am Main, during which Grimm reiterated that, in Norberg’s terms, “by delineating a particular people, he could prepare the ground for the reorganization of contemporary politics around the body of the *Volk*. Philological premises, methods, and insights, Grimm held, could help establish the precondition of legitimate politics, namely ‘congruency’ between the institutions of rule and linguistic and cultural nationhood,” *The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism*, 23.

emphasizing the specific and the local (even if the specific was highly speculative, and the location was indeterminate or in another country), and by emphasizing the *Thatsache*, or “matter of fact” relayed as a represented story or plot, Kleist and the early Grimms melded popular literature, law, and news in publications that arguably epitomized the folkish.

But much of the *Volk* was not doing too well in 1810. The essentially Enlightened *Allgemeines Landrecht* of 1794 mandated that “foreign beggars should not be let into the country, or tolerated therein, and if they sneak in nevertheless, they should immediately be sent back over the border. The native poor also should not be allowed to beg but instead should be sent back to the place they belong” (Fremde Bettler sollen in das Land nicht gelassen, oder darin geduldet, und wenn sie sich gleichwohl einschleichen, sofort über die Gränze zurückgeschafft werden. Auch einheimischen Armen soll das Betteln nicht gestattet, sondern dieselben an den Ort, wohin sie gehören [...] zurückgeschafft werden).⁵⁷ As Lynne Tatlock and Joseph Loewenstein explain, this passage of the *Allgemeines Landrecht* refers to a “so-called ‘Heimatsprinzip,’ the rule of native domicile, according to which [...] the foreign poor were to be displaced beyond the borders of one’s own sovereign country, those who were born within the boundaries of the country were to be replaced within their home commune, and those who were settled ‘at home’ were to be kept from undertaking any arduous translation abroad. Once their precise geographic origins were determined, the dispossessed were to be put in their proper place.”⁵⁸

The *Allgemeines Landrecht* proposed to treat poverty and immigration to a certain extent as related issues, and the *Heimatsprinzip* represented an attempt to subdue what the *Berlinische*

⁵⁷ *Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussischen Staaten* (01.06.1794), *Zweyter Theil*, Articles 19.4 and 19.5. Accessed at <https://opiniojuris.de/quelle/1623>. Translation mine.

⁵⁸ Lynne Tatlock and Joseph Loewenstein, “The Displaced *Bettelweib von Locarno*,” *Kleists Erzählungen und Dramen. Neue Studien*, eds. Paul Michael Lützeler and David Pan (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 61–75, here 71. *Das Bettelweib von Locarno* was originally published in the *Berliner Abendblätter* (October 10, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter I*, 51–54). Tatlock and Loewenstein refer to Alexander Klein’s *Armenfürsorge und Bettelbekämpfung in Vorderösterreich 1753–1806* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1994), 262, and to Michael Doege’s *Armut in Preußen und Bayern (1770–1840)*, *Miscellanea Bavarica Monacensia* 157 (Munich: Kommissionsverlag UNI-Druck München, 1991), 32.

Monatschrift, in 1787, called a “monstrously large mass of people from all classes, male and female, young and old, foreigners and natives, wander around the country, from house to house, from village to village, from city to city, soliciting, begging, asking, defiantly obtaining, insulting, stealing the necessary means of subsistence” (ungeheuere große Menge von Menschen aus allen Ständen, männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechts, jung und alt, Ausländer und Einländer, laufen im Lande umher, von Haus zu Haus, von Dorf zu Dorf, von Stadt zu Stadt, erbitten, erbetteln, erbäten, ertrotzen, erschimpfen, erdrohen, erstehlen sich den nöthigen Lebensunterhalt).⁵⁹ The *Landrecht* simultaneously promoted accessibility to knowledge of the law and more intense subjugation of the poor, and thus presumptively criminal, under that law.

For his part, Kleist used the *Berliner Abendblätter* to appeal to the public to help the police apprehend criminals—or, ideally, to help apprehend others before they *could* break the law—and to work with the police to prevent “intended crimes” (beabsichtigte Verbrechen).⁶⁰ Although encouraging the public to be suspicious of potential criminals was not completely new, the sheer repetition of police reports about graphically violent *Thatsachen* in the paper, published six days a week, together with admonitions to help the police, promoted a surveillant energy. The poor, the foreign, and the potentially criminal were objects of fascination, but also were to be sent where they belonged—whether under the stipulations of the *Allgemeines Landrecht* or following the exhortations in the *Abendblättern*.⁶¹ And the Grimms sent stories like “Slaughtering” where they belonged as well: out of the increasingly popular, increasingly literary tale collections published as the nineteenth

⁵⁹ Michael Doege, *Armut in Preußen und Bayern (1770-1840)*, 32, cited in Tatlock and Loewenstein, “The Displaced Bettelweib von Locarno,” 70.

⁶⁰ Just one example is the “Polizei-Rapport,” issue 4, October 4, 1810, in Kleist, *Berliner Abendblätter* I, 24.

⁶¹ Karl Philipp Moritz did urge newspapers to report on “das Elend und die Armut in den verborgenen Winkeln,” maintaining that “Das Elend, wenns einmal da ist, muß unter uns zur Sprache kommen, und auf Mittel gedacht werden, wie man demselben abhelfen kann!”, “Ideal einer vollkommenen Zeitung,” 862. He also pointed out the newspaper’s potential to support Enlightened aims: “Wahrlich ist es zu verwundern, da man bisher so viel von Aufklärung geredet und geschrieben hat, daß man noch nicht auf ein so simples Mittel als eine *Zeitung* gefallen ist, um sie *in der Tat* zu verbreiten,” 863.

century continued to move into a truly modern, post-Enlightened era characterized by the establishment and growth of powerful nation-states defined in part by who did and did not belong.

“How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” depicted the potentially deadly consequences of life among the illiterate poor *and* the working class (butchers), while it was also told and re-told among those groups. But the Grimms shaped their later tale collections for a literate, presumably upwardly mobile audience that was escaping not only such putatively pre-modern monstrosities but also the pre-literate world. The brothers’ insistence on defining who belonged in the *Volk* and in the German nation required clearer distinctions between perpetrator and victim, hero and villain than omitted tales like “Slaughtering” could provide, and that meant increasingly dealing with the ongoing realities of poverty and illiteracy by attributing those problems to weak or bad character, or to non-Germanness.

The Grimms spent much of their lives enacting the premise that storytelling made the nation.⁶² Collections that continued to include tales like “How Some Children Played at Slaughtering” and other omitted stories arguably would have contributed to a different kind of nation. While the *Berliner Abendblätter* used spatial displacements and multiple chronologies to report extensively on matters either happening in or directly pertaining to the present, from 1819 onward the Grimms located most of their revised tales in Germany—but in a Germany that could be anywhere and everywhere, and in a past that was not only vague (“once upon a time” [es war einmal]) but uniform: a past that could have been anytime. They thus kept their collections “modern” and “Romantic” while eliminating tales that read more like text fragments from the real past. But for a time, in the early years of the nineteenth century, “How Some Children Played at

⁶² Jakob Norberg’s *The Brothers Grimm and the Making of German Nationalism* is the most sustained exploration of the intersections of philology, narrative, and nationalism in the Grimms’ work and lives to date.

Slaughtering” clearly was considered a story to remember: in the *Berliner Abendblätter* and in the first tale edition, before the Grimms chose to forget it.

Notes on Contributor

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