

THE THEME OF FAILED LIFE IN
THE STORIES OF ADALBERT STIFTER

by

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ABSTRACT

Although in his works Adalbert Stifter often focused attention on harmonious and fulfilled life, he did not avoid depicting the negative sides of human existence. He repeatedly portrayed characters who experience much suffering and who never reach the contented state of being they seek. Their lives must clearly be deemed failures. This study attempts to identify and analyze the theme of failed life in the writer's narratives. Particular emphasis is placed on his early prose, that is, the stories written or conceived before 1848, because meaningless life plays a dominant role in many of them.

The circumstances of the protagonists who fail to find fulfilment in life show remarkable similarities. They are condemned to live out their lives in isolation without the hope of deliverance. Not only are they cut off from the world, but they also have no spouse or descendants at their side. The absence of children makes them much more readily the prey of passing time. More often than not they pursue no meaningful activities. The immediate cause of their decline may be one or several crises which they encounter and cannot overcome. The characters are unable to surmount the crises because they exhibit serious shortcomings; they do not become the victims of arbitrary fate.

With few exceptions the most important of these negative traits is unrestrained passion. Passion is more than just an overpowering sensual desire; it is also the source of anger, egoism, lust for power and violence. Eccentric behaviour and spiritual shortsightedness may be further elements leading to catastrophe. A distorted education or the complete absence of one can also contribute to the protagonists' decline.

Stifter's prose contains a number of figures who cannot be counted failing characters in spite of the fact that they are denied complete fulfilment in life. They are the individuals who, because they are only partially successful in overcoming their crises, must resign themselves to a less desirable position in life than they had hoped to achieve.

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I

INTRODUCTION

In the works of Adalbert Stifter the reader repeatedly encounters detailed and lengthy descriptions of nature and the landscape, but the depiction of the outer world was not the author's main aim. His primary concern was rather the exploration of the inner world of man. In his writings Stifter investigates the essence and the character of man and seeks to penetrate to the roots of the human condition. Nature is often employed as a means of revealing to the reader the spiritual state of the characters.

The general mood of Stifter's childhood and youth was serene and happy; yet in his mature years he experienced much suffering. Deeply disturbing events and tragic blows of fate were frequently a part of his life, and he increasingly suffered from anguished states of mind leading to periods of depression and melancholy. A number of professional failures and personal humiliations came his way, and his financial situation was always precarious at best. Outwardly he appeared a sedate and satisfied "Bürger" enjoying life's pleasures,¹ but inwardly he was often beset by feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. He never achieved the inner harmony or the sheltered, well-balanced existence which he so persistently sought. Moreover, Christianity offered him little comfort with its promise of compensation in the hereafter for the sufferings of this life. Although outwardly he more or less adhered to Christian teachings, his faith

was tepid; his attachment to Christianity was engendered by nostalgia and not by religious conviction. He did not share the Christian belief in immortality; his view of the world was not eschatologic. Rosemarie Hunter quite correctly points out: "Stifter sieht das menschliche Dasein nicht sub specie aeternitatis, er sieht es als tragisch durch den Tod begrenzt."²

Because Stifter feared that death signified the ultimate end, he was deeply committed to this life and believed that man must strive for fulfilment in the here and now. He saw man's ultimate goal as the mastery of life. His works on the whole are insistent affirmations of life. Most of his literary figures manage meaningful lives. Nevertheless, although Stifter repeatedly focuses attention on the exemplary, it would be erroneous to conclude that his writings do not reflect negative experiences from his own life. Not only does he portray harmony and perfection, but he also depicts the darker aspects of human existence. The sufferings which life inflicted upon him find expression in a number of his works. A tranquil foreground often veils dark forces within, and the reader becomes aware of the sinister undertones and a sense of unease just below the surface. Stifter knows that death and decay are part of life; in particular the world which he portrays in his earlier prose pieces is not always orderly and hospitable, but can also be hostile. Natural catastrophe, disease and seemingly blind chance can menace at any time. Moreover, man is not only endangered from

without; the greatest threat to his existence arises from within. Human shortcomings such as uncontrolled passion, lack of moderation and unrestrained selfishness constantly threaten to unbalance and destroy him. Not all of Stifter's characters succeed in overcoming the external perils or, more important, in subduing their inner demonic forces, which he refers to as their "tigerartige Anlage"³ in his short narrative Die Zuversicht (1846). A recurring theme is that of the hero whose attempts to reach harmony and fulfilment are abortive, and whose life must clearly be judged a failure. The lives of those incapable of attaining such harmony may suddenly be shattered by a cataclysm, or since Stifter usually avoided depicting death in his works, they more often continue to live but without direction, purpose or likelihood of melioration. Such figures drift on toward death and oblivion in a state of gloomy resignation, lethargy and painfully felt isolation.

The theme of failed life plays a significant role almost exclusively in those works initially composed before 1848. Scarcely any major figure destined for absolute failure is to be found in the writings after the "Vormärz," for the protagonists now become able to cope with the threat of complete failure. The author's reluctance in the later works to portray figures who are destined to end in failure may at least in part be attributed to the revolution of 1848. That event made a lasting, if negative impression on him and can be considered a turning point not only in his life, but to some

extent also in his art. Stifter initially viewed the political developments of the spring of 1848 with favour because he believed that they would bring an end to repression by the Metternich regime and would result in the establishment of responsible and enlightened government. He held high hopes that the ideals of freedom, justice and humanity would now determine political action and that a better world would result. Within a few weeks, however, his enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause had changed to aversion and horror. He became thoroughly disillusioned because the revolution had led to what he had always been apprehensive of--disorder, mob-rule and bloodshed. He began to fear the tyranny of the masses more than he had disliked the absolutism of the ancien régime. The civil strife, the unleashed passions and the degeneration of morals which Stifter witnessed made him realize that the world he knew was in danger of collapse. In a sense, the events of the spring of 1848 reflected on an external plane the chaotic inner state from which he often suffered so deeply. The revolution mirrored the passions, conflicts and anxieties within his soul which he attempted to conquer throughout his life. "Was er als verstörende Gefährdung aus eigener innerer Leidenschaftlichkeit fürchtete und bändigte, begegnete ihm als Aufstand des Masslosen und Gewalt samen in der Geschichtsbewegung dieser Jahre."⁴

It is true that the shock of the upheaval could not drastically alter the basic themes, the tone and the language

of Stifter's writings, for as Martini points out, "seine Motive, seine Lebensstimmung und gefühlhafte Weltanschauung, seine künstlerischen Grundformen und seine Sprache waren längst vorgeprägt."⁵ Nevertheless, one can distinguish between the author's pre-revolutionary works and those written after 1848. It may be assumed that, because he so directly experienced conflict and chaos, Stifter grew increasingly reluctant to depict negative phenomena in his works. It may well be true that by stressing harmony and fulfilment and by playing down the theme of failure in his art, he attempted to compensate for his bitter experiences and to allow himself at least a temporary respite from painful reality. Moreover, by emphasizing the positive aspects of life, Stifter possibly hoped to rejuvenate and strengthen his belief in humanity and in the beauty and harmony of the universe. One might call the post-revolutionary works articles of faith through which the author attempted to overcome his feelings of anguish and insecurity and which fulfilled his sense of mission as an educator and a moralist who ought to depict the meritorious and exemplary in life.

Stifter did not eliminate the dark and demonic forces altogether; at times destructive elements such as egotism and passion do manifest themselves in works like the novella Der Kuss von Sentze (1866) and the novel Der Nachsommer (1857). Yet because the author wanted to avoid portraying figures who are destined to end in failure, those forces no longer pose as great a threat as in the pre-1848 prose. There are,

to be sure, a few minor figures who meet with a calamitous fate; one need think only of some of the secondary characters in the novel Witiko (1865-7). However, the main characters in such mature works as this and Der Nachsommer--if they do not achieve complete self-fulfilment--nevertheless manage to attain a reasonably satisfying level of existence because they are willing to abandon their unrealizable goals and accept the lesser station in life bestowed upon them. The accent is no longer pessimistic; resignation and reconciliation with fate play a more pronounced role in the later compositions.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the theme of failure as it appears in Stifter's early novellas. Failure plays a central role in Der Hochwald (1844), Die Narrenburg (1844), Abdias (1847), Das alte Siegel (1847), Der Hagestolz (1850), Der Waldgänger (1847) and Turmalin (1853). In the novellas Der Hochwald, Abdias, Das alte Siegel, Der Waldgänger and Turmalin failure is clearly the predominant theme while in Die Narrenburg and in Der Hagestolz it is counterbalanced by the antithetical theme of success. Two versions exist for most of the author's earlier stories. In all cases with the exception of Der Waldgänger the date listed above is the date of appearance of the second version.⁶ Unsatisfied with the language and the style of the initial edition of these works, Stifter revised them before offering them again to the reading public. However, since he did not significantly alter the

theme of failed life when rewriting the stories, the investigation will be based on the final version. The first five novellas were published together in Studien between 1844 and 1850, and the second edition of Turmalin⁷ appeared in the collection Bunte Steine (1853). Der Waldgänger was published in the almanach Iris for the year 1847. Unlike the other works, it was never revised.

The investigation of the theme of failed life in the novellas will proceed as follows. First, Stifter's understanding of fate and its role in the human sphere will be examined. Second, the author's concept of failed life will be defined. Third, the crises which ultimately lead to failure will be analysed. Fourth, specific causes for failing to achieve fulfilment will be considered. Fifth, some figures in the novellas who succeed, at least partially, will be examined. The concluding chapter will then provide a summation of the basic trends and traits peculiar to the failing characters.

Even though failure to achieve a fulfilling life is a central theme in many of Stifter's early novellas, it has to date not been given the attention it deserves in secondary literature. To be sure, several worthwhile books on Stifter and his art which often include an analysis of his pre-revolutionary prose have recently appeared, but they fail to treat this interesting and important theme at length. Eric Blackall's book Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study⁸ represents

the first important full-length study in English on Stifter. This work deals at length with the author from both a biographical and critical viewpoint including analyses of all his writings, with special emphasis on Der Nachsommer.

Although Blackall often alludes to the darker aspects of human existence in Stifter's art, he does not fully explore this topic. In fact, like so many critics before him, Blackall ultimately perceives Stifter as the portrayer and representative of an idyllic, harmonious way of life. The darker aspects which Blackall mentions had been the focal point of Erik Lunding's earlier study Adalbert Stifter.⁹

Stifter is no longer seen as the naive writer who depicts the idyllic, but as one whose works primarily reflect Angst and loneliness. Yet, while he discusses at length the somber aspects of Stifter's early prose, Lunding does not attempt an analysis of meaningless life or its causes in those works. Konrad Steffen in Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen¹⁰ devotes considerable space to the study of the early works. He is also aware of the sense of doom and catastrophe just below the surface of many of Stifter's stories. However, since Steffen examines the novellas on an individual basis, he does not trace themes common to them. In his Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung¹¹ Joachim Müller presents the reader with an over-all view of Stifter's development as an artist. Among other topics, Müller examines the concept of fate in the author's writings and also devotes a chapter to

the problem of passion.

Philip Zoldester in Adalbert Stifters Weltanschauung¹² analyses the author's relationship to nature as reflected in his prose, the image of man in his works, his social and political ideas, and his religious beliefs in order to show "wie ungemein einheitlich Stifter die Welt doch im Wesentlichen sieht und beschreibt, wie sehr seine ästhetischen, ethischen, historischen und politischen Ansichten ein grosses, unteilbares Ganzes bilden und wie dieses Ganze letztthin ein konservatives genannt werden muss."¹³ Zoldester's arguments are supported primarily with examples from Witiko, and he devotes little space to an analysis of Stifter's early stories. Michael Kaiser's study Adalbert Stifter: Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung seiner Erzählungen¹⁴ is based on the contention that literature is an attempt by an author to master by means of the poetic medium his inner problems arising from traumatic experiences in his childhood. The writer does so by projecting his anxieties as well as his hopes into the fictional world. That psychological process changes the meaning of reality. Kaiser makes use of this hypothesis in his analyses of Stifter's stories and novels and comes to the conclusion that the author's prose is in essence a reflection of the two polarities hope and fear. Although Kaiser's psychological interpretation of the author's treatment of time, fear, death and social interaction is illuminating, he discusses the protagonists' failure to find fulfilment in

life only on the periphery of his study. In Adalbert Stifter: Wirklichkeitserfahrung und gegenständliche Darstellung¹⁵

Hans Dietrich Irmischer devotes his attention to Stifter's experience of reality, time and space as reflected in his works and also examines the role of the narrator. Irmischer views the writer's art as an attempt at mastery via the poetic medium of alienated reality caused by the excentric position of man in space. Like many critics before him, however, Irmischer does not specifically examine the role of failed life in Stifter's stories.

A second, more recent publication in English that gives an overview of Stifter, the man and the writer, is Margaret Gump's Adalbert Stifter. She sees in Stifter neither "the serene man of childlike faith that the early critics saw in him nor the wholly pathological figure depicted by some of the more recent ones,"¹⁶ and she attempts to strike a healthy balance between often diametrically opposed views in secondary literature. Although, while discussing the works individually, she points out that Stifter portrayed the negative side of life, she feels that on the whole the author more often than not deliberately fails to recognize the cruel struggle in nature and the tragedy in human life. Rudolf Wildbolz in Adalbert Stifter: Langeweile und Faszination,¹⁷ by examining several of the writer's stories as well as the novel Der Nachsommer, endeavours to show that the world which Stifter creates in his prose is perceived by

the critical reader as neither believable nor desirable because it offers only unreal solutions to life's problems. Yet, Wildbolz maintains, Stifter is fascinating precisely "weil er, den unheilen Grund des Menschen vor Augen, kompositorisch und sprachlich ein System erfindet und im Alter--wider seine Absicht--ad absurdum führt, das seinen eigenen Ursprung--Subjektivität--verhüllt, ohne ihm in Wahrheit überwinden zu können."¹⁸

The only previous study which focuses on the problem of meaningless life in Stifter's early works is a Master's thesis accepted by the University of Alberta in 1965.¹⁹ In her thesis Rosemarie Hunter concentrates on the theme of failure as it appears in Das alte Siegel, Der Hagestolz and Der Waldgänger. She analyses the three stories on an individual basis in the body of her study and in the conclusion correlates the diverse elements leading to a meaningless existence. Hunter considers the isolation experienced by the protagonists together with their cognizance of life's transiency to be the most striking features of their failed lives. Their figures' decline, she feels, must be attributed to one particular detrimental character trait--a trait which is exhibited by every one of them. She labels this common negative characteristic their "Unbedingtheit."²⁰ While she agrees that the main protagonists in Das alte Siegel and Der Waldgänger unquestioningly fail in their attempt to find fulfilment, she calls the recluse's situation in life only

a partial failure because he gains some satisfaction from his gardening activities and from his relationship with his nephew Victor.

Among the numerous articles on Stifter and his writings there are only a few which touch on the theme of failed life. Walter Silz in the chapter on Abdias in his book Realism and Reality: Studies in the German Novelle of Poetic Realism²¹ considers several causes for Abdias's failure in life. Although Silz admits that Abdias has serious faults, he concludes that the protagonist ultimately cannot be held responsible for the misfortunes that strike him, but that he becomes the victim of cruel fate. Johann Lachinger in his article on Abdias²² presents the thesis that Abdias's downfall is the consequence of human ignorance. In spite of many signs from above, Abdias never recognizes that he will find salvation only "in der Erfüllung der religiösen Sendung . . . , die ihm seine Ahnungen und die wunderhaften Vorgänge um ihn und seine Tochter nahelegten."²³ G.H. Hertling defends a similar point of view in his critique of the same novella.²⁴ He interprets Abdias "als religions-philosophische Botschaft . . . , als poetisch-verschlüsselte Ermahnung alttestamentlichen Gehalts,"²⁵ and he sees the hero's complete lack of insight into the ways of God as the cause of his woes.

In "Stifter's Der Hagestolz, an Interpretation"²⁶ Alexander Gelley is of the opinion that the recluse's

painful awareness of life's transience, coupled with the realization that all worldly striving is ultimately futile, is the central theme of the story. That theme, Gelley points out, reveals itself through the confrontation of youth and age and is universalized by the adaptation of the parable of the sterile fig tree at the end of the novella. Rather than labelling it puzzling and fragmentary, as several critics did before her, Eve Mason in her essay on Turmalin²⁷ calls the little story "a triumph of literary economy."²⁸ She concentrates on the negative character traits of the "Rentherr" and comes to the conclusion that his eccentricity and selfishness lead to his own downfall as well as the mental degeneration of his child. In her publication on Der Waldgänger²⁹ Rosemarie Hunter attempts to come to terms with the fate of the main protagonist more so by interpreting the many symbols Stifter employs in the novella than by examining the course of events. She believes that Georg in his old age becomes the solitary wanderer of the woods who can call no place his home because of his failure to establish contact with others and his lack of resolve earlier in life. However, Hunter does not judge the "Waldgänger" to have failed in life; because he has admitted his guilt and has accepted his lesser station in life, she feels, he can be added to the ranks of characters like Risach in Der Nachsommer and the priest in Kalkstein who embody "das Ideal des Stifterschen Menschen."³⁰

Apart from the works mentioned above, any other considerations of the theme of failed life are markedly fleeting. Because this topic on the whole has been dealt with for the most part only on the periphery of the secondary literature on Stifter, it is hoped that this study will be a valid contribution to what is felt to be an important aspect of the author's art.

NOTES

- 1 See Margaret Gump, Adalbert Stifter (New York, 1974), p. 21.
- 2 Rosemarie Hunter, "Kinderlosigkeit und Eschatologie bei Stifter," Neophilologus, 57 (1973), 281.
- 3 Adalbert Stifter, Gesammelte Werke in vierzehn Bänden, ed. Konrad Steffen (Basel, 1962-72), V, 469. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 4 Fritz Martini, Deutsche Literatur im bürgerlichen Realismus 1848-1898 (Stuttgart, 1962), p. 500.
- 5 Ibid., p. 499.
- 6 Publication dates of the first versions of the first five novellas are as follows: Der Hochwald (1842), Die Narrenburg (1843), Abdias (1843), Das alte Siegel (1844), Der Hagestolz (1845).
- 7 Turmalin first appeared under the title Der Pförtner im Herrenhause in 1852.
- 8 Eric Blackall, Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study (Cambridge, 1948).
- 9 Erik Lunding, Adalbert Stifter. Mit einem Anhang über Kierkegaard und die existentielle Literaturwissenschaft (Copenhagen, 1946).

- 10 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen (Basel, 1955).
- 11 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung (Halle, 1956).
- 12 Philip H. Zoldester, Adalbert Stifters Weltanschauung (Bern, 1970).
- 13 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- 14 Michael Kaiser, Adalbert Stifter: Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung seiner Erzählungen (Bonn, 1971).
- 15 Hans Dietrich Irmscher, Adalbert Stifter: Wirklichkeitserfahrung und gegenständliche Darstellung (München, 1971).
- 16 Gump, p. 23.
- 17 Rudolf Wildbölz, Adalbert Stifter: Langeweile und Faszination (Stuttgart, 1976).
- 18 Ibid., p. 145.
- 19 Rosemarie Hunter, "Das Problem des verfehlten Lebens in einigen Novellen Adalbert Stifters aus der Zeit 1843-1848," M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, Calgary, 1965.
- 20 Ibid., p. 154.

- 21 Walter Silz, "Stifter, Abdias (1842)," in Realism and Reality: Studies in the German Novelle of Poetic Realism (Chapel Hill, 1954).
- 22 Johann Lachinger, "Adalbert Stifters Abdias," Vierteljahresschrift des Adalbert Stifter-Instituts des Landes Oberösterreich, 18 (1969), 97-114.
- 23 Ibid., p. 101.
- 24 G.H. Hertling, "Adalbert Stifters zeitlose Botschaft: Obadja-Abdias," Vierteljahresschrift des Adalbert Stifter-Instituts des Landes Oberösterreich, 25 (1976), 117-129.
- 25 Ibid., p. 118.
- 26 Alexander Gelley, "Stifter's Der Hagestolz, an Interpretation," Monatshefte, 53 (1961), 59-72.
- 27 Eve Mason, "Stifter's Turmalin: A Reconsideration," The Modern Language Review, 72 (1977), 348-358.
- 28 Ibid., p. 348.
- 29 Rosemarie Hunter, "Wald, Haus und Wasser, Moos und Schmetterling: Zu den Zentralsymbolen in Stifter's Erzählung Der Waldgänger," Vierteljahresschrift des Adalbert Stifter-Instituts des Landes Oberösterreich, 24 (1975), 23-36.

30 Ibid., p. 35.

II

FATE OR CONSEQUENCE OF FAULT?

Before turning directly to an examination of specific examples of failure and their causes, it is necessary to clarify what role fate plays for Stifter in the lives of men. The author often refers to "das Schicksal" in his works, but what significance are we to give it? Does he believe that fate really exists? Do men sometimes become its innocent victims, or do their misfortunes always result from human inadequacy? These questions must be answered first because Stifter's ideas on fate are inseparably intertwined with his concept of failed life.

Although Stifter felt that on the whole this is a good world, he admitted that there are inscrutable forces at play in the universe which affect all life powerfully but which are totally blind to man's aspirations and moral principles. The very existence of a number of protagonists is endangered by a variety of these belligerent forces, which converge upon them from outside and are consequently beyond their control. Most prominent among these phenomena is nature in its chaotic state. Nature usually shows itself in a benevolent mood; it offers peace, consolation and refuge to the individual, and it is his wisest teacher. Yet at times nature can abruptly threaten man with destruction. Whether beneficent or destructive, it remains indifferent to the human lot. It adheres to its own laws which are incomprehensible to man. In Zwei Schwestern (1850) Alfred Mussar

says about nature: "'Sie geht in ihren grossen eigenen Gesetzen fort, die uns in tiefen Fernen liegen, sie nimmt keine Rücksicht, sie steigt nicht zu uns herab, um unsere Schwächen zu teilen, und wir können nur stehen und bewundern'" (III, 364). Stifter's characters not only encounter violent storms, avalanches, inundations and droughts, but they are also helplessly exposed to the horrors of war and seemingly blind chance. Although these powers possess the potential for destruction, they frequently pose only a threat and do not bring about disaster. Often the moment of danger passes and harmony returns. The children in Bergkristall (1853), the young boy in Granit (1853) and several characters in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters (1847), including the main figure Augustinus, are threatened mortally by the elemental forces, but they do not fall prey to them. The villagers in Das Heidedorf (1844) are spared ultimately from death by starvation, and in Brigitta (1847) the figures manage to escape from a pack of attacking wolves. In a number of cases, nature, which initially threatened the protagonists, ultimately contributes to their salvation by providing them with shelter. The children in Bergkristall are saved from death in the snowfields by a cave which they discover in the ice. The "Josikrämer" and the "Knecht aus den Waldhäusern des Rothenbergerhanges" in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters are saved from a deadly ice storm by taking refuge, the one in a cave in the rocks and the other in a shelter created by fallen trees.

Whereas the above characters escape destruction--often at the very last moment--there are, on the other hand, several

minor figures in Stifter's novellas who become, it appears, the innocent victims of these destructive forces. They do not exhibit any serious faults; they do not possess that "tigerartige Anlage" (V, 469) which, as will be documented later, contributes to the downfall of the major characters, and yet they are destined to fail. Disaster strikes them swiftly and unexpectedly with irrevocable finality in the best years of their lives. Unlike the major figures who fail, they need not endure protracted suffering. They do not live on to an advanced age, slowly wasting away and decaying in isolation, but instead life for them comes to an abrupt end. A hike through the mountains ends in tragedy for the delicate and sensitive wife of the colonel in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters. The ice storm which spares the life of Augustinus brings destruction at the same time to a young boy and several other individuals; and again in the same novella, Augustinus must look on helplessly as his entire family is consumed by a fatal disease. Destiny suddenly overtakes Ditha, the daughter of Abdias; she is killed by a lightning bolt, the same force which previously had given her sight. Deborah, the girl's mother, bleeds helplessly to death just at the moment when her life has been granted new meaning. In Der Hochwald Klarissa loses father, brother and fiancé in a battle which the latter tried to prevent. It seems that man can only look on in bewilderment as cosmic forces indiscriminately destroy one person while benevolently sparing another. In fact, what brings disaster to some, may

at the same time be a blessing to others; evil seems at times mysteriously to contain elements of good. The lightning storm which restores Ditha's sight damages Abdias's house and levels his neighbour's crops (II, 327), and the subsequent storm which takes the girl's life proves to be of great benefit to the surrounding fields (II, 347). The ice storm in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters which causes the deaths of several individuals also rejuvenates nature and results in a bountiful harvest (II, 130-31).

What significance do these unfortunate individuals have, who are, it appears, senselessly destroyed by a higher power looking on with indifference? Can they, like the major characters who fail because of their own shortcomings, in some way be held responsible for the calamity that befalls them, or are they simply crushed at random by the wheels of the chariot of fate? Are the misfortunes which rain down upon these figures a form of retribution, or is their death unmotivated, thereby suggesting the ultimate irrationality of being? In the relevant text the author does not provide answers to these searching questions; yet clarification can be obtained by examining a number of other passages in his writings where he attempts to arrive at a solution to the problem of human fate.

Bewildered by the vicissitudes of existence and finding it exceedingly difficult to come to terms with the turmoil in his own life, Stifter, when writing his first compositions, entertained the thought that man is at the mercy of a cruel

and indeterminable fate. Nowhere else in his works does the author present a more vivid impression of destruction and decay or feel more strongly the arbitrariness of fate than in Ein Gang durch die Katakomben:

Mir war, als sei ich in ein fabelhaft Gebiet des Todes geraten, in ein Gebiet, so ganz anders, als wir es im Leben der Menschen erfahren, ein Gebiet, wo alles gewaltsam zernichtet wird, was wir im Leben mit Scheu und Ehrfurcht zu betrachten gewohnt sind--wo das Höchste und Heiligste dieser Erde, die menschliche Gestalt, ein wertlos Ding wird, hingeworfen in das Kehrlicht, dass es liege wie ein anderer Unrat. --Ach! welch eine furchtbare, eine ungeheure Gewalt muss es sein, der wir dahingegeben sind, dass sie über uns verfüge--und wie riesenhaft, all unser Denken vernichtend, muss Plan und Zweck dieser Gewalt sein, dass vor ihr millionenfach ein Kunstwerk zugrunde geht, das sie selber mit solcher Liebe baute, und zwar gleichgültig zugrunde geht, als wäre es eben nichts! --Oder gefällt sich jene Macht darin, im öden Kreislaufe immer dasselbe zu erzeugen und zu zerstören?--es wäre grässlich absurd! (XIII, 52)

The senselessness of the individual's life is a powerful theme in this essay which the young author composed in 1840 about the catacombs of Vienna. In the exclamation "Ach! welch eine furchtbare, eine ungeheure Gewalt muss es sein, der wir dahingegeben sind, dass sie über uns verfüge," he clearly expresses his belief that the individual is exposed to an inexorable fate, which he must face and over which he exercises no control. The question of fate is also raised in the earliest version of Die Narrenburg (1843), where Jodokus struggles against the "ungeheure," "unerbittliche Schicksal" which drives all life before it. "Wohin? Das wissen wir nicht,"¹ he exclaims. Anneliese Märkisch points out: "Die fast erdrückende Abhängigkeit vom Schicksal, die dem jungen Stifter die Freude am Dasein zu nehmen droht, empfindet auch Jodokus in der

Erstauffassung."² In the later Studien-version of Die Narrenburg (1844) the author reaches a slightly modified conclusion about fate. The corresponding passage is now less a lament about man's fate than a plaint at life's transience and the futility of human achievement. The term "Schicksal" has been replaced by the milder "es," and the protagonist slowly comes to the realization that man is not necessarily at the mercy of immeasurable forces; but that he somehow contributes to the functioning of the "es." "Millionenmal Millionen haben mitgearbeitet, dass es rolle" (I, 449), Jodokus says at one point, and the person who will come after him he commands: "Springe auf, und greife wieder zu an der Speiche, und hilf, dass es rolle--" (I, 449).

In Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters (1847) too Stifter no longer adheres to his former assumption that fate is inevitable and that man becomes its helpless victim: "Man sagt, dass der Wagen der Welt auf goldenen Rädern einhergeht. Wenn dadurch Menschen zerdrückt werden, so sagen wir, das sei ein Unglück; aber Gott schaut gelassen zu, er bleibt in seinen Mantel gehüllt und hebt deinen Leib nicht weg, weil du es zuletzt selbst bist, der ihn hingelegt hat; denn er zeigte dir vom Anfange her die Räder, und du achtetest sie nicht" (II, 29). Although fate remains transcendental for the author, he now believes that the individual is not defenselessly exposed to it. Man can avoid the wheels of the chariot of fate which crush all life in their path--if he makes use of his reasoning powers. He must himself assume responsibility for the

calamities that befall him, for the perils of life are pointed out to him by the divine power. If the individual chooses not to heed the warning from above, and instead rushes into the path of destruction, then only he himself can be held accountable. Although fate seeks to destroy man, Stifter tells us in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters that the individual can exercise a large measure of control over it.

The preamble to the novella Abdias represents the author's most explicit attempt at an analysis of fate, providence and human responsibility. Whereas in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters he had continued to believe in the concept of fate--albeit a fate which man could control through the use of "Vernunft"--he now seriously questions its existence. Stifter admits in the introductory reflections to Abdias that there is "etwas Schauderndes in der gelassenen Unschuld, womit die Naturgesetze wirken, dass uns ist, als lange ein unsichtbarer Arm aus der Wolke und tue vor unseren Augen das Unbegreifliche" (II, 239). Moreover, he does not doubt that there are people "auf welche eine solche Reihe Ungemach aus heiterem Himmel fällt, dass sie endlich dastehen und das hagelnde Gewitter über sich ergehen lassen" (II, 239). Nevertheless, he does not believe that there really is a "fatum" as conceived by the ancients as "furchtbar letzter, starrer Grund des Geschehenden" (II, 240) to which even the gods were subject. Furthermore, the author is equally unconvinced that man possesses a "Schicksal"--that is, a destiny which is sent to him from above. Events are neither pure chance nor "ein von einer höhern Macht Gesendetes"

(II, 240) but rather, so we are informed, simply part of the chain of cause and effect. Misfortune does not rain down upon the individual but arrives as a consequence of human transgression. What appears to be "Zufall" is in effect "Folgen;" what seems to be "Unglück" is in reality "Verschulden" (II, 240). Joachim Müller comments: "Darum vorzüglich geht es Stifter: das, was die Menschen allzu leicht Zufall nennen, was dem noch unklar Sehenden als Zufall erscheint, das ist Folge, Folge eines Tuns, das dem Menschen selbst zu Lasten zu rechnen ist. Was voreilig als Unglück bezeichnet wird, das ist Verschulden."³

Human fault, it appears to Stifter, evokes response from the elemental forces; in everything that occurs he sees immanent necessity and logical consequence. Because man in his present state of development is incapable of comprehending the ultimate basis of all things, he may only dimly discern guilt or, in fact, not recognize it at all. Yet Stifter believes that there is fault even if it is not readily detectable as such. Because the individual's capacity to reason is restricted, the "Kette der Ursachen und Wirkungen" (II, 240) must remain an enigma to him until such a time in the future as his reason and insight have been refined. Only when man has achieved unlimited metaphysical vision will he be able to follow the chain of cause and effect to its divine origin. Only then can he grasp why some of his fellow-creatures are spared the misfortunes of life, while others must endure pain and sorrow. Not until then will he be able to appreciate that all calamity--no matter how inexplicable it may now

seem--is, in fact, well-founded.

Although several critics have not found the arguments in the introduction to Abdias wholly convincing, it appears that the author had resolved the problem of human fate to his own satisfaction--at least, he never saw fit to revise his concept. In his subsequent writings he returns repeatedly to the same theme, but in each case he remains convinced that all misfortune which besets man is really the consequence of fault. In "Über die Schule" (1849) Stifter writes: "Was je Gutes oder Böses über die Menschen gekommen ist, haben die Menschen gemacht. Gott hat ihnen den freien Willen und die Vernunft gegeben und hat ihr Schicksal in ihre Hand gelegt" (XIV, 290). In his last, uncompleted work, the final version of Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters, while discussing the diverse evils which can befall the individual, he comments: "Du aber hättest es vermeiden können oder kannst es ändern, und die Änderung wird dir vergolten" (XII, 248-49).

It may be said, of course, that Stifter's arguments are based on speculation and are neither logical nor rational. Indeed, as has already been pointed out, a number of scholars have found the author's theories deficient in the light of what happens in Abdias. Walter Silz maintains that Stifter is a "poor logician and metaphysician" who "does not reach a solution to the problem of Fate."⁴ J.P. Stern detects "an important clue to Stifter's profound awareness of absurdity"⁵ in the preamble to Abdias. Werner Kohlschmidt reaches a similar conclusion when he writes about the author:

"In Wirklichkeit glaubt er selbst nicht an die 'heitere Blumenkette', die durch das All geht."⁶ Joachim Müller states emphatically after surveying all of the author's works:

"Stifter neigt also dazu ..., trotzdem er hier und da versucht, das Schicksalsgeschehen sinnvoll zu interpretieren, den Menschen bedingungslos dem Schicksal unterworfen zu sehen, den Menschen rettungslos einer übermenschlichen, aussermenschlichen Macht ausgeliefert zu sehen."⁷ Yet in spite of the fact that these critics have hesitated to accept Stifter's ideas on fate, it can, nevertheless, be maintained that his arguments do offer a plausible explanation for the human dilemma as he portrays it in his works. As will be documented at a later point, the author's postulate can be applied readily to the lives of his main characters because their failure to achieve a fruitful and balanced existence is the consequence of transgression. Although their faults may at times seem inconsistent with the magnitude of their sufferings, they must assume sole responsibility for what besets them.

On the other hand, the question arises whether or not Stifter's theory of cause and effect is also valid for the subordinate figures who, it seems, become the innocent victims of blind and arbitrary fate. Is wrong-doing discernible in the case of Ditha and her companions-in-misfortune? Or must one, when attempting to analyse the reasons for their faltering, simply ask oneself, as Stifter suggests at one point in the preface to Abdias: "Wer kann das ergründen?" (II, 240). Are the misdeeds which bring about their downfall determinable,

or is the reader to assume that they--if, indeed, they exist at all--must remain for the time being incomprehensible?

There is, in fact, sufficient evidence to suggest that even in the case of most of these protagonists tragedy arrives as the consequence of human fault, if it is recognized that for Stifter the guilt which produces adversity does not necessarily originate with the one who must endure its visitations.

When Stifter speaks of "Verschulden," he does not mean exclusively "Selbstverschulden," but instead he also implies that one individual's faults may effect the downfall of another. Although the protagonist may be wholly without flaws, he may fall prey to the consequences of the wrong-doings of another figure. The validity of this contention is underscored by the chain of events in Turmalin and by the story of Jodokus and his bride Chelion in Die Narrenburg. In these novellas misfortune befalls individuals to whom no guilt can be ascribed; adversity arrives as the result of someone else's misdeeds. The "Rentherr" in Turmalin brings about not only his own downfall but becomes responsible for the near-ruination of his child as well. Grief-stricken because his wife has suddenly left him apparently for another man, he abandons his apartment and wanders about with his infant daughter in search of his wife. Eventually father and child settle in the dark basement of a run-down house where they live in almost complete isolation. The girl is not allowed to leave the house or to maintain any contact with the outside world. She is instructed to occupy herself by describing either her father on his deathbed, or

her mother as she wanders aimlessly about the world and finally commits suicide. As the father's life falls into disarray, as his physical and mental health degenerate, the daughter also becomes a physical and psychological cripple. It is only after his death that the girl is saved from almost certain disaster and is cautiously re-integrated into human society. Although from that point on she receives care and training, it becomes quite clear that only "eine bescheidene Teilnahme an der Sphäre der gesitteten Menschheit"⁸ will be possible for her. The deficiencies of her past cannot be fully overcome, and as a consequence her life will not reach full fruition.

Unlike in Turmalin, the author does not avoid a tragic ending for Jodokus and his wife in Die Narrenburg. The transgressions of the two Scharnasts, Jodokus and Sixtus, result not only in their own destruction but Chelion's also. Sixtus heaps guilt upon himself because, unable to restrain his all-consuming passion, he forces his attention on the innocent girl while her husband is absent and thereby contributes directly to her death. He is aware of his wrong-doings because he flees after having seduced Chelion and commits suicide when he hears of her death. However, it is Jodokus, the woman's husband, who must assume the greatest responsibility for the final tragedy. In an attempt to conquer the restlessness and foolishness of his nature, he had married Chelion, a frail child of nature, had uprooted her from her native land, and had brought her to the harsh northern environment where

she is condemned to waste away slowly, longing for the forests, the climate and the sky of her home. Although his conscience tells him: "'Gehe wieder mit ihr nach Indien, sie stirbt vor Heimweh'" (I, 454), Jodokus is too selfish to make that sacrifice. Once he becomes aware of the relationship between his brother and his wife, he is momentarily unable to control his anger and jealousy. In a fit of rage he plans to kill the girl; and although he does not carry out his plan, the trust which Chelion had placed in him, and without which she is unable to survive, is broken: "Sie hatte mich einmal mit dem Mörderauge an dem Bette stehen gesehen, und dies war nicht mehr aus ihrer Seele zu nehmen. Einst war ich ihr die sichtbare Gottheit auf Erden gewesen, nun zitterte sie vor mir" (I, 463). Although Jodokus makes every effort to restore the old relationship, she dies, "die brechenden Augen noch auf mich gerichtet, wie das arme Tier den Mörder anschaut, der ihm die Kugel in das furchtsame Herz gejagt hatte" (I, 464).

Although the relationship between misfortune and extraneous guilt is not as readily discernible in Ditha and the others, it, nevertheless, exists in their case as well. In Abdias a series of bitter misfortunes strike the characters. Abdias lives in a Jewish community in the ruins of a lost Roman city in the middle of the African desert. As a youth he goes out into the world and makes his fortune by various means, but his wealth does not bring him happiness. The members of his community hate him because of it, and he loses the love of his wife Deborah because a disease disfigures him. Abdias's

love of fine dress and equipment brings Melek and his Bedouins to the desert community in search of riches. While they sack the city, Deborah dies giving birth to Ditha. After the death of his wife, Abdias takes his remaining possessions and his child to Europe to ward off further misfortune. He now lavishes all his love upon his daughter, but he discovers that Ditha is blind. In desperation he once more begins to amass riches in order to provide for the child's future. One day Ditha miraculously gains her sight when struck by lightning, but a few years later another bolt of lightning takes her life. After this catastrophe Abdias no longer has the strength to struggle against what appears to be bitter fate. He lives on for many years in apathy and isolation unable to comprehend what has happened.

Although Abdias does not realize it, he must assume responsibility for the disaster which strikes his daughter in spite of the fact that the transgressions of which he is guilty do not directly involve her. His faults result in her downfall as well as his own. His vengefulness, avarice and mistrust, but above all his spiritual blindness must evoke a response from above. Abdias runs afoul of a cosmic law; his guilt brings consequences not only upon himself but also on the one dearest to him. The fact that Stifter calls Ditha's death "das neue Wunder und Strafgericht" (II, 347) suggests that Abdias must be held accountable. In spite of the fact that Ditha remains completely flawless, her death cannot be called absurd. She does not, as J.P. Stern suggests,

become the victim of "untoward arbitrary fate."⁹ Instead she must be seen as a link in the chain of cause and effect. For that matter, her death cannot be interpreted as tragic either, for she is simply a part of nature--symbolized by her affinities with flowers, the blue sky and lightning (II, 335)--which is finally reunited with the whole. Death for her is not the end of life but simply a transition back to the origins, as Silz points out: "We feel vaguely that this brief life has fulfilled itself according to some dimly descried natural necessity, and we are filled with awe rather than poignant grief. She is taken up into Nature's unending processes; from her fair and unpolluted flesh new flowers spring."¹⁰ Johann Lachinger reaches a similar conclusion when he writes: "Ditha, reif geworden für ihre transzendente Bestimmung, wird vom mythischen Bräutigam durch den ihr irdisches Leben auslöschenden Brautkuss--symbolisiert im Blitz--heimgeholt."¹¹

Not only must Abdias be held accountable for the death of his daughter, but his faults also contribute to his wife's downfall. "Auch dieses Unglück geht indirekt zu Lasten des Abdias," writes Lachinger, "denn die Mutter hat das Mädchen im Schrecken des Überfalls--der Frucht von Abdias' Unvorsichtigkeit und Prahlerei--zu früh und ohne Beistand zur Welt gebracht."¹² Moreover, throughout the years of their marriage Abdias never concerns himself with Deborah's spiritual well-being; he only caters to her physical needs. His attitude remains the same to the time of her death. Instead of remaining

with his wife and providing her with the emotional support she requires to overcome the shock of giving birth prematurely, he leaves her to search for food and to survey what is left of his possessions. It is no wonder that the other inhabitants of the desert community believe: "Abdias sei es eigentlich gewesen, der sie [Deborah] um das Leben gebracht habe" (II, 275). However, the blame for Deborah's death does not rest solely with Abdias because, unlike her daughter, she is not without fault and therefore must assume some responsibility for what befalls her. Deborah, like her husband, is guilty of spiritual blindness. She had married Abdias only for his physical attractiveness--"sie hatte nur leibliche Augen empfangen, um die Schönheit des Körpers zu sehen, nicht geistige, die des Herzens" (II, 252)--just as he had been attracted to her by her exceptional beauty. Once he has been disfigured by smallpox, she turns away from him in disgust. For years she despises her husband, and only at the moment of death is she able to recognize beauty in his character. Before she dies, she says: "'Abdias, du bist jetzt nicht mehr so hässlich wie früher, sondern viel schöner'" (II, 261).

The wife of the colonel in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters falls to her death while on an outing with her husband. She suffers an attack of vertigo while crossing a timber slide, and she plunges into the ravine below without calling out to her husband so as not to endanger him. The source of her misfortune is not to be found in her own life, for like

Chelion and Ditha she is irreproachable. At first glance it appears that she becomes the victim of an untoward fate, because in the novel itself Stifter does not suggest a reason for her untimely death. Yet, if one considers her fate in the light of the author's reflections in the preamble to Abdias, it can be argued that she too becomes the victim of another individual's transgression. Paradoxical though it may at first appear, it is, in fact, the woman's husband who must be held answerable for her death. In his younger years he led the wasteful life of a "'Spieler, Raufer, Verschwender'" (II, 41), who at one point not only contemplated murder but also suicide. "'Ich bin nicht gut gewesen'" (II, 41), he admits when speaking about the days of his youth. The guilt which the colonel incurred then has its effect on his young wife's life many years later. The repercussions of his wrong-doings strike her (and thereby him as well because with her death he loses the one dearest to his heart) in spite of the fact that he changed his life for the better long ago. It appears that the consequences of man's transgression may become manifest even if he has reformed.

War is most obviously a product of human fault. Although it is a man-made phenomenon, it is like natural catastrophe, disease and accident beyond the control of the individual, and it too may threaten him with destruction in spite of his own blamelessness. In Der Hochwald the brother of Klarissa and Johanna dies in battle although no wrongdoing can be ascribed to him. Yet he is not destroyed by a

"Tücke des Schicksals,"¹³ as Konrad Steffen maintains, for it can be assumed that he too becomes the victim of extraneous guilt. It is for the most part Ronald and Klarissa who--albeit unwillingly--become responsible for his misfortune. Their transgression, the unrestrained passion which erupts between them, results not only in pain and sorrow for them, but also has its consequences for Klarissa's brother. To be sure, Klarissa feels a measure of apprehension about her all-consuming love for Ronald. On one occasion she asks: "'Ronald, wird es gut sein, was wir taten?'" (I, 330), and of their former relationship she says: "'Ich erkannte die Sünde'" (I, 322). Nevertheless, she is incapable of controlling her emotions. The father in Der Hochwald must also assume some of the responsibility for his son's death. Upon seeing Ronald whom he had loved and trusted as a friend in the past among the enemy soldiers, Count Wittinghausen becomes so angry that he throws his lance at the presumed foe, unaware of the fact that Ronald is attempting to negotiate an end to the battle. Although the lance misses its target, that rash act results in renewed fighting, to which Ronald, the father and the son fall victim. Anger, it will be seen later,¹⁴ is in the author's eyes just another form of passion. Thus passion, the most condemnable of all human faults, destroys the innocent as well as the guilty in Der Hochwald.

The guilt incurred by Ronald, Klarissa and the old count also has its effect on Johanna's life. There is no evidence in Der Hochwald to suggest that she has committed an offence,

and yet she is condemned to share her sister's fate. Like Klarissa she lives on to an advanced age in bitter isolation, never marries and has no children.

It should be evident from these examples that the individual in Stifter's works can experience misfortune as a consequence of someone else's mistakes. Disaster strikes the unfortunate figures although they themselves are beyond reproach. Unlike the main characters in the author's stories who are themselves responsible for what besets them, most of them do not need to endure protracted periods of suffering, for in their case disaster is synonymous with sudden death. The concept of extraneous guilt cannot be applied in the case of all of the figures. There are a few minor characters who are beset by misfortunes which defy all attempts at explanation. One need think only of the relatives of Augustinus in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters who suddenly die from a disease, or the deaths of Uram in Abdias and Ludmilla's husband in Der Hagestolz. Their calamities are left unmotivated, or as Stifter would have it in the preamble to Abdias, the causes of their perdition are as yet beyond human comprehension.

NOTES

- 1 Adalbert Stifter, Sämtliche Werke, ed. August Sauer et al., 25 vols. (Prag, 1901 ff.; Reichenberg, 1929 ff.), IV, 2, 48.
- 2 Anneliese Märkisch, "Das Problem des Schicksals bei Adalbert Stifter," Germanische Studien, 233 (1941), 18.
- 3 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung, p. 121.
- 4 Walter Silz, "Stifter's Abdias (1842)," pp. 58-59.
- 5 J.P. Stern, "Propitiations: Adalbert Stifter," in Re-interpretations: Seven Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature (London, 1964), p. 273.
- 6 Werner Kohlschmidt, "Leben und Tod in Stifters Studien," in Form und Innerlichkeit (Bern, 1955), p. 220.
- 7 Joachim Müller, Vergleichende Studien zur Menschauffassung und Menschendarstellung Gottfried Kellers und Adalbert Stifters (Weida, 1930), p. 58.
- 8 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen, p. 151.
- 9 Stern, p. 277.
- 10 Silz, p. 61.
- 11 Johann Lachinger, "Adalbert Stifters Abdias," p. 110.

12 Lachinger, p. 106.

13 Steffen, p. 72.

14 See below, pp. 115-116.

III

FAILED LIFE DEFINED

Those who become the innocent victims of extraneous guilt are without exception characters of lesser significance. Of far greater consequence are the individuals who fail to reach a balanced and harmonious state of being because of their own shortcomings. They are the dominant characters in the stories which focus on the theme of failure. The remainder of this study will be devoted to an analysis of this theme as it manifests itself in the lives of these figures. Before attempting to examine the various factors which contribute to their downfall, it must first be established what the characteristics of a failed existence really are, that is, what is implied by failure to attain a fruitful and satisfying life. That will be the subject of this chapter.

Failure to succeed in life is not necessarily synonymous with sudden physical death. In fact, the lives of the main protagonists do not--as was the case with the lesser figures--come to an abrupt end, but on the contrary, the author condemns them to an existence beyond the point in time where it becomes apparent that life has lost its meaning for them. Without exception these characters live on to an advanced age. Klarissa and Johanna in Der Hochwald do not die until they have grown very old: "Dass die Schwestern sehr alt geworden, wusste man bis in die neuesten Zeiten" (I, 355). Jodokus in Die Narrenburg must live on in solitude to an

advanced age, and Hugo Almot, we are told in Das alte Siegel, was still living after "seine Haare schon so weiss waren wie einstens die seines Vaters" (II, 413). Of Abdias we learn that he reached the age of at least a hundred: "Wie alt er geworden war, wusste man nicht. Manche sagen, es seien weit über hundert Jahre gewesen" (II, 348). The "Hagestolz" is described as a "Greis" who is sitting, as old men are wont to do, "im Sonnenscheine auf der Bank vor seinem Hause" (III, 12), and the "Rentherr" in Turmalin does not fall to his death until he has reached old age. The reader knows nothing of the last whereabouts of Georg and Korona in Der Waldgänger, but there is no question that they too live on to an advanced age. When we last meet Georg, he has reached a "hohes Alter" (V, 147), and of Korona, it is said only: "Lebt sie noch, dann ist sie uralt" (V, 147).

Because each of these characters reaches an age where one can quite naturally expect to die, it is obvious that death in their case cannot be considered a part of failure. In fact, the opposite is true. Because they live on after life has lost all meaning for them, they must endure adversity for many years. It is precisely in these long years of solitude and lethargy that their failure in life manifests itself. By living out their lives in isolation and torpidness without the hope of improvement, the characters endure the consequences of their guilt. Although their continued existence accords them time not only to contemplate the magnitude of their misfortune but also to consider its causes, many of

them never comprehend fully that they themselves are responsible for what has befallen them. Although Jodokus in Die Narrenburg, while pondering his son's disappearance, asks himself "hatte er nur erkannt oder geahnt, was ich seiner Mutter getan" (I, 464), he is unable to appreciate that his misfortune arrived as the consequence of his own misdeeds. Abdias never realizes that the disaster which struck him was his own doing. Defiant and obstinate to the end, his only thoughts while experiencing a momentary recovery from his state of mental stupor are centred on revenge. He finds it impossible to restrain his emotions, and only his physical and mental frailty prevent him from carrying out his vindictive plans: "Auf einmal erwachte er wieder und wollte jetzt nach Afrika reisen, um Melek ein Messer in das Herz zu stossen; aber er konnte nicht mehr; denn seine Diener mussten ihn morgens aus dem Haus bringen und mittags und abends wieder hinein" (II, 347). In his old age the "Hagestolz" realizes that he has squandered his years; he admits to his nephew that he deeply regrets his life: "'Bist du weise, so ist es gut: bist du ein Tor, so kannst du im Alter dein Leben bereuen, wie ich das meinige bereut habe'" (III, 123). However, he fails to grasp that it is he alone who must be held answerable for that wasted life. He does not recognize that he was the agent of his own downfall, for the mere fact that he regrets his life does not suggest that he has gained insight into the factors which brought about his unhappiness. Moreover, he places much of the blame for his misfortune on

Ludmilla when he remarks to Victor: "'Wenn sie nur um ein wenig stärker gewesen wäre und den klaren Verstand, der ihr Anteil war, nur über ein grösser Stück Welt hätte ausdehnen können--alles wäre anders geworden'" (III, 125). It appears that the "Rentherr" in Turmalin recognizes his guilt when he admits to his wife that he is to blame for their marital unhappiness. Yet because he views his fault exclusively as having invited another man into the house, thereby unwillingly fostering an adulterous relationship between his guest and her, he completely misconceives the essence of his misdeeds. He not only misunderstands the nature of his guilt as concerns his wife, but he never recognizes that his own downfall, not to speak of the near-disaster which befalls his daughter, occurs as the result of his sins.

While these characters are incapable of appreciating that the blame for their misfortune rests entirely with them, Klarissa in Der Hochwald becomes aware of the causes of her and her sister's calamity. When the knight Bruno relates to her the events leading up to the deaths of the other members of her family, she exclaims: "'Und ich ... war es, ich, die Vater und Bruder erschlagen'" (I, 352). Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel begins to realize toward the end of his life that he himself is the author of his unhappiness: "Später rang er mit Gewissensbissen, und da er alt geworden, ... hat er oft bitterlich geweint und gesagt: 'Wie sie ist doch keine-- wie sie ist doch keine'" (II, 413). He recognizes that by structuring his whole life according to the motto "Servandus

tantummodo honos," which prompted him to sever his ties with Cöleste, the mother of his child and the one person who could have given purpose to his life, he has forfeited his happiness. In despair he throws the ancient seal, the symbol of his ruined existence, into an inaccessible ravine. Hugo acknowledges his wrong-doing not only by disposing of the inherited seal, but also, as Eric Blackall points out, "dadurch, dass er sein Kind von Cöleste zu seinem Erben einsetzt."¹ Georg in Der Waldgänger also realizes that he made a terrible mistake by leaving Korona. After having met her again by chance many years after their separation, "ging [Georg] auf sein Zimmer--und der achtundfünfzigjährige Mann weinte die ganze Nacht. Jetzt erst stand die Grösse der Sünde vor ihm, die er begangen hatte--jetzt bereute er" (V, 145). The fact that Klarissa, Hugo and Georg gain some understanding of their wrong-doings sets them apart from the other figures who fail in life and makes them kindred to tragic characters.

Isolation

Although failure to achieve a harmonious existence cannot be equated with physical death, the unsuccessful protagonists, nevertheless, are cut off from life. Once it has become apparent that they have failed in life, they loose contact with the rest of humanity almost completely. The isolation to which they are exposed is one of the most striking attributes of their unfulfilled lives. It is true that loneliness is a state familiar to all of Stifter's characters, but whereas for

the successful figure it is a momentary experience which he is able to overcome, for those who have failed it becomes a permanent one. Although it is often a source of anguish to them, the protagonists are not compelled by their fellow man to lead a secluded existence. Their isolation is self-imposed, and they make no attempt to escape it. Not only do they live in remote or inaccessible locations, but more often than not their isolation is made even more complete by the fact that their dwellings are inhospitable castles or fortress-like structures. They rarely if ever leave their refuges, and visitors are not encouraged to call. The buildings which they inhabit serve as fitting symbols for their isolation.

By voluntarily withdrawing into seclusion, the protagonists on the one hand avoid the often demanding responsibilities and obligations which are part of life in a human community, but on the other they also forgo the love and concern of their fellow men, the conviviality and the sense of security which issue from that life. Both elements are for Stifter indispensable not only for the well-being of the individual but also for the whole of mankind. Moreover, having contact with others is not only a prerequisite for a fruitful life, but is in itself a form of fulfilment, and by severing their ties with the rest of humanity, these figures rob themselves of this enriching experience. By retreating into isolation, they are violating the natural order of the universe. They not only sin against themselves as individuals but also give offense to other men, for a strong commitment to the community is

essential if mankind is to flourish.

Klarissa and Johanna in Der Hochwald survive the fateful day which brings misfortune to those close to them, but their subsequent life together is a mere shell, like the ruined castle to which they return. As the Swedish armies were approaching the district some months before, the sisters took refuge at a cottage on a lake in the untouched wilderness of the forest. Many weeks went by, and they gradually began to appreciate the serenity and beauty of the woods. Although their retreat was virtually inaccessible from the outside world, it was discovered by Ronald whom Klarissa had met and fallen in love with when she was still a child. She became again enchanted by him just as she had been as a little girl. Although she felt apprehension about her renewed passion for the prince, she was unable to control her emotions. After assuring her of his love, the young man left the secluded cottage and went to the sisters' castle to dissuade his countrymen from attacking it. His actions were misunderstood, however, and the ensuing battle claimed not only his life but that of the girls' father and brother as well.

When Klarissa and Johanna return to their castle after the battle, it lies in ruin, the countryside is devastated and the inhabitants of the region have fled so that there appears to be "kein einzig anderes Lebewesen stundenweit in die Runde" (I, 346). Yet the sisters show no inclination to take up residence in friendlier surroundings and instead choose to remain in the area for the rest of their lives.

The desolate environment, the destroyed castle and the bleak season--winter has set in when they return--are symbolic of what the future holds in store for them. Although attempts are made to rebuild the burnt-out structure, the author emphasizes that it retains the appearance of a ruin: "Ein Notdach war gesetzt, Tore, Stiegen, Gemächer wieder eingerichtet, aber immer sah die Burg wie eine Ruine aus. Jahre kamen und vergingen, und immer sah die Burg wie eine Ruine aus" (I, 354). The sisters remain detached from the rest of the world. They never leave their home, and except for one faithful friend, the aging knight Bruno who occasionally calls on them, they entertain few visitors. Not only does the desolate castle have symbolic value in the novella, but an even more appropriate symbol of the sisters' isolation from the human community is their chamber window which has been covered by paper. The paper allows little light to filter into the room and prevents the sisters from gaining a glimpse of the world outside of their restricted domain.

As a young man, Jodokus in Die Narrenburg had set out into the world to win "die Liebe aller Menschen, auch der vergangenen und der künftigen, die Liebe Gottes und aller Engel" (I, 448-9), but after the death of Chelion he elects to live in isolation in his sinister castle--cut off from the rest of the world by an impenetrable wall whose only entrance is so well concealed that Heinrich von Scharnast many years later cannot discover it. Although Jodokus had previously travelled extensively, driven by his restless nature, he

never again sets foot outside of his domain. He dismisses all his servants except for his half-crazed steward, reduces his material possessions to a minimum, and allows his holdings to fall into decay. The lonely and eccentric life he leads is devoid of direction, and it stands in stark contrast to the gregarious and harmonious existence of the villagers in the green and peaceful valley below with whom he maintains no ties. By juxtaposing these two antipodal worlds in the novella, Stifter underscores the paltriness of Jodokus's existence. Erich Burgstaller comments: "Auf diese Weise wird die Welt der Narrenburg nicht nur eindrücklich vom Fichtauer Raum abgehoben, sie wird auch als krankhaft in sich abgekapselt, als isoliert vom übrigen Leben gezeichnet. Die Welt der Rothensteiner ist tatsächlich ver-rückt, aus dem Gleichgewicht der natürlichen und menschlichen Ordnungen geworfen."² After Jodokus has died and his sole direct descendant has been killed in Africa, only the old castellan lives on in the fools' castle. All contact with the outside world remains lost until Heinrich, a descendant from another line of the Scharnasts, is able to bridge the gulf between the two contrasting worlds. Once Heinrich has become its master, the isolation of the castle on the hill is broken; the open gates and windows bid visitors welcome and there is so much human activity that it appears "als rühre sich der ganze Berg, der früher so vereinsamt gewesen" (I, 446).

After the death of his wife, Abdias leaves the desert community which he had called home since birth and takes his

daughter to Europe. In an isolated, uninhabited valley he erects a building which has more the appearance of a fortified castle than a home. The doors are secured by double bolts, and iron bars seal the windows. In fact, the windows do not lead to the outside but rather into an inner courtyard. A high wall surrounds the house on all sides. In this building, protected from intruders and sealed off from the rest of mankind, Abdias lives with Ditha alone. Uram, the servant who had accompanied him on his journey from Africa, dies soon after their arrival in Europe, and the new employees whom Abdias hires live in an outbuilding and remain aloof from him. Few strangers visit the secluded valley, and no one is ever invited into the house. After Ditha has been killed by lightning, Abdias lives on for more than three decades. He sits passively in the sun in front of his house, oblivious of the world. It appears that Ditha's sudden death has deprived him of his reason: "Abdias sass nach diesem Ereignisse auf dem Bänkchen vor seinem Hause und sagte nichts, sondern er schaute die Sonne an. Er sass viele Jahre, die Knechte besorgten auf Anordnung des Handelsfreundes die Felder, ... und er wusste nicht, wie lange er gesessen war; denn nach glaublichen Aussagen war er wahnsinnig gewesen" (II, 347). Because insanity signifies a withdrawal of the individual into an inner world, Abdias's isolation has become total; his physical solitude is compounded by his spiritual isolation.

When Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel rides away from the

"Eichenschloss" after terminating his relationship with Cöleste, he is struck by a biting November wind. There are "kaltblaue, schwere Wolken" above, and at his feet rustles "das dürre herbstliche Gras" (II, 411-2). The state of nature fore-shadows the desolation of his later years. Hugo had met the woman many years before under mysterious circumstances in Vienna, and in spite of the fact that she refused to divulge anything about her person or circumstances, he fell in love with her. Unknown to him, the relationship resulted in a child. The lovers became separated and only met again eleven years later at a castle in France. Cöleste was now able to tell him why she had been so secretive about her past. She had been forced at a young age to marry a rich but cruel nobleman who began to maltreat her when it became apparent that the union would remain without offspring. Without Cöleste's approval, her servant Dionys had conceived the plan to end her suffering by substituting another man's child as the nobleman's heir and had thus arranged the first meeting between Hugo and her. Although nothing appeared to stand in the way of their happiness when the lovers met again at the "Eichenschloss"--Cöleste's husband had died some years before--Hugo rejected her because he felt that she had deceived both her husband and himself and that she could no longer be trusted. Obsessed with his rigid sense of honour, he left the castle and thus sacrificed his happiness.

Hugo returns to the estate in the mountains which he has inherited from his father and elects to remain "ein Jahr nach

dem andern ... auf demselben allein" (II, 413). His is a forlorn existence: "Einsam und öde war es in dem alten Haus, das auf der Gebirgshalde stand" (II, 413). Over the years his loneliness becomes the more painful to bear the more he realizes that he himself is responsible for it. Not only is Hugo's life devoid of fulfilling human associations, but Cöleste's life will be equally isolated. Her home is situated in a desolate and uninhabited region, and the author points out that after Hugo and his army detachment have left, "wurde es wieder so einsam und öde um Schloss Pre, wie es zuvor gewesen war" (II, 412).

In Der Hagestolz, as in Die Narrenburg, Stifter juxtaposes two antipodal themes of successful existence and failed life. The beginning scenes depict the idyllic, fruitful life of Ludmilla and her family. The pains and setbacks which she experienced in her past have refined and matured her and have contributed to her mastery of life. Her autumn years are years of repose and contentment. Otto Pouzar comments: "Auch ihr hat die Welt nicht alles gehalten, was sie ihr versprach. Aber sie ist ihr der sichere, freundliche Boden geblieben, auf dem sie zu wirken und sich zu veredeln vermag. In der Begrenzung kommt sie zur Ruhe und Vollendung in sich."³ The modest but hospitable house which she inhabits with Hanna, her daughter, and Victor, her adopted son, lies in a friendly, fertile valley not far from a village. Its windows are always open, allowing sunshine and fresh air to enter, and its door stands ajar bidding welcome to the family's friends

and relatives. The fact that the striking of the village clock and the ringing of the church bells are clearly audible indicates that the dwelling and its inhabitants are part of the community.

The serene and satisfying life which Ludmilla leads stands in contrast to the lonely and impoverished existence of the embittered "Hagestolz." In his youth the "Hagestolz" fell in love with Ludmilla, but she did not love him in return. Instead she preferred his brother Hippolyt, who, however, married another girl. Yet Hippolyt could never forget Ludmilla, and he arranged that she should raise his son Victor after his death. Ludmilla for her part had married another man, the father of her daughter Hanna. The "Hagestolz" never loved another woman after his offer of marriage had been rejected by Ludmilla. He devoted many years to successful business ventures, but these activities did not bring him happiness. Finally realizing that he had lived his life in vain, he chose to isolate himself from society by settling on a secluded island in a remote mountain lake. Not only is the island virtually inaccessible--underwater cliffs and unpredictable weather conditions make travel on the lake hazardous--but the isolation of the recluse is made even more complete by the fact that the buildings which serve as his residence are surrounded by an impenetrable wall whose only gate is kept locked at all times. Furthermore, the windows of the hermitage, like those in Abdias's dwelling, are protected by iron bars and shutters, and complicated

locking devices secure all doors. Very little light enters the rooms, "gleichsam als scheute man die Freiheit und Klarheit des Lichtes und liebte die Finsternis" (III, 83). An uncomfortable, death-like stillness prevails; in contrast to Ludmilla's home, there is almost no sign of life. The tolling of church bells cannot be heard on the island--in fact, no man-made sound ever carries over from the settlements in the distance. No visitors are allowed to land, and the "Hagestolz" never leaves his isolated refuge. His only contact with the outside world is through one of his aging servants who occasionally rows to the village on the lakeshore for provisions. The fact that the recluse does not trust his employees, although they serve him faithfully, and communicates only minimally with them indicates that he is isolated even from those few individuals who are in his immediate proximity.

The old man's isolation is interrupted only once when Victor, his nephew, visits him and introduces a fresh breath of life to the stagnant atmosphere of the island. At first the recluse treats his guest rudely and harshly and keeps him a virtual prisoner on his estate, but in time Victor's radiance and zest for life as well as his self-assertion mellow the old man, and the two relatives draw closer to each other. As they become more intimate, the uncle admits his bitter loneliness. One morning, when Victor indicates his desire to depart, the uncle asks his nephew to remain voluntarily a little longer on the island "'bei einem alten Manne ..., der niemanden hat'" (III, 112). At another point

the irredeemable despair of the recluse manifests itself in his passionate outcry: "'Dich hätte ich geliebt'" (III, 117). Yet Victor eventually leaves the island again, and it sinks once more into isolation and oblivion. At the end of the novella the "Hagestolz" can be seen sitting as before "ganz einsam auf seiner Insel" (III, 142).

Shortly after his wife has left him, the "Rentherr" in Turmalin and his young child disappear mysteriously from their apartment in Vienna. Although they have not settled, as rumour would soon have it, in a cave in the forests of Bohemia, their new residence, a room in the basement of a run-down tenement house, is equally remote. Although the building is located in a suburban mainstreet, it is, nevertheless, very isolated. Only the narrow side of the house faces the road. Entrance can be gained only through a narrow side portal; the main gate is barricaded, and it has not been in use for years. Because of its delapidation, the building has very few tenants; in fact, we are told that "in wenig Jahren werde gar niemand mehr drin wohnen wollen" (IV, 158). The old man and his daughter live in their dark room, detached from the rest of society. The child is kept a virtual prisoner by her father; her only view of the outside world is through the iron bars and the wire mesh of a window which meets the street at pavement level. As a consequence, the picture of reality she gains through this opening--she can only see "die Säume von Frauenkleidern vorbeigehen, ... die Stiefel von Männern, ... schöne Spitzen von Röcken oder die vier Füße

eines Hundes" (IV, 174-75)--is severely distorted. "Was das Kind erblickt," Konrad Steffen points out, "sind blosse Gliedmassen, Hüllen, Teile von Kleidern: zerstückte Abbilder oberirdischen Daseins."⁴ The fractionalized image of the world which the girl gleans through the bars of the window, her otherwise total isolation, and the resultant lack of mental stimulation are the causes of the retardation of which her disproportionally large head is the physical manifestation. Stifter skilfully contrasts the squalid environment of the "Rentherr" and his daughter with the "luftige und freie Wohnung, zu welcher auch ein geräumiger Garten gehörte" (IV, 149) of the narrator and her happy family. The bizarre music of the "Rentherr," his constantly shifting eyes and his abnormal treatment of his child indicate that his earlier eccentricity and deludedness have deteriorated into madness. As in Abdias, insanity signifies a withdrawal of the individual to a world within. Physical isolation is merely a reflection of total spiritual detachment from life.

Loneliness plays an important role in the lives of Georg and Korona in Der Waldgänger as well. Georg in his old age becomes the eternal wanderer, who never settles down anywhere and whose trail finally disappears into nothingness. "Wir wissen nicht, wo der alte Waldgänger jetzt ist," the author informs the reader, "er mag noch irgendwo leben, er mag gestorben sein--wir wissen es nicht" (V, 147). Korona's life is equally as lonely; she is "gewiss so allein wie dazumal, da sie von ihrem Vater gegangen ist, nur mit dem

Unterschiede, dass sie jetzt bei keinen Verwandten ist und dass damals ein Anfang vor ihren Augen lag, jetzt ein nahes Ende" (V, 147). Georg, who had studied science and architecture in his youth, met Korona while he was remodeling the castle of her employer. They fell in love and married. Because of Georg's ability as an architect and Korona's competence as a housekeeper they accumulated enough wealth to build a beautiful house in beautiful surroundings. "Immer mehr ordnete sich das Haus, immer mehr sassen sie in ihrem Besitztum in Fülle und sahen auf die wunderschöne Welt hinaus" (V, 126), we read. However, their happiness was marred by the fact that their union remained childless. Because Korona felt that it was one of man's most important duties to become a parent, she suggested to her husband that they divorce so that each partner could marry again and have children. Although he knew in his heart that her suggestion was wrong, he finally agreed after some thought, and they separated. Georg remarried; his new wife bore him two sons. Then, one day, while looking for a locality to build a house for his old age, he met Korona again. Both people had become attracted to the area because it so strongly resembled the one where they had lived happily many years ago. During the brief encounter Georg discovered that Korona never married again because she could not forget him.

After that meeting Georg and Korona never see each other again. Georg's second wife eventually dies, and his two sons leave him and never return. In his old age he wanders through

the woods collecting butterflies and different kinds of moss. Like the water of the Moldau River and its tributaries, the "Waldgänger" never finds any rest, but must constantly remain on the move. To be sure, he visits with the inhabitants of the region, often dines with them and even stays overnight on occasion, but he never becomes a part of the community. No one in the area knows "woher er gekommen war" (V, 57), and once he has left, he is soon again forgotten (V, 86). The people become used to the solitary old figure; they look upon him as "einen, der da ist" (V, 57), but they never accept him as one of them. For a time he gains the affection and companionship of the "Hegerbube" who follows him wherever he goes and shares in his activities. The relationship gives his failed life the illusion of fulfilment, but the boy eventually must leave to further his education. Overcome by grief, the "Waldgänger," too, leaves the region and is never seen again.

The lonely existence which these figures lead is perhaps the most obvious feature of their inability to copy with life. Yet their isolation is not necessarily only a consequence of failure, but may also be an attribute of their being on the path leading to it. Several characters experience loneliness even before it becomes apparent that their lives have been wasted. When war threatens the family castle, Heinrich von Wittinghausen in Der Hochwald persuades his two daughters to seek refuge at a place in the forest which is "so einsam, so abseits alles menschlichen Verkehrs, dass

kein Pfad, kein Fusstritt, keine Spur davon erspählich ist, überdem unzugänglich an allen Seiten ...'" (I, 263). Although Klarissa and Johanna later learn to appreciate its safety and tranquility, they are bewildered by the solitude of the forest when they first arrive at their retreat. They feel cut-off from the world and their former life: "Also ist es wahr, die Heimat, das gute Vaterhaus ist preisgegeben und verloren, all ihr früher Leben ist abgeschnitten, sie selbst wie Mitspieler in ein buntes Märchen gezogen, alles neu, alles fremd, alles seltsam und dräuend ..." (I, 285). The sense of isolation which they experience upon their arrival in the forest anticipates the loneliness of their later years.

For Abdias loneliness is a state which he encounters throughout his life. Born a Jew, he is a member of an outcast race. He grows up in the squalid ruins of a lost Roman city and as a youth is sent out into the world by his father to seek his fortune as a merchant. He spends half a lifetime travelling through the empty wastes of the North African desert in search of riches. He suffers constant abuse at the hands of his fellow-men and never enters upon friendly relations with anyone. He is isolated from the other members of his community because, although he shares his wealth with them, they hate him for it, and even his wife turns from him in disgust after he has become disfigured by disease. Abdias finally leaves the solitude of the desert and settles in Europe, but he continues to live in seclusion, and his life remains devoid of human contact. The environment in which

Abdias lives in Africa as well as later in Europe is an extension of his inner self--the barrenness of his soul.

Hugo Almot's experience of isolation too is not limited to his later life. He grows up without the benefit of a mother's care and devotion in an isolated mountainous area. Educated entirely by his aging father, he comes into little contact with the outside world. Although at age twenty-one he moves to the distant capital to complete his education, he continues to lead a secluded life, devoting much of his time to his studies in his room, so that in spite of more than three years of life in the city "lag ihm das Herz noch so einsam in der Brust wie einst auf der Gebirgshalde" (II, 361). Unconsciously he seeks to escape his loneliness by writing in his diary, which, "sonderbar genug, in lauter Briefen an den toten Vater bestand" (II, 361). Even after Hugo has met Cöleste, there is evidence to suggest that their relationship does not dispel his sense of isolation. The author informs us that the street in which the two lovers exchange their first words is depopulated and that the little house in which they meet is located "ziemlich weit von der Stadt entfernt" (II, 381). Moreover, Hugo senses that the "Lindenhäuschen" is ordinarily uninhabited and locked up: "Oft war eine Luft in den Zimmern, nicht wie die der Wohnlichkeit, sondern wie in verschlossenen Räumen" (II, 392). It has already become evident from several other of the author's works that "verschlossene Räume" are symbolic of an isolated existence, as is the striking image of the caged

and perhaps blinded finch singing in the night after the lovers' last tryst (II, 392).

The protagonist of Turmalin lives a secluded life with his family even before he moves into the dark basement room of the "Perronsche Haus." The house which serves as his first place of residence is situated on a busy square in Vienna. Yet the rooms which the family inhabits are removed from the main stream of life, not only because they are located on the fourth floor of the building, but also because they can be entered only after unlocking an iron gate and passing through a long and narrow passageway. Moreover, as in Der Hagestolz (II, 83), the apartment is very dark because heavy curtains cover the windows allowing little light to filter through. The fact the rooms occupied by the "Rentherr" are separated from those of his wife and daughter indicates that the figures are isolated even from each other. They rarely leave their apartment, and they have only one friend, the actor, Dall, who visits them in their isolated surroundings. As Irmscher points out, the world in which the "Rentherr" lives with his family is not the real one but an abstraction of reality: "Nur in mittelbaren Zeugnissen kommt die Wirklichkeit zu ihnen herein: in den Bildern berühmter Männer, mit denen der Rentherr sein Zimmer von oben bis unten tapeziert hat, und in der Person des Schauspielers Dall. Die Bilder und dieser Schauspieler sind 'Darstellungen' des Lebens, nicht dieses selbst."⁵

Georg and Korona in Der Waldgänger also experience isolation all their lives. Georg's childhood years are spent in a village which is "abgetrennt von der übrigen Welt der Menschen ..., als hätte man mitten in einem grossen Walde gelebt" (V, 87). His parents never leave their home, and they entertain no visitors. Because Georg is not allowed to go "zu den anderen Buben des Dorfes hinaus, um mit ihnen zu spielen," he sees "nichts als die Ebene und den grossen Himmel darauf und im Winter das warme Stübchen und den Ofen" (V, 89). As a consequence of his lonely youth, he remains isolated from his fellow-man when he journeys into the city to begin his studies. After his parents have died, he feels "als sei er der einzige Mensch auf der Welt, und sonst gäbe es keinen" (V, 97). When he meets Korona, whose sense of loneliness possibly even surpasses his own, he is particularly attracted by the "verödete Grösse, die in ihrem Wesen lag" (V, 111), just as she is drawn to him because he is a solitary individual. Throughout the years of their marriage they remain isolated from their neighbours and never partake of life in the community. Margaret Gump is quite correct in pointing out that "the words 'allein,' 'einsam,' 'vereinsamt,' 'vereinzelt' are key words in the story."⁶

Bachelorhood

The isolation encountered by the protagonists who have failed in life is not only due to the fact that they are

detached from the human community but is also to a large extent the consequence of their bachelorhood. Throughout his works the author attaches great importance to the meaningful relationship between a man and a woman--in fact, a happy male-female union is almost a prerequisite of a successful existence, because only in a relationship of love and friendship can the individual experience complete fulfilment. In 1829, long before he composed his first works, Stifter stated in a letter to Fanni Greipl, the girl with whom he had fallen deeply in love: "Das einzige Gut des Herzens ist auf Erden: --Familienglück--ein Weib nach meinem Herzen, das Licht und das Leben des Mannes"⁷ Marital happiness eluded him in his own life, however, for the beloved Fanni rejected him after a long courtship. His subsequent marriage to Amalia Mohaupt, a simple and unlettered, but very attractive woman with whom he had become erotically involved while still courting Fanni, proved to be a banal affair confined to everyday matters. It was not the ideal relationship which he had envisaged in his youth, or which he creates for most of the successful figures in his writings. Unlike these figures, the characters who encounter failure in life have no spouse at their side in their later years and consequently lack the affection and companionship which the author felt to be so necessary for the well-being of every individual. Although they had been married, or had at least planned marriage earlier in life, the relationship had ended with the death of the partner, or was severed because of a seemingly

irreconcilable difficulty. In contrast to the author himself, who married Amalia soon after the conclusion of his earlier love affair with Fanni, the protagonists exhibit no inclination to seek another relationship after their first one has ended. It is interesting to note that those individuals in Stifter's works who do enter a second union never find complete happiness. Hanna in Der beschriebene Tännling (1850), Murai in Brigitta (1847) or, for that matter, Risach and Mathilde in Der Nachsommer (1857) do not find real fulfilment in their second relationships. Ludmilla in Der Hagestolz is an exception, for her marriage to Hanna's father after the termination of her romantic involvement with Hippolyt seems to have been a happy one.

Although the sisters in Der Hochwald are still young when they return to the ruins of their castle, they never entertain the thought of marriage and remain unattached until the end of their days. Johanna, who has never experienced love for a man, sublimates her loneliness in devotion to her sister: "Johanna war eine erhabne Jungfrau geworden, rein und streng, und hatte nur eine Leidenschaft, Liebe für ihre Schwester" (I, 354). For Klarissa, on the other hand, there is the prospect of a new relationship with the knight Bruno, who has loved her since her childhood. However, Klarissa does not requite his love, because she cannot forget her dead fiancé. In fact, she escapes the loneliness of reality by withdrawing into a realm of nostalgic dreams where she continues to love and cherish a Ronald who is still alive.

Even in her old age, he lives in her imagination as a "schöner, blondgelockter Jüngling" (I, 354). Klarissa is not only isolated from life as it exists outside of the castle walls, but by retreating into a world of fantasy, she becomes detached from reality as well.

Although Chelion and Jodokus in Die Narrenburg are devoted to each other, an ominous shadow is cast over them, and their marriage ends in tragedy. After Chelion has died, Jodokus keeps her memory alive by carefully tending to her earthly possessions. He locks up the "Parthenon" which he had built for her, except for one room, in which he lives alone. In his account of his life he writes: "Auf Erden hatte ich keinen Menschen mehr" (I, 464). He makes no attempt to conquer the loneliness which envelops him after her death by taking another spouse. When he has grown very old, he sets the "Parthenon" ablaze so that all that remains of the structure is "die leere, hohle Hülse einstiger Wohnlichkeit" (I, 433). The empty, hollow shell of the burnt-out building stands as a fitting symbol for his own life.

In Abdias the marital happiness of Deborah and Abdias is not an enduring one either. Their marriage is based solely on physical attraction, and once Abdias has lost his bodily beauty to disease, there is nothing left to sustain their relationship. Only at the moment of Deborah's death are they drawn to each other once more, but it is too late. After Deborah has died, Abdias never remarries but devotes his love and attention entirely to his child.

When Hugo Almot rides away from Cöleste's castle after having severed his ties with her, he does not as yet appreciate her basic innocence and purity, for he asks himself: "'Wo in dieser weiten, in dieser grossen Welt mag das herrliche, das reine Herz schlagen, das mich beglückt hätte und das ich beglücken hätte können!'" (II, 411). As he grows older and becomes increasingly lonely on his isolated estate, however, he begins to realize that in Cöleste he had found the one individual who could have given meaning to his life and that by rejecting her he had sacrificed his happiness: "Und da er alt geworden, ... hat er oft bitterlich geweint und gesagt: 'Wie sie ist doch keine--wie sie ist doch keine'" (II, 413). The loneliness of the "Hagestolz" is not only caused by his detachment from society, but is also due to the fact that he had failed to marry. After his proposal of marriage had been rejected by Ludmilla, he never again sought the attention of a woman. In his old age he regrets his failure to seek another affiliation. He advises Victor above all to get married, preferably at a young age, so that he will not find himself in a similar unenviable position later in life. Whether or not the partners are drawn to each other in love, the recluse adds, is of little consequence to the union, "'denn derlei Dinge sind nicht beständig, sie kommen und vergehen, wie es eben ist, ohne dass man sie lockt und ohne dass man sie vertreibt'" (III, 124).

The "Rentherr" too lives out his unavailing life in isolation without the companionship of a spouse, but in

contrast to the "Hagestolz," he is married for a period of time to a beautiful woman who bears him a child. However, his marriage does not appear to be a warm and happy relationship. The separate rooms suggest that there is little contact between husband and wife. There is never a hint of affection between them or of activity which the family shares as a group. Because the "Rentherr" is engrossed with his numerous but meaningless hobbies instead of devoting his time to his family, he brings ruin to his marriage. His neglect of his wife paves the way for her infidelity. Left to lead a monotonous and lonely life in her rooms, she becomes involved with the actor. Plagued by remorse, she confesses her unfaithfulness to her husband and leaves him and the child.

In contrast to the other characters discussed up to this point, it appears that Georg and Korona in Der Waldgänger have achieved fulfilment early in their lives. They get married because they love each other, and initially nothing seems to stand in the way of their continued happiness. They take great pleasure in furnishing the house they have rented. Georg becomes successful in his career as an architect, and Korona finds contentment in her role as a housekeeper. "Der Wohlstand und die Behaglichkeit stiegen in dem kleinen Häuschen" (V, 118), Stifter informs the reader. Georg and Korona spend many happy hours together designing their own home which they build at an attractive site. Yet the contentment which they find in their new house is not complete, for "ein Wunsch ging nicht in Erfüllung, der allen anderen die

Krone aufgesetzt hätte oder der sie alle entbehrlich gemacht hätte: sie hatten immer noch keine Kinder" (V, 126). They decide to terminate their marriage because it has not been blessed with children. Georg takes a new wife, but there is evidence to suggest that the second union does not bring him the happiness which he enjoyed in the first. For one thing, he does not share his wife's chambers but sleeps, "wie es in dieser Ehe Gewohnheit war" (V, 146), in his own study. For another, he later deeply regrets his decision to separate from Korona. Konrad Steffen calls Georg's new marriage "eine Vereinigung aus Achtung statt aus Liebe."⁸

After the death of his second wife, Georg never remarries. Although he entertains the thought of contacting Korona again, he does not do so, for "er schämte sich, auch wusste er nicht, ob sie nicht auch, wie er, aus dem Tal geflohen ist, da sie sich begegnet hatten" (V, 147). He lives out the remainder of his years in solitude. Korona never remarries after she has divorced Georg even though it was she who had originally insisted on the separation. "'Ich habe es nicht vermocht'" (V, 145), she confesses to him when he asks her if she has taken a new husband. Like Georg, she spends her old age in utter loneliness.

Childlessness

Although Stifter's marriage to Amalia was not the harmonious, exemplary union which he had hoped for, he did not openly

complain about it. It did provide him with the physical comforts he required and gave him a sense of security, especially in his later life--years of growing loneliness. However, he was deeply troubled by the fact that the marriage remained without offspring, for he believed that children enriched an individual's experience of life. In a letter to his wife in 1841, he wrote: "Gebäre nur recht bald einen Knaben, der so schön ist, wie Du, und so lustig, wie ich, dann ist alles gut bis auf ein Mädchen, um das ich Dich auch bitte."⁹ Stifter felt deprived of the opportunity to bring up and educate his own children--to him an ennobling and fulfilling task-- and he also feared that without heirs he would be lonely in his later years. Furthermore, being aware of life's transience and apprehensive of non-existence after death, children were for him a kind of life insurance, a link between the present and the future. He believed that a person could gain some measure of continuity through children because a part of him would live on in his descendants. It is true that Stifter did not expect to achieve immortality through the chain of generations, for he thought that all life on earth and, indeed, this planet itself would perish some day. Yet he felt that for the individual who had no heirs, life would be even more fleeting, for death would signify immediate extinction. His attempts at compensating for his childlessness by means of adoption ended in tragedy.

Although Eric Blackall¹⁰ and Rosemarie Hunter¹¹ feel that after 1848 Stifter had conquered his disappointment at

having no children, there is evidence to suggest that this was not the case. A letter written on July 4, 1863 to his wife tells of a visit to a girls' school in his capacity as school inspector and indicates that even at the age of fifty-eight he was still disturbed by his childlessness: "Ich komme von recht lieben, feinen Mädchenangesichtern aus der zweiten Klasse der Mädchenschule. ... Ich sah mehrere fast betrübt an, die ihre klaren, lieben Äuglein freundlich auf mich gerichtet hatten, und dachte wie es wäre, wenn wir ein solches Geschöpfchen oder mehrere aus unserem Fleische und Blute gehabt hätten, wenn diese jetzt erwachsen wären, wenn sie unsern Stamm fortführten in fernere Zeiten usw."¹²

Because his own childlessness was such a source of anguish to the author, it is not surprising that the problem with all of its ramifications manifests itself in his writings as an important characteristic of failure. Not only is the loneliness of the protagonist who has met with no success in life compounded by the fact that he has no children at his side in his later years, but since there will be no continuance in his descendants, he will also become more readily the prey of passing time. There is no nexus with the future, no measure of permanence. In a much quoted passage in Der Hagestolz, Stifter formulates the predicament of remaining without progeny: "Wenn ein uralter Mann auf einem Hügel mannigfaltiger Taten steht, was nützt es ihm? ... Alles zerfällt im Augenblicke wenn man nicht ein Dasein erschaffen hat, das über dem Sarge noch fort dauert. Um wen bei seinem

Alter Söhne, Enkel und Urenkel stehen, der wird oft tausend Jahre alt" (III, 122). Whereas the individual who has produced offspring may "live" on in his descendants at least until such a time as the whole of mankind, and perhaps the earth itself, has perished, there is for the childless person no prospect of continuance, and death becomes synonymous with instantaneous non-existence. Moreover, whatever he has accomplished in life will prove to have been without purport. As there is no beneficiary and consequently no one to carry on his life-work, its physical manifestations often rapidly decay after his death. To be sure, several of the characters on whom this study is based have sired children, but because they have little or no contact with them, or because, as is the case with Abdias, the child dies before reaching maturity, they face the same problems as those individuals who have no offspring at all.

The sisters in Der Hochwald have no children, and so upon death they--and with them the countless generations of the Wittinghausens which preceded them--face extinction. They leave no trace in time, as symbolized by the fact that vegetation once more grows over the location where their cottage in the woods stood, "so dass wieder die tiefe, jungfräuliche Wildnis entstand, wie sonst, und wie sie noch heute ist" (I, 355). Moreover, since no one inhabits the family castle after their deaths, it rapidly falls into ruin, and all that remains of it a few years later are "Berge von Schutt" (I, 250). Time proves to be a destructive

force for the whole Wittinghausen family because its last members do not perpetuate themselves in children. Konrad Steffen rightly comments: "Die Ruine mit dem grossen Schuttkegel am Eingang der Novelle und die rauchgeschwärmte des letzten Kapitels, an deren Fenster das geschmolzene Glas wie Klumpen Eis herunterhängt, sind eindruckliche Bilder von der zerstörenden Macht der Zeit."¹³

Although Jodokus in Die Narrenburg has sired a son, he leaves his father at an early age, and all contact between them is lost. As a consequence, Jodokus experiences the same solitude as the childless characters. In the account of his life, he writes: "Auf Erden hatte ich keinen Menschen mehr" (I, 464), and the manuscript concludes with the words: "--ach, ich sehne mich nach meinem Sohne" (I, 465). Because Jodokus has no progeny at his side in later life with whom he could have established a meaningful relationship and who would then constitute for him a link in the chain of generations to come, there is no prospect of a continuance after death. Jodokus experiences his being on earth as unique and transitory, and he believes that he is the "Schlusstein des millionen-jährig bisher Geschehenen" (I, 449). His life, he feels, has been "eben nichts als Trödel," and he expects those who will come after him to add it "zu dem andern Trödel der Jahrtausende" (I, 448). As in Der Hochwald, Jodokus's castle, the symbol of his existence and that of his forefathers, begins to crumble even while he is alive. When Heinrich von Scharnast visits it some years later, he discovers that nature has taken over

and that the buildings are all in a state of decay.

Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel encounters a similar predicament in spite of the fact that he too has sired a child. He sees his daughter for only a moment at the castle in France while she is still very young, and after that time he has no further association with her. Thus he never knows the joys of parenthood or the contentment engendered by a child's company in his old age. He dies lonely and forgotten. His activities on his estate lack ultimate purpose, for although he wills his possessions to his daughter, she never takes up residence there, and the holdings rapidly fall into ruin after his death. At the end of the novella the author describes how all has decayed: "Das Frühglöcklein tönt noch wie sonst, der Bach rauscht wie sonst--aber auf dem alten Hause ist es heutzutage ein trauriger, betrübter Anblick unter den Trümmern der verkommenden Reste" (II, 413). Not only does the state of decay suggest that Hugo has been unfruitful in his life's activities, but it also implies that he, like the other protagonists who have met with failure in life, leaves no evidence of his existence behind, that for him too there is no hope for continuity after death.

Abdias and the central figure in Turmalin each have a daughter who spends her entire childhood and adolescent years with her father. Because of state of mental imbalance the "Rentherr," however, is incapable of appreciating the presence of a child at his side. There is no evidence to suggest that he harbours more than instinctive parental

feelings for his daughter. He keeps her imprisoned in their dark basement apartment, provides her with only the barest necessities of life, and accords her an education which is bizarre at best. The decaying tenement building in which his apartment is located has become black with age, dust and mud blanket the doors and windows, and there are plans to demolish the structure. The building not only serves as a fitting symbol of the man's failure in life, but also suggests that for him too death will bring extinction. Abdias, on the other hand, devotes his love and attention to his daughter Ditha and structures his life to what he believes are her needs. A rewarding relationship based on affection and understanding develops between father and child, and Abdias experiences several happy years in her company. Yet Ditha is killed before she reaches adulthood, and her father faces solitude in his old age. Moreover, his life's activities prove to have been in vain; his flourishing farm is taken over by the descendants of a business acquaintance.

In Der Hagestolz Stifter links the theme of failed life closely to the theme of childlessness. The recluse, perhaps more than most other figures, is tragically affected by his lack of offspring. Early in the story, the author describes the old bachelor's problem: "Er hatte nie Kinder gehabt und nie eine Qual oder Freude an Kindern erlebt, es trat daher keines in den Schatten, den er von der Bank auf den Sand warf" (III, 12-13). In his old age the "Hagestolz" deeply regrets his earlier decision not to get married. Now he

feels deprived of the affection and companionship which descendants at his side would provide. The absence of children makes the loneliness of his later years seem complete. Furthermore, he is disappointed that the opportunity to raise and educate his own children was denied him. To his nephew Victor he complains that even the occasion to adopt did not present itself: "'Es hat mir niemand ein Kind geschenkt'" (III, 118), and he deplores the fact that Ludmilla and not he was entrusted with Victor's upbringing: "'Dein Vater hätte dich mir geben sollen'" (III, 119). Most important, however, the recluse believes that descendants would give his life some degree of permanence. He feels that because he has no issue, there is no bond with the future: "'Mit meinem Tode fällt alles dahin, was ich als Ich gewesen bin'" (III, 122). Werner Kohlschmidt points out that the continuance which a child might provide is "die einzige im Gesichtskreis des Hagestolzes auftauchende Möglichkeit der Todesüberwindung."¹⁴

Because the "Hagestolz" believes that in his case the end of life will be extinction, he lives in constant fear of death. "Der Greis sass an dem Hause und zitterte vor dem Sterben" (III, 12), the author informs us at the beginning of the novella. The recluse is not only afraid of his dogs because he believes that they might take his life, but he also shaves himself so as to make it less opportune for his servants to murder him. He bolts the doors behind himself as he enters each room. The complicated mechanical locking devices which secure the doors in his house, the bars and

shutters on the windows, and the wall which surrounds his property serve not only to shut out life as it exists in the outside world, but also to protect the occupant from death. In fact, the old man's retreat into isolation on his island can be interpreted not only as an escape from life with society but also--paradoxical as it may sound--as a flight from death. Linked to the recluse's fear of death is his awareness of life's transiency. He is painfully conscious of the inexorable passing of time and experiences time exclusively as the despoiler of life. Life, he says to Victor, is "'ein unabsehbares Feld, wenn man es von vorne ansieht, und es ist kaum zwei Spannen lang, wenn man am Ende zurückschaut'" (III, 122), and a few lines later he adds: "'Darum möchte man die Hände ausstrecken, um nicht fort zu müssen, weil man so viel versäumt hat'" (III, 122). Because he views time as destructive, there are no clocks to be found in his home, and the remoteness of the island ensures that the striking of any village clock cannot be heard. In view of the fact that the "Hagestolz" related to time improperly in his earlier days, he more readily becomes its prey. Steffen formulates the recluse's relationship to time in the following manner: "Jede dem Menschen zugemessene Zeit bleibt kurz, aber das Alter ist vor allem dann der unheimliche Dämmerungsfalter, wenn das vorausliegende Leben durch die Schuld des Lebenden, der die lebendigste Tat, die Heirat, nicht gewagt hat, um seinen Gehalt gekommen ist."¹⁵

The adaptation of the Biblical parable of the barren

fig tree which forms the closing paragraph of the novella perhaps describes best of all the unenviable situation of the "Hagestolz." Like the barren tree which the gardener finally discards after the last leaf has dropped off, the recluse has no progeny and leaves no trace of his existence behind: "'Dann wird der Baum aus dem Garten weggetan und seine Stelle wird weiters verwendet. Die übrigen Gewächse aber blühen und gedeihen fort, und keines kann sagen, dass es aus seinen Körnern entsprossen ist und die süßen Früchte tragen wird wie er'" (III, 142). Whereas the productive individual may continue to exist in successive generations of descendants, the recluse is "aus allen denselben ausgetilgt, weil sein Dasein kein Bild geprägt hat, seine Sprossen nicht mit hinuntergehen in dem Strome der Zeit" (III, 142). To be sure, the author admits that nothing on earth is immortal, that some day all life and the earth itself will perish, but the childless "Hagestolz" "geht ... eher unter, weil an ihm schon alles im Sinken begriffen ist, während er noch atmet und während er noch lebt" (III, 142). The crumbling buildings on the island, the decaying orchard--adjectives like "tot", "verwildert," "verkommen," "morsch" and "verkümmert" are used repeatedly by Stifter in his description--and even the old dogs of the recluse are the symbols of his decline.

The problem which the "Hagestolz" faces stands in contrast to Ludmilla's position in life. She has experienced the rewards of raising not only her own daughter but her adopted son Victor, and she can enjoy their companionship.

in the evening of her life. Otto Pouzar adds: "Ihr Leben wird nie umsonst gewesen sein, ihr edles Menschentum wird fortwirken, so wie ihr Leib in dem ihrer Tochter fortblüht."¹⁶ Although she also on occasion encounters the melancholy of old age, she does not view the passing of time as negative. She looks forward to each new day with confidence and in expectation "'da die Welt so schön ist und immer noch schöner wird, je länger man lebt'" (III, 18). She too is aware of the transitoriness of life, but she also believes: "'Wenn man älter wird, lernt man die Dinge und Weile, welche auch noch immer kürzer wird, erst recht schätzen'" (III, 18). Unlike the embittered old man on his remote island, she does not regard the past as spent and unsubstantial, for she has been fruitful in her life's activities.

In an attempt to mitigate the loneliness of his old age as well as to satisfy his desire to have at least some influence on the molding of an adolescent--and thereby perhaps to forge a very small link with the future-- the "Hagestolz" requests his nephew's presence on the island for a period of time. He justifies his invitation in the following manner: "'Ich wollte dich sehen. Ich wollte doch deine Augen, deine Haare, deine Glieder, und wie du sonst bist, sehen, so wie man einen Sohn ansieht'" (III, 118). Although Victor, when he first arrives at his uncle's home, is taken aback by his bitterness and hardheartedness and there is little rapport between them, a reconciliation takes place toward the end of Victor's stay, and they gain each other's respect and affection.

Alexander Gelley points out that "it is in the recognition of the uncle's irredeemable despair that Victor's hate and amazement are transformed into love."¹⁷ Although the recluse wins his nephew's affection, his loneliness is alleviated only temporarily because Victor leaves the island again. While his presence on the island brings only brief relief to his uncle's loneliness, Victor does profit from his visit. The old man not only manages to exercise some influence on his nephew's development during the visit, but because over the years, unknown to anyone, he has successfully handled his financial affairs, he is able to chart a path for his future. As a consequence of the confrontation with his uncle, Victor conquers two flaws in his character, his "laming melancholy" and his "hypersensitive consciousness of life's transience,"¹⁸ as Alexander Gelley calls them. Thus the boy is better equipped to avoid the mistakes which the recluse made in his life and which led to his hopeless situation. Not only does Victor profit from the advice which his uncle dispenses, but that embittered, despairing figure also serves as a warning. The fact that the "Hagestolz" has a positive influence on the molding of a young individual--and in so doing prevents for that person a fate similar to his own--sets him apart from the other characters discussed up to this point. It makes his failure in life seem less extensive than theirs. Otto Pouzar reaches a similar conclusion when he writes:

"Und indem er für seinen Neffen stofflich und geistig sorgt, gibt er im letzten Augenblicke noch auch seinem verfehlten

Leben einen Sinn."¹⁹

Although her relationship with her husband is a rewarding one, Korona in Der Waldgänger is deeply troubled by the fact that they have no children. She believes: "'Zu einem der ersten, vielleicht zu dem allerersten Rechte und zu der holdesten Pflicht der Menschen gehört es, Kinder zu haben; darum hat Gott die beiden Geschlechter mit solcher Freude aneinander gebunden, ausser der es nichts Freudenreicheres gibt, wenn nicht das Gefühl der Eltern noch süsser sein mag und die Pflicht derselben noch mehr in das Herz gewachsen'" (V, 133-34). She not only feels that children provide their parents with love and companionship, particularly in their old age, but considers it equally important "'dass der Mensch... die menschlich und göttlich gesetzlichen Mittel ergreife, die Welt in einem kleinen Teilchen durch seine Kinder fortblühen zu machen'" (V, 134). Yet she never remarries in spite of her strong feelings on parenthood. As a consequence, her later life is not enriched by children at her side, and she gains no measure of continuity after death.

Although Georg's second marriage is blessed with two children, the relationship between father and sons does not appear to be a warm one. The boys sleep in their mother's room, and after they have left home, they never return and rarely, if ever, communicate with their father. The author contrasts Georg's situation with old Adam's position in life. While the former has lost almost all contact with his children, the latter lives out the remainder of his days in the midst

of his many descendants (V, 81-82). While Adam sits contented in the sunshine, his descendants continue his life-work.

Like the "Hagestolz," Georg attempts to compensate for the absence of children at his side by gaining the affection of a young boy. Simon's presence not only alleviates Georg's loneliness for a few years, but he also gains satisfaction from instructing the boy in the way of the world and teaching him to read. However, just as Victor must leave his uncle again, Simon goes away to learn a trade, and the "Waldgänger" is once more utterly alone.

Lack of Meaningful Activity

Whereas Stifter's successful figures channel their energy and resources into useful work which not only benefits them as individuals but also the members of the community in which they live, the unsuccessful characters in their secluded spheres more often than not pursue no meaningful activity. While the former derive pleasure and satisfaction from engaging in a variety of daily functions, the latter prefer to while away their time by sitting idle or at best by performing some fruitless task. It appears that as life has lost its meaning for them, so too has any kind of functional activity forfeited its purpose. Stifter says little about the many decades the sisters in Der Hochwald continue to live in their burnt-out castle because there simply is nothing to report; the two women remain inactive until the end of their days.

The fact that their residence retains the appearance of a ruin in spite of all attempts to restore it, reflects on an external level the physical and mental inertia of its inhabitants. Johanna and Klarissa simply lack the drive and vigour which would be required to make possible the reconstruction of their home.

Before the death of his wife the life of Jodokus in Die Narrenburg is filled with restless activity. He travels extensively, serves as a soldier and like his forefathers expends a great deal of energy in erecting and refurbishing a number of buildings within the walls of his castle. Jodokus, as Heinrich Mettler points out, "verherrlichte die Tat über alles."²⁰ Yet once Chelion has died, he abruptly ceases all activity. His vision that he is the focal point of the universe has been shattered, and all further deeds seem pointless. He never again sets foot outside of his domain, dismisses his employees, and allows his holdings to decay. Jodokus's idleness stands in contrast to the unceasing activity which begins on the hill once Heinrich von Scharnast inherits the castle. Unlike Jodokus and his forebears, Heinrich does not erect new buildings in a frenzied quest for originality but builds on old foundations and repairs the structures which are already standing.

Abdias too is very active before it becomes apparent that his existence has ended in failure. Throughout his earlier life, he engages in many ventures to increase his earthly possessions, and after his arrival in Europe, he

assiduously cultivates the soil on his farm. Once Ditha has died, however, he no longer exhibits any interest in the affairs of his estate but is content to sit in the sun. Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel, on the other hand, manages his farm efficiently until the end of his days: "Er versammelte seine Knechte und Leute um sich, gab ihnen Befehle, verbesserte sein Anwesen und tat den Leuten, die in der Gegend wohnten, Gutes" (II, 413). Yet he does not find happiness in these activities, and it becomes clear that they lack purpose, for he has no descendants who might benefit from his labours. Hugo's holdings flourish while he is alive, but fall rapidly into ruin after his death.

It appears that the "Rentherr" in Turmalin does not pursue a useful occupation at any time in his life. He plays no active part in society whatsoever and apparently lives on his private income. The author's choice of the label "Rentherr" has a special significance. The "Rentherr" occupies himself with numerous but meaningless hobbies ranging from writing poetry to painting and spends a great deal of time viewing the portraits of famous personalities which cover the walls of his apartment. Although later in his old age he plays the flute in public places to provide for himself and his child, his activities as a wandering musician cannot be classified as substantial, since his bizarre manner of playing his instrument only reflects his mental imbalance. Furthermore, although he has been hired to act as a concierge for the old building in which his apartment is located, he

scarcely ever performs his duties.

While discussing the requisites of a successful existence with his nephew, the "Hagestolz" remarks that every individual exists for himself, but that only the person who channels all of his resources into useful work and activity is able to bring his life to fruition and enjoy its rewards (III, 121). He adds that the individual who makes use of his capacities in that manner is also of greatest benefit to others. The old man's comments stand in contradiction to his own way of life. Having failed to bring his existence into balance, he makes virtually no attempt to pursue any activity which might be of benefit to anyone, and he thus dissipates his faculties. He has structured his life on the island according to a scheme, but that scheme lacks significance. He spends a large part of his day, not unlike Abdias, sitting in the sun, or he occupies himself with insubstantial tasks. Like many of Stifter's figures who have succeeded in life, the recluse is a collector of such things as stuffed birds, firearms and old books. However, his collection serves no significant purpose. It is made up of meaningless objects which he simply stores and allows to gather dust. Alexander Gelley believes that "the reverend spirit which prompts Risach [in Der Nachsommer] to restore old furnishings or Heinrich's scientific curiosity are significantly absent in him."²¹ It is only after Victor has come to the island that the recluse devotes any time to his collection. The day after the boy has arrived, the "Hagestolz" in a timid, unconscious attempt at putting

some sense of order and purpose back into his life cleans the dust off his mounted birds. Yet the old man's preoccupation with those lifeless objects in the presence of a boy whose face reflects "Lebenslust und Kraft" (III, 85-86) only reveals the emptiness of his life. Susi Gröble remarks on this point: "In seiner Beschäftigung mit dem toten Vogel spiegelt sich ... sein Unvermögen, den Zugang zum Leben zu finden."²² The meals of the "Hagestolz" are equally symbolic; they also reflect the man's inability to engage in meaningful activity. Although he points out to his nephew that the individual who overemphasizes the importance of a basic physical drive such as hunger is unbalanced and serves as a dangerous model for his fellow-beings (III, 121), he himself devotes excessive attention to food. The act of eating has become for him an all-important ritual. The extravagant meals which the recluse consumes stand in contrast to the simple dishes which are served in Ludmilla's home. The fact that he remains haggard, and that his clothes hang loosely on him in spite of his lavish dinners, only underscores the shallowness of his actions.

Although the activities in which the recluse engages are for the most part unfruitful, his daily routine does not lack substance entirely. For one thing, he devotes at least a part of his time to the care of a small flower garden which he has established near his house. This parcel of cultivated land stands out like an oasis amidst the overgrown wilderness which covers the entire island. Victor perceives this small

area as "das Freundlichste dieser Umgebung" (III, 88). The act of gardening adds a positive note to the old man's life because the tasks of a gardener are similar to those of the farmer--a profession which the author regards as most fulfilling and rewarding, and one which Victor is encouraged to take up because, by devoting himself to agriculture, he will be able to employ all of his faculties. The recluse's gardening activities also link his way of life to some degree with that of Ludmilla, who considers her work in her vegetable garden and in her orchard an enriching experience. Moreover, it has already been noted that the "Hagestolz" over the years has devoted some time to the management of his nephew's financial affairs and that during Victor's visit he takes pains to exert a positive influence on the shaping of his character. The fact that the uncle's activities do not entirely lack significance once again suggests that his failure in life is not as all-encompassing of that of the other negative protagonists.

The "Waldgänger," in contrast to many of the other unsuccessful characters, engages in activities which not only occupy his time, but also give some purpose to his failed life. He wanders through the forests of the region collecting insects and plants. He devotes considerable time to preparing the collected objects and putting them on display so that the children of the neighbourhood can view them and learn something about nature. The fact that his collection serves a pedagogical function indicates that his daily routine is not without

significance. To be sure, the villagers laugh about Georg's activities, but the narrator of the story expressly adds that they only do so "weil sie nicht sahen, wozu das sei" (V, 60). His habit of accumulating objects of nature also provides a link to the time when he was successful in life. Then it was his hobby to collect minerals and rocks, an activity which gave him much pleasure. Moreover, the fact that he devotes many hours to the education of Simon, the "Hegerbube," further suggests that his later years, like those of the "Hagestolz," are not entirely wasted.

Loss of Contact with Nature

The importance which Stifter places on nature in his prose is perhaps unequalled in the literature of his era. Few writers in German have rendered a more powerful or vivid description of landscape. Nature is not merely a backdrop or a decoration, but has a decided impact on man. Nature, according to Joachim Müller, "ist in Stifters Dichtung so eigenständigen Wesens, dass sie sich ebenbürtig dem in ihrer Mitte handelnden oder leidenden Menschen zugesellt. Mensch und Natur entfalten sich als gleichwertige Daseinsmanifestationen in einer analogen und in einer schicksalshaften Entsprechung."²³ Although nature does at times manifest itself as a menacing force which threatens the individual with destruction, it more often than not shows itself in a benevolent mood. It offers consolation, contentment, guidance and even a livelihood

to those who are responsive to its benignity, and it plays a significant part in their struggle to succeed in life. The figures who are successful in life exist in harmony with nature: they marvel at its splendour and diversity, attentively listen to its message, seek respite in it when troubled and carefully cultivate it. Gregor in Der Hochwald develops and matures in communion with nature and finds fulfilment in it. In Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters nature has a therapeutic effect on the main character, Augustinus. At a critical time in his life, his reawakened awareness of the beauty and orderliness in nature prevents him from laying hand on himself, and by subsequently living in close proximity to nature he is able to reorganize his life successfully. In Der Waldsteig (1850) too, nature has healing powers. Tiburius, the main figure, is cured of his physical and mental afflictions and finds happiness in life through exposure to the forest, the fresh air and the sunshine, and through contact with a child of nature. The heroine of Brigitta is able to gain a livelihood and create a new, fruitful life for herself by transforming previously barren land into a beautiful, productive garden.

It appears on examining only a few of the author's successful figures--there are, to be sure, many others--that developing and maintaining a healthy relationship with nature is essential if the individual wishes to achieve and sustain a fruitful and stable existence. Man is a product of nature; it is his cradle, and he must constantly seek its presence

and live according to its laws. Most of the characters who have failed in life do not live in close communion with nature in spite of the fact that their places of residence are often set in "natural" surroundings. Although several of those figures have had connexions with nature earlier in life, they draw apart from it once their failure manifests itself. To be sure, the two girls in Der Hochwald become enchanted by the splendour and stillness of the forest while on their way to their retreat and later begin to appreciate the harmony in nature and the sense of tranquility and security which nature can bestow on the anguished, bewildered human soul. Nevertheless, they never become, as Gregor, their mentor and protector, has been able to do, part of it. Once Ronald, the emissary of that other sphere, the cruel, imperfect world of man shatters the serenity of the forest with his rifle shot, "their peace of mind is gone, they are no longer receptive to the message of the forest, their nerves are blunted to the voice of great Nature in her unchanging majesty and wisdom, and so they are lured back into a world of destruction and death, of mourning and loneliness."²⁴

When the sisters leave the forest and return to their family castle where they will live out their unavailing lives, they have lost touch with nature entirely, and there is no indication in the novella that they again establish contact with it. Their detachment from nature is symbolically represented by the mutilated landscape surrounding their burnt-out castle.

In his quest to lay claim to the earth and the stars and to attain the love of God and mankind, Jodokus in Die Narrenburg is oblivious to the beauty and harmony of the universe. Unlike Heinrich, who succeeds him as the master of the fools' castle, he is incapable of establishing a rewarding relationship with nature even late in life when he lives in a simple stone hut at the foot of the hill. What is more, in his desire to be the "Mittelpunkt des All" (I, 449), he violates the natural order of things, which for Stifter is akin to blasphemy and must surely evoke dire consequences. The fact that Chelion, the child of nature par excellence--"sie kannte kein anderes Glück, als im Walde zu leben, Früchte zu geniessen, Blumen zu pflücken ..." (I, 452)--dies once he marries her and uproots her, not only serves to illustrate his alienation from nature but, more important, attests to the destructive influence which he has on nature. Abdias, on the other hand, is shown as a person who is bound closely to the earth and to nature from an early age. He lives in communion with the African desert which is his home for many years, amiably tends to the animals in his charge, and later in Europe is able to transform a barren landscape into a flowering garden. Moreover, he is the only one who can communicate with Ditha, who is intimately a part of nature. Yet once Ditha is killed, Abdias makes no attempt to seek consolation or to gather the strength in nature to overcome that crisis. Instead, he

simply withdraws to an inner world. During the last three decades of his life he remains totally detached from nature.

Although Hugo Almot in his youth develops an attachment to the glaciers, valleys and brooks of the remote mountain region in which he grows up, he no longer cultivates that contact once he takes leave of his native valley and moves into the city. He never again expresses the feelings of joy about the world around him which, the author tells us, Hugo had experienced so often in his youth (II, 350). When, many years later, he reaches the crisis which determines his fate, he has lost touch with nature altogether. Nature displays an indifferent, indeed, hostile mood: it is a cold November day, and the landscape around the castle appears barren and lifeless. Nature does not, as is the case in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters or Der Waldsteig, have a therapeutic effect on the protagonist. It does not help him to overcome his crisis in life, and it does not offer him consolation after it has become apparent that he has failed to master that crisis. Although Hugo returns to his family estate after his portentous confrontation with Cöleste, there is no evidence to suggest that he renews his former connexion with nature in spite of the fact that it provides him with a livelihood. Even the glacier "den er sonst in der Jugend gerne besucht hatte" (II, 413) no longer holds any significance for him.

Whereas most of the other figures have some association with nature in their earlier years, the "Rentherr" in Turmalin

lives detached from it throughout his life. Nature is significantly absent from the illusionary world which he has created for himself in his apartment at the beginning of the novella. He not only continues to live apart from nature but later also prevents his daughter from establishing contact with it by imprisoning her in the dismal basement room of the decaying building.

The "Hagestolz" does not live completely apart from nature in his old age. He keeps a small flower garden to which he devotes a few moments of his day. Moreover, although he disdains and even fears the three dogs which live with him and only begins to appreciate them after he has witnessed the close relationship which exists between Victor and his animal, the fact that he keeps animals at all in his home further demonstrates that he has not lost contact with nature altogether. Nevertheless, the relationship which he maintains with nature is not a close one. That becomes obvious if it is considered in the light of Victor's attitude toward the landscape and the living things around him. While the recluse never ventures far from his residence and does not appreciate the natural beauty of his island, his nephew delights in exploring it and marvels at its setting and the diversity of its flora and fauna. Whereas Victor listens with reverence to the songs of living birds, his uncle shows interest only in the stuffed ones in his cabinet. Although the "Hagestolz" sustains some ties with nature, they are not strong enough

to permit him to seek consolation or deliverance in that sphere.

Georg in Der Waldgänger, on the other hand, continues to live in rapport with nature even in his old age. Because he shunned human company as a student, his heart became drawn to nature. "Er liebte diese Wälder sehr, ging gerne in ihnen herum und suchte nach allerlei Gegenständen in denselben" (V, 97), we read. Later he chose a location in the midst of nature to build his home. Because he established close ties with nature in his youth and maintained that contact through his adult years, the "Waldgänger" lives in harmony with the landscape even after it has become apparent that he has failed in life.

It has become evident not only that the attempts of each of the above protagonists to succeed in life have been abortive, but that the consequences of their failure are remarkably similar. All of the figures are confronted with essentially the same predicament in their later years. They are condemned to drift slowly toward death and oblivion in a state of hopelessness and lethargy, out of touch with their fellow men and the world around them. They have no spouse or children at their side with whom to share their later years and who might mitigate their loneliness. The absence of descendants makes them much more readily the prey of passing time. Unlike the successful figures, these individuals more often than not pursue no activities which

could be considered functional or rewarding, and with one exception, they do not live in rapport with nature in spite of the fact that it often exists in abundance in their proximity. Although they continue to live for many years after their failure in life has become apparent, one cannot really speak of living in their case. It is simply waiting for death to occur. They exist in a physical sense, but they are already dead within.

Having defined the concept of failed life, the next steps in this investigation appear obvious. Some attention must be devoted to the immediate cause of the characters' decline, namely the existential crises which they encounter and which they are unable to surmount. Then the various underlying reasons which contribute to their downfall will be examined.

NOTES

- 1 Eric Blackall, "Das alte Siegel," in Adalbert Stifter: Studien und Interpretationen. Gedenkschrift zum 100. Todestage, ed. Lothar Stiehm (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 77.
- 2 Erich Burgstaller, "Zur künstlerischen Gestalt von Adalbert Stifters Narrenburg," Seminar, 12 (1976), 101.
- 3 Otto Pouzar, Ideen und Probleme in Adalbert Stifters Dichtungen (Reichenberg, 1928; reprint ed., Hildesheim, 1973), p. 42.
- 4 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen, p. 150.
- 5 Hans Dietrich Irmischer, Adalbert Stifter: Wirklichkeitserfahrung und gegenständliche Darstellung, p. 220.
- 6 Margaret Gump, Adalbert Stifter, p. 68.
- 7 Adalbert Stifter, Briefe, ed. Friedrich Seebass (Tübingen, 1936), p. 24.
- 8 Steffen, p. 179.
- 9 Briefe, p. 71.
- 10 Eric Blackall, Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study, p. 241.
- 11 Rosemarie Hunter, "Kinderlosigkeit und Eschatologie bei Stifter," p. 276.
- 12 Briefe, p. 281.

13 Steffen, p. 70.

14 Werner Kohlschmidt, "Leben und Tod in Stifters Studien,"
p. 224.

15 Steffen, p. 116.

16 Pouzar, pp. 42-43.

17 Alexander Gelley, "Stifter's Der Hagestolz, an Interpretation," p. 68.

18 Ibid., p. 61.

19 Pouzar, p. 44.

20 Heinrich Mettler, Natur in Stifters frühen "Studien:"
Zu Stifters gegenständlichem Stil (Zürich, 1968), p. 49.

21 Gelley, p. 68.

22 Susi Gröble, Schuld und Sühne im Werk Adalbert Stifters
(Bern, 1965), p. 94.

23 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung,
p. 27.

24 Blackall, Stifter, p. 118.

IV

THE CRISIS IN LIFE

In his early works Stifter portrays almost all human existence as endangered; in the stories written or conceived before the revolution of 1848 there are relatively few figures whose lives are not exposed at one point or another to the risk of total failure. The threat to the individual's existence may reveal itself in several exigencies culminating in one final climactic moment, as is the case with Abdias, whose being is jeopardized several times before the decisive crisis arrives in the form of his daughter's death. Much more frequently, however, the danger manifests itself suddenly at a single, acute juncture. The crisis--in whichever form it arrives-- has a profound effect on the life of the protagonist. It is a turning point in his life, for it determines whether or not he will be successful in achieving a meaningful existence. During the crisis the self is shaken to the depths of its being and runs the risk of disintegration. A majority of Stifter's figures are able to overcome the crisis and thus bring their lives into balance. For them the conquest of the crisis becomes a healing process which furnishes them with the strength to adjust to life. Their experience is a test, a moral lesson which enables them to restructure their lives successfully. The failing characters, on the other hand, do not respond favourably to the test. They cannot cope with the crisis. After that point in time

contentment is no longer possible for them.

The crisis which determines the future of the two sisters in Der Hochwald is preceded by the rifle shot which suddenly shatters the innocence and tranquility of the forest. The shot is an ill omen of events to come. After the noise has echoed across the valley, a sense of anxiety seizes the two women, and the peace of mind they had acquired during their months in the woods is gone. They sense that a portentous event is about to take place: "Eine gewisse Schwüle und Angst lag über dem Tale und den Herzen, als müsse jetzt und jetzt etwas geschehen" (I, 312). When Klarissa discovers that the intruder is Ronald, her childhood love, "ein ungeheuer Empfinden" (I, 314) takes possession of her, and her rekindled longing for the young man draws her from the protected sphere of nature into the human realm of pain and destruction of which he is a part. Although she attempts to restrain her passion when she meets Ronald again, she is once more enchanted by him and finally throws herself "zitternd vor Übermacht des Gefühles" (I, 326) into his arms. Not unlike the butterflies which, as Johanna believes, are lured into life by the last warm rays of the autumn sun only to succumb to the frost of the approaching winter (I, 336), Klarissa is attracted by what will prove to be an illusion of happiness. By allowing her emotions free play at that critical point in her life, she realizes a moment of bliss, but also causes her own and her sister's future unhappiness. After Ronald has

left for the fateful encounter at Wittinghausen castle, nature returns to its timeless tranquil state, but, the author tells us, "Klarissa war nicht mehr ruhig--Johanna nicht mehr glücklich" (I, 333). Although the consequences of Klarissa's failure to surmount her crisis in life will not become apparent until some time later, the sisters are aware that a turning point in their lives has been reached.

In Der Hochwald the author points out that the human being often is able to anticipate the arrival of an unpropitious event. Like Klarissa and Johanna, Jodokus in Die Narrenburg has a foreboding of evil before he encounters the crisis which will give rise to the impoverishment of his later years. As he is returning to Rothenstein castle after a journey, he is struck by the premonition that a catastrophe is about to occur. Once he arrives at the castle, he becomes aware of the relationship between his wife and his brother. Chelion had aroused the passion of Sixtus and for a fleeting moment had responded to the latter's amorous advances. Jodokus becomes incensed at her apparent unfaithfulness, and, momentarily unable to control his jealousy, he plans to murder the girl. Although he does not carry out his scheme, his outburst eventually leads to Chelion's death and to his own downfall. Once Chelion has seen the murderous intent in her husband's eyes, she loses the confidence in him which she requires in order to survive. Jodokus himself realizes later that by raising his hand with

the intention of killing another human being he has violated the moral code of the universe. In his memoirs he writes: "Wer einmal den Arm erhob zum Todschlage eines seiner Mitgeschöpfe, wenn er ihn auch wieder zurückzog, dem kann man nicht mehr trauen; er steht jenseits des Gesetzes, dem wir Unverletzlichkeit zutrauen, und er kann das frevle Spiel jeden Augenblick wiederholen" (I, 463). Jodokus's inability to control his passion even momentarily lays the foundation for his own calamity because after Chelion's death life loses its meaning for him.

In Das alte Siegel Hugo Almot's life reaches its crisis when after eleven years he unexpectedly meets Cöleste again at her castle in France. Cöleste has furnished the rooms where their reunion takes place exactly like those of the "Lindenhäuschen," and the opportunity of entering a warm and enriching life presents itself to Hugo once more. It appears that nothing stands in the way of a belated happy union. After their long separation they greet each other with great joy, and when Cöleste embraces him, Hugo feels "das ganze eherne Rad des Krieges" lifting from his heart, and he realizes "dass er lange, lange nicht gelebt habe" (II, 412). However, the happiness which they have regained proves to be an illusion; when the woman reveals her past history to him, Hugo's heart turns to stone. Clinging to his high principles, he cannot accept the fact that she had deceived him eleven years ago, and that as a result, he had

loved a married woman. He feels that she had acted wrongly toward him and her husband, and that he now cannot ever trust her again. Although Cöleste beseeches him to allow her to demonstrate her purity and innocence, Hugo's rigid sense of honour--fittingly symbolized by the solid castle and the dark oaks which surround it (II, 401)--does not permit him to become "'der Gatte einer Witwe . . . , von dem sie sagen, dass er schon vor dem Tode ihres Mannes mit ihr im Einverständnisse gewesen sei'" (II, 409). Even the sight of the child whom he has fathered does not move him to cast aside his code of honour. By clinging to a set of abstract values, by being unable to resolve the conflict between honour and humanity, Hugo sacrifices his love for Cöleste and thus destroys his happiness.

The critical moment at the castle in France is not the only one which Hugo encounters in his life. It is preceded by a juncture at the little house in the suburbs where Cöleste had first received him and where they had grown to love each other passionately. The earlier crisis to some extent anticipates the later one. One dark night, as Hugo is leaving Cöleste, he is suddenly overwhelmed by doubts about the purity of their love. Disturbed by the unlived-in atmosphere of the house and Cöleste's frequent spells of sadness which overshadow their moments together, Hugo cries out: "'Das ist die Liebe nicht, das ist nicht ihr reiner, goldner, seliger Strahl, wie er immer vorgeschwebt'" (II, 392). The call of a caged and presumably blinded finch

which echoes through the darkened street at precisely that moment reminds him of the songs of the birds in his home in the mountains, and he visualizes his aged, innocent father standing in front of the house. The memory of his father-- which would inevitably remind him of the latter's legacy, the ancient seal--prevents Hugo from visiting Cöleste for several days. His entrapment in the meshes of the abstract code of honour inherited from his father and his resultant inability to recognize the innocence of the girl are symbolized by the image of the imprisoned and blinded bird. When Hugo is finally drawn back to the "Lindenhäuschen," it is deserted. His obsession with his inhumane code of values causes the long and painful separation from Cöleste and paves the way for the final crisis in France.

In Der Hagestolz the unresolved crisis which gives rise to the recluse's failure in life is not directly depicted in the story, but is buried in the past. The disclosure of that portentous incident is withheld until the end of the novella; it is only after ties have been established between them that the "Hagestolz" reveals to Victor the secret of his relationship to Ludmilla. Half a century before, the recluse had made Ludmilla the centre of his life, but she had rejected him in favour of his brother Hippolyt. When the "Hagestolz" suddenly witnessed the couple's embrace, he was seized by a fit of jealous rage, and his first impulse was to plan the murder of his brother. However, he did not effectuate that scheme, but instead

exacted his revenge on Ludmilla by mocking her after Hippolyt had left her for another woman. With malignant joy he pointed out to her "'wie sie ihren Verstand und ihr Herz nicht verwenden konnte'" (III, 127). After that malicious outburst a union between them was impossible. By being unable to control his jealousy, and above all by subsequently treating Ludmilla with disdain during her crisis, the recluse forfeited his chance for happiness. Although he failed to master his crisis at an early age, the full consequences of his failure do not become apparent until later in life.

The progression toward the crisis in Turmalin follows the pattern already encountered in previous works. Once again the motif of infidelity plays a major role. The life of the "Rentherr" enters its crisis when he discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him with his closest friend, Dall. In a fit of rage the "Rentherr" plans to kill his rival, but he cannot locate him in spite of an extensive search. Eventually he calms down and even admits to his wife that he himself is to an extent responsible for her infidelity because he had invited the actor into their home. Although the "Rentherr" is willing to forgive his wife, she suddenly leaves both him and her baby. Stifter omits from the story any explanation for her abrupt departure; he leaves it to the reader to decide whether she leaves because she cannot excuse her actions, or because she feels, as Eve Mason points out, that "death might be preferable to a life

of silence and total absence of communication, of which, as the result of her contact with Dall, she must have become unbearably conscious."¹ After his wife's disappearance, the world collapses about the "Rentherr." Although he had neglected her in the past, she had remained the focal point of his life, and with her disappearance he loses his footing. It seems that only her return will prevent his mind from disintegrating. Konrad Steffen remarks: "Der viermalige Kniefall vor dem Verführer und die viermal mit gefalteten Händen wiederholte Bitte um die Rückgabe der Frau zeigen, wie genau der Rentherr fühlt, dass nur die Wiederherstellung der Ehe sein Leben retten kann."² Because the woman does not return, the mental equilibrium of the "Rentherr" is destroyed. As is the case with so many of Stifter's figures, his happiness in life--indeed his sanity--is dependent entirely on the success of a single relationship, in spite of the fact that that relationship apparently meant little to him before it ended. When it does founder, he cannot accommodate himself to the changed situation. Unable to make a new beginning, he is destined to fail in life.

In Der Waldgänger Korona's disappointment at the childlessness of her marriage reaches a climax at a gathering to which she and her husband have been invited. As she sits inwardly and outwardly "vereinsamt und vereinzelt" (V, 129) among happy children and their proud parents, she becomes more aware than ever before of her own lack of

offspring. A few weeks later she confronts Georg with the suggestion that they should end their relationship. Because their union has remained childless for thirteen years, she feels, it is "'ein misschlungenes Band ..., eine Scheinehe ..., die vor Gott eine unmögliche gewesen ist'" (V, 134-35). Although Georg knows subconsciously that Korona's suggestion is immoral, he finally agrees to the dissolution of their marriage. The divorce is the crucial turning point in their lives and the cause of their future unhappiness, but they do not recognize that until later. Korona is the first to realize that the divorce precipitated the crisis in their lives. By not remarrying, she not only admits to her guilt, but also endures the consequences of that guilt. Georg does not comprehend the profound effect of the separation on his life until thirteen years later. During his chance encounter with Korona he suddenly realizes that he forfeited his happiness by divorcing her.

The sudden death of his daughter causes Abdias to lapse into apathy from which he never recovers. One autumn day, as he watches an approaching storm together with Ditha at the edge of a flax field, the girl is suddenly struck by a lightning bolt. The catastrophe occurs at a moment when she is commenting on the important role the flax plant plays in the lives of men from the cradle to the grave. Just after having spoken of death, she sinks back lifeless against a sheaf of corn. The same force which had given her sight some

months before kisses "dem Kinde mit seiner weichen Flamme das Leben von dem Haupte" (II, 347). Ditha is killed during a period in Abdias's life when it appears that fate has finally bestowed upon him a plethora of good fortune in compensation for years of suffering. In the months preceding the girl's death, Abdias had experienced true happiness at her side. A relationship based on love and spiritual closeness had bound them to each other. The lightning bolt which brings that brief period of contentment to a conclusion leaves Abdias in a stupor. He no longer has the fortitude to make a new start; although he lives on physically for more than thirty years, his intellectual life comes to an end with Ditha's death.

The crucial incident which deprives Abdias of his reason is only the final one in a number of crises confronting him during his lifetime. Unlike the final crisis, however, the preceding ones do not incapacitate him. He rises after each reversal and even manages to accommodate himself in some measure to the changed situation. Nevertheless, each crisis has a negative impact on his life and contributes to his later downfall. Although Abdias does not succumb to the earlier crises, he does not master them either. In every instance the crisis remains unresolved. He gains no insights from his encounters with misfortune; he never contemplates their causes; he never feels compelled to examine his actions; and he makes no serious attempt to alter his life positively,

but simply continues to tread the same path as before. When he falls victim to smallpox in Odessa, he does not interpret the ordeal as a warning from above to mend his ways, but persists in pursuing his former activities: "Den Reichtum suchte er auf allen Wegen, er trotzte ihn bald in glühendem Geize zusammen, bald verschwendete er ihn, und wenn er draussen unter den Menschen war, lud er alle Wollüste auf seinen Leib" (II, 252). In fact, his disfigurement serves only to intensify his sense of vanity: "Abdias war in seidenen Kleidern und glänzenden Waffen ...; denn seit er hässlich war, liebte er den Glanz noch mehr" (II, 254). His vainglory lays the foundation for yet another critical moment, for his fine clothes and equipment betray his secret wealth to Melek and his Bedouins. As a consequence of their attack, Abdias not only is despoiled of most of his precious possessions, but also loses his wife. Thus he becomes the epitome of human misfortune as a direct result of his own vanity.

Yet, at the same time, Melek's raid carries with it the seeds of potential good fortune and redemption. As Abdias takes the little girl whom Deborah has borne him into his arms, "so wurde ihm in seinem Herzen, als fühle er drinnen bereits den Anfang des Heiles, das nie gekommen war und von dem er nie gewusst hatte, wo er es denn suchen sollte--es war nun da, und um Unendliches süsser und linder, als er es sich je gedacht hatte" (II, 261). The new-born child offers Abdias the opportunity for a new beginning,

and he appears initially to change his life for the better. He no longer journeys across the desert in search of riches, but remains at home to care for the child. He eventually takes Ditha to Europe to create a new life for the two of them. He even thanks God "dass er einen solchen Strom sanften Fühlens in das Herz des Menschen zu leiten vermöge" (II, 285). However, the pastoral life which Abdias leads for a period of time in Austria is deceiving because, in spite of external evidence, he has not acquired a new moral outlook. His nature remains unchanged. Above all, he has failed to temper his violence and impulsiveness. The burning desire to take revenge on Melek is still with him, and he continues to make plans for the day when he can travel to Africa and plunge a knife into his adversary's heart. He impulsively kills his dog when the animal behaves in an erratic manner. What is more, Abdias readily reverts to his accustomed way of life when confronted by yet another crisis. The discovery of his daughter's blindness does not prompt him to accord the child an education which would enable her to cope with that handicap, but only revives his lust for wealth. He again becomes obsessed with the idea of amassing a fortune so that the girl might be protected in later life. Abdias feels, as he did in Africa, that only material wealth can provide security. As a result of his disreputable business practices and his avarice he once more becomes "ein Gegenstand des Hasses und des Abscheues" (II, 319).

The final crisis which results in Abdias's downfall is precipitated by the initial phase of a thunderstorm. The thunderstorm not only plays a major role in Abdias, but is also an important leitmotif in Die Narrenburg, Das alte Siegel and Der Hagestolz. When viewed as the manifestation of nature in its chaotic state, the storm--at least in its initial, menacing stage--symbolically represents the human crisis. The crisis is, after all, the intrusion of chaos into the life of the protagonist. It threatens to play havoc with his life, just as the storm threatens to upset the balance and tranquility of nature. However, the menace to nature proves to be entirely ephemeral. The storm is ultimately transformed into rain and hence has a healing effect on nature. The precipitation purifies the air and fosters new plant growth. While nature conquers its crisis and in the long run even benefits from it, the human crisis remains unresolved. Its destructive effect proves to be lasting; the protagonists never recover from the influx of chaos.

The approaching storm does not bring about the crisis facing Jodokus in Die Narrenburg, but instead appears as an accompanying phenomenon--a phenomenon which, nonetheless, dramatically underscores the gravity of the crisis. The thunderstorm not only emphasizes the seriousness of the incident, but also prepares the reader for its arrival. While Jodokus is riding toward his castle on the night of

his wife's infidelity, ominous clouds are gathering in the sky, and sultriness pervades the air. An uncanny stillness envelops the whole landscape. Both rider and horse are daunted by the atmosphere and sense that this is an ill omen of events to come. Lightning flashes illuminate the scene as Jodokus enters his wife's apartments with the flask of poison in his hand. The lightning continues during the encounter between husband and wife, and it is only after Jodokus has left Chelion's chamber and hurled the bottle of poison into an abyss that the clouds dissipate, and nature begins to display a less antagonistic mood:

"Der harte Himmel lösete sich und floss in weiche Schleier ineinander, und einzelne Tropfen schlugen gegen die Baumblätter" (I, 462). A cool, but bright morning follows the stormy night. Nature has overcome the threat of chaos and has returned to its customary tranquil state. Jodokus, on the other hand, has not mastered his crisis, and as a consequence his life remains in disarray permanently.

No thunderstorm threatens in the course of the final confrontation between Hugo and Cöleste in Das alte Siegel. Yet nature shows itself in a threatening mood. The dark clouds in the sky and the biting November wind blowing across the desolate landscape not only disconcert Hugo as he is riding away from Cöleste's castle, but also point to the bleak future facing both protagonists. While no thunderstorm breaks out during the last meeting of the lovers, one does

develop during the much earlier crisis at the "Lindenhäuschen." On the evening in which Hugo leaves the little house after what will prove to be his last rendezvous with Cöleste, foreboding clouds press down heavily upon the buildings of the city. The weather conditions mirror the turmoil within Hugo's soul; the conflict between his passion for the girl on the one hand and his unbending principles on the other. While nature quickly recovers from the intrusion of chaos into its realm, Hugo cannot allay his inner strife. Although that evening he decides to sacrifice his love for the girl to his code of honour, his passion draws him back to the "Lindenhäuschen" a few days later. His soul remains in turmoil throughout the many years he spends in military service.

The motif of the thunderstorm occurs again in the story of the "Hagestolz." However, in contrast to the other novellas, the storm here does not occur during the protagonist's crisis, but instead accompanies the conversation between him and his nephew more than five decades later when the old man tells of his life and the events which led to his downfall long ago. Because it takes place at a time when the recluse attempts to come to terms with his past and, more particularly, the incident which had such a negative impact on his life, the storm not only underscores the momentousness of the crisis, but also represents it symbolically. What is more, the storm in the story's present also

symbolizes a decisive, purifying discharge of emotion on his part. For the first time in his life the old man is able to expose his innermost feelings to another individual. The act of self-disclosure to some extent assuages the ferment within his soul and thus resembles a catharsis for him. The fact that the storm causes little damage on the island while it brings destruction to the surrounding district indicates that the recluse's self-revelment has a benevolent effect on him although it arrives too late to improve his situation in life substantially.

It is evident that the protagonists who fail to reach fulfilment do so ultimately because they are unable to overcome one or more crises in their lives. The crises are tests to which they, unlike the successful figures in Stifter's works, cannot respond adequately. As a consequence, all prospects for success in life vanish. The question which must now be put is: Why are the protagonists unable to conquer the critical situation? Why do they fail while the majority of Stifter's figures succeed in resolving the crises they encounter? The next section of this study will be devoted to an investigation of the various factors that contribute to their failure in life.

NOTES

- 1 Eve Mason, "Stifter's Turmalin: A Reconsideration," p. 352.
- 2 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen, p. 149.

V

THE SOURCES OF FAILED LIFE

Although at the beginning of his career as a writer Stifter did entertain the thought that the individual is exposed to a cruel and inexorable fate that is cast upon him and over which he exercises no control, it was documented earlier¹ that he did not adhere to that belief for very long. He soon came to the conclusion that misfortune does not rain down upon man, but arrives as the consequence of wrong-doing. Yet, unlike many writers, Stifter does not portray wholly negative characters--that is, characters who are basically evil or cruel and who engender disdain in the reader. There are no murderers, liars, thieves, swindlers or other scoundrels to be found in his works; in fact, the author never depicts characters who might be described as totally unworthy. All of his figures, whether they succeed in life or not, generate at least a measure of sympathy in the reader. Nevertheless, although the protagonists who meet with failure in life can hardly be designated as villainous or worthless, they do exhibit serious faults which contribute to their downfall. That is not to say that the figures who bring their lives to fruition do not possess shortcomings as well, but they are able to overcome their deficiencies; they develop and mature and discover the right way to live. What are the serious imperfections which

bar the failing protagonists from achieving a fulfilling life? In the following an attempt will be made at analysing these diverse negative traits under the headings of passion, eccentricity, delusion and lack of education. It will be seen that each protagonist exhibits several of these debilitating traits.

Passion

Throughout his works Stifter distinguishes between love and passion. Whereas he considers love to be ennobling and enriching, he consistently condemns all forms of passion. Early in his writing career he pointed to the differences between the two. "Das ist das Hohe einer naturgerecht entwickelten Seele, dass jenes kranke, empfindelnde und selbstsüchtige Ding, was wir Liebe zu nennen pflegen, was aber in der Tat nur Geschlechtsleidenschaft ist, vor ihr sich scheu verkriecht--und das ist der Adel der rechten Liebe, dass sie vor tausend Millionen Augen offen wandelt und keines dieser Augen sie zu strafen wagt" (I, 162), he writes in Feldblumen (1844). Love, Stifter feels, is God-given and spiritual, a desirable and indeed necessary ingredient of ordinary human happiness. Love has very little to do with sexuality--in fact, sexuality is rarely mentioned in a happy relationship. The author recognizes few distinctions between the diverse kinds of love; the love between a man and a woman differs little from that between parent and child,

or brother and sister. In Feldblumen he calls true love the "zarte Gewebe aus Vernunft und Sitte" (I, 179), and much later in Der Nachsommer (1857) he defines the ideal of love as "'eine eheliche Liebe, die nach den Tagen der feurigen, gewitterartigen Liebe, die den Mann zum Weibe führt, als stille, durchaus aufrichtige, süsse Freundschaft auftritt, die über alles Lob and allen Tadel erhaben ist, und die vielleicht das Spiegelklarste ist, was menschliche Verhältnisse aufzuweisen haben Sie ist innig, ohne Selbstsucht, freut sich mit dem andern zusammen zu sein, sucht seine Tage zu schmücken und zu verlängern, ist zart und hat gleichsam keinen irdischen Ursprung an sich'" (VIII, 228).

Uncontrolled passion, on the other hand, is described in "Über Stand und Würde des Schriftstellers" (1848) as "ein die andern Seelenkräfte überragendes Streben nach einem Sinnlichen ... nach Tierischem" (XIV, 164). Yet passion is more than just an overpowering sensual desire, the author tells us, for the term in its broader context also implies any kind of "Gewalt oder Alleingeltendmachung (Herrschaft, Eifersucht, diese furchtbaren Geister der Menschheit, die sie leider mit dem Tiere, zum Beispiel dem Hunde, gemein hat)" (XIV, 164). Thus passion is interpreted not only as an overwhelming carnal urge, but as any attempt by an individual to place himself in a position of dominance over another being or thing. Put another way, it is the

"rücksichtslose Geltendmachen der eigenen Eigentümlichkeit"

(XIV, 164) in the private as well as the public sphere.

Passion for Stifter is an irrational, bestial urge and as such is the source of any sensuality, anger, egoism, lust for power and violence. It stands in direct opposition to reason, love, self-restraint and morality--the most human qualities in man.

The author denounces passion consistently in his works because he views it as the most objectionable and destructive of man's negative traits. In his comments on the stories by the author Emilie von Binzer, which she published under the title "Mohnkörner," Stifter remarks:

Die nackte Leidenschaft aber an und für sich als ein Schönes hinstellen, erweckt den grössten sittlichen Widerwillen, weil es in der Schöpfung nichts so Unfreies und Peinigendes gibt, als einen von seiner Leidenschaft gebundenen Menschen, der dem Tierischen nachgehen muss und dasselbe oft, wie uns die Geschichte der Menschheit zeigt, mit ungeheuren Kräften und Mitteln ins Werk setzt.... Überall wo im Leben Menschen unter dem Einfluss grosser Leidenschaften handelten, haben sie an denen, auf die ihr Wirken ging, Unheil erzeugt und von ihnen und den andern Hass und Verachtung geerntet.... Gewöhnlich werden Menschen mit grossen Leidenschaften unglückliche Opfer derselben, sie zerstören sich und erlangen meistens auch nicht einmal den Gegenstand der Leidenschaft.²

The protagonist who succumbs to passion becomes unrestrained and immoral; he loses the ability to control his emotions and drives. Like an animal he allows himself to be guided exclusively by his instincts. He yields to a desire to dominate the object of his passion. In fact, the urge to dominate and possess may even lead to the temptation of

wantonly destroying the other individual. The passionate figure becomes alienated from himself and loses contact with reality. Because he focusses his attention on the object of his passion, his picture of the world around him becomes blurred and disarranged. He is no longer capable of differentiating between the real world and a world of fantasy. The lack of clear vision renders any rational decision an impossibility.

Only those who possess the necessary moral strength to suppress their passion are able to channel their lives back to the right course, as Joachim Müller points out: "Der leidenschaftliche Mensch ist verloren, es sei denn, die Auswirkung des masslosen inneren Dranges werde gehemmt durch eine starke Gegenkraft, die ... ihn in ein gesetzhaft umgrenztes Dasein zurückbändigt. Nur durch eine solche starke Kraft vermag der leidenschaftliche Mensch, der schon dem Untergang überantwortet ist, meistens im letzten Augenblick gerettet werden."³ Those who do not possess the counter-force to control their passion are invariably destined to fail in life. Passion can never lead to happiness, but must bring adversity and suffering.

Unbridled passion becomes the direct obstacle to the happiness which the central characters in Der Hochwald seek. From the beginning of the story the author makes allusions to Klarissa's inherently passionate nature. She is given to romantic and fanciful conceptions of the world, of men

and of love. During a conversation with Johanna in the chambers of their castle she exclaims:

'O Johanna, liebes Mädchen, wie bist du noch dein eigener Himmel, tief und schön und kühl! Aber es werden in ihm Dünfte emporsteigen,--der Mensch gibt ihnen den Missnamen Leidenschaft--du wirst wähnen, sie seien wonnevoll erschienen, Engel wirst du sie heissen, die sich in der Bläue wiegen--aber gerade aus ihnen kommen dann die heissen Blitze und die warmen Regen, deine Tränen--und doch auch wieder aus diesen Tränen baut sich jener Verheissungsbogen, der so schön schimmert und den man nie erreichen kann---der Mondschein ist dann hold und unsre Melodien weich.---Kind, es gibt Freuden auf der Welt, von einer Überschwenglichkeit, dass sie unser Herz zerbrechen könnten--und Leiden von einer Innigkeit---o sie sind so innig!'" (I, 254)

Yet it is only during her later encounter with Ronald at the secluded lake in the forest that the reader begins to discover how utterly she had become enslaved by her passion at a tender age. As a mere child she had been overwhelmed by a sensuous attraction to the Swedish prince. She had cast all other considerations aside and succumbed to a love which had robbed her of her reason: "'Ihr waret so schön, mein Auge konnte fast nicht ablassen von dem Euren, ein ganzes Meer von Seele und Gemüt gosset ihr in mein dunkel bewusstes Herz, meine hilflose Kinderseele zwanget Ihr, an Eure Lippen zu fliegen--ich fragte nicht, woher Ihr kamet, wer Ihr seid--ich hing an Euch--im Wahnsinne von Seligkeit hing ich an Euch, sündhaft vergessend meinen Vater, meine Mutter, meinen Gott'" (I, 322), she confesses to Ronald during their second meeting. Even the prince himself was astounded by the girl's fervour: "'Eine Seele,

tief, wild, gross und dichterisch wie meine, wuchs aus dem Kinde an mich, dass ich erschrak, aber nun auch mich im Sturme an sie warf, namenlos, untrennbar Glut um Glut tauschend, Seligkeit um Seligkeit'" (I, 323).

After Ronald had departed and while she was maturing to womanhood, Klarissa attempted to conceal and even to suppress her passionate nature. In fact, it appears that during her lengthy stay in the woods she succeeds in overcoming the irrational, destructive force within through her prolonged contact with nature.⁴ The resplendence and tranquility of nature enchant and mollify her and bestow a sense of harmony upon her soul. However, the rifle shot which announces the appearance of her former lover at the lake suddenly destroys her newly acquired inner harmony. The sultriness and sense of uneasiness hovering over the valley and gripping the hearts of the girls from that moment on can be compared with the atmospheric conditions prevailing before the outbreak of a thunderstorm. Indeed, the oppressive air suggests the forthcoming outburst of human emotions which will have disastrous consequences for the protagonists.

Once Klarissa discovers the identity of the intruder, she is drawn back into the orbit of passion; her "tigerartige Anlage" (V, 469) breaks through again: "Ein ungeheuer Empfinden musste in ihrer Seele emporwachsen, wechselnd in Wohl und Weh; denn ein fremder Geist lag auf diesen sonst so ruhigen Zügen und goss eine Seele darüber aus, als glühete

und wallete sie in Leidenschaft" (I, 314). She agrees to a meeting with Ronald although she realizes that by coming face-to-face with him, she runs the risk of once again falling victim to passion--a danger that is clearly recognized in her answer to her sister who feels that the unknown woodsman might do them harm: "'Gefahr solcher Art droht uns nicht'" (I, 315). Moreover, Klarissa also knows that her rekindled feelings for the young man are sinful, for she refuses to meet with him "'in unserem heiligen Hause'" (I, 314). An outburst of passion would defile that unsullied place of refuge and would betray the trust and love of her family.

The act of discarding the simple dress she has worn during her stay at the forest retreat in favour of her finest attire in preparation for the meeting with Ronald symbolizes Klarissa's continued attraction to the baser world of men and her--albeit unconscious--willingness to be lured from the sphere of unblemished nature back into the domain of passion, stress and suffering. When she sees the prince, she is again overwhelmed by his presence. Attempting initially to remain aloof and to control her emotions, her resistance fades as his protestations of love become more ardent, and she ultimately gives free rein to her passion. The ensuing love scene is characterized by an increase in the tempo of the action on the human level of the story; while nature remains in its state of resplendent calm,

the lovers are carried away by a surge of emotion. Instead of allowing time to nurture and cement their relationship, they press for the immediate satisfaction of their longing. The surrounding world ceases to exist as they become absorbed with each other: "Der ganze Wald, die lauschenden Ahornen, die glänzende Steinwand, selbst Johanna und Gregor versanken um Klarissa, wie wesenlose Flitter, nichts war auf der Welt als zwei klopfende Herzen" (I, 325). Overpowered by their passion, Klarissa and Ronald submit to the spell of love. The rapture engulfing them threatens to consume them; in fact, the outburst of intemperate passion seals not only their fate, but also claims the other members of Klarissa's family as victims. The moment of presumed happiness becomes the source of their future misfortune.

Stifter condemns Ronald's and Klarissa's passion because it demoralizes them and activates their irrational, bestial drives. What is more, their passion knows no hesitation or restraint; it does not recognize the cosmic law of gradual and continued growth. Thus, by casting aside time and by pressing for the instantaneous fulfillment of their urges, they violate the God-given order of the universe. However, what Stifter finds most condemnatory about their passionate relationship is the fact that Klarissa in her rapture forgets the world around her and, more important, the members of her family. Hans Dietrich Irmischer points out: "Der eigentliche Makel der

Liebesleidenschaft aber besteht für Stifter in der Verabsolutierung des eigenen Ichs und seines Begehrens, die dazu führt, dass dem Menschen die übrigen Dinge der Wirklichkeit, die ihm nahestehenden Menschen zu nichts werden."⁵

By telling Ronald: "'Ich lieb'dich unermesslich, mehr als Vater und Geschwister, mehr als mich selbst and alles, mehr als ich es begreifen kann--'" (I, 325), Klarissa forsakes her love for her father, her brother, her sister and her God. The act of relinquishing her charitable, humane love in favour of eroticism and passion is her greatest transgression.

Because Klarissa and Ronald are unable to overcome their passion, the author destines them to fail in life. Ronald is even more of a dreamer and Schwärmer than Klarissa; in the words of Gregor, he attempts "'lauter Dinge, die ohne Ziel und Zweck sind, und strebt nach Unerreichbarem'" (I, 307). Not only his outward appearance, but also his inner make-up show him to be akin to the impetuous romantic hero. When Klarissa was still a child, he burst into the protected sphere of her family castle and with his fairy-tale appearance and charm awakened the young girl's latent sensuality. He then rushed out into the world to perform unprecedented deeds. Just as heedlessly he storms back into Klarissa's life in the midst of a terrible war to take possession of the object of his passion. Elizabeth Kläui remarks: "Er lässt sich vom

Gefühl mitreißen und achtet nicht auf die 'Dinge': die Zeitverhältnisse, der Krieg, in dem sein Land gegen dasjenige Clarissas steht, müssten ihm Geduld gebieten. So aber 'fliegt' er in sein Glück, welches sein Unglück wird."⁶ Incapable of restraining that vehement inner force, Ronald rushes off to his death at Wittinghausen castle. His passion and his impetuosity can at least in part be attributed to the biological legacy of his father, King Gustavus Adolphus. The product of an illicit relationship, Ronald inherited the king's sensuousness and lust for adventure. Klarissa, too, to some extent received her passion from her father. The latter reveals his passionate nature during the battle for his castle. When he espies Ronald in the midst of the enemy forces, he cannot contain his anger and hurls his lance at the presumed foe. This rash act leads to his death and the destruction of his castle.

The outburst of unrestrained passion described in Der Hochwald stands in stark contrast to the tender love scene between Heinrich and Anna in Die Narrenburg. While Stifter feels compelled to condemn Ronald's and Klarissa's behaviour, he casts an approving eye on the love episode in the later story. There is, to be sure, an undertone of sensuousness in the relationship between the two figures in Die Narrenburg -- "in beiden wallte und zitterte das Gefühl, wodurch der Schöpfer seine Menschheit hält" (I, 378), we read--but their

passion is held in check by a delicate counterpoise, "ein zartes Gegengewicht ... ein zartes, aber unzerreissbares--die Scham" (I, 378). It is precisely that strong sense of chastity which, since it constrains and counterbalances the passion that threatens most of Stifter's young lovers, makes Heinrich's and Anna's love virtuous and meritorious. In fact, the author maintains that the human sense of shame transforms passion from an animal urge into the God-given, spiritual entity worthy of a human being: "Darum, was das Tier erst recht tierisch macht, das hebt den Menschen zum Engel des Himmels und der Sitte, und die rechten Liebenden sind heilig im menschenvollen Saale und in der Laube, wo bloss die Nachtluft um sie zittert--ja gerade da sind sie es noch mehr, und bei ihnen fällt kein Blättchen zu frühe oder unreif aus der grossen Glücksblume, die der Schöpfer ihnen zugemessen hatte; es fällt nicht, eben weil es nicht fallen kann" (I, 378). Because the two protagonists are endowed with a sense of chastity, they do not seek immediate gratification of their desires, but permit time to mellow their love. Unlike Ronald and Klarissa they remain part of the world surrounding them during their tryst in the garden. Furthermore, whilst pledging each other love, Heinrich and Anna never forget the members of their families, but, on the contrary, express concern over the impact their relationship might have on them. Because their tender relationship corresponds to the author's conception of the

ideal of human love, Heinrich and Anna are assured a happy and meaningful existence.

The lives of the protagonists in what has been called the "novella" contained within Die Narrenburg, on the other hand, are ultimately destroyed by passion. Jodokus's passionate nature comes to light already at the beginning of the novella. In the account of his past he equates love solely with sensuality; "die Liebe [war] Sinnlichkeit" (I, 451), he writes while reflecting upon his earlier deeds and experiences. Just as passion dominated his previous relationships with women, his affinity to Chelion is based on sensuality. It is the girl's physical beauty and her exotic innocence which captivate Jodokus. "Aber schön war sie, schön über jeden Ausdruck, den eine Sprache ersinnen mag, und über jedes Bild, das in Jahrtausenden einmal in eine wallende Phantasie kommt" (I, 450), he writes about her in his memoirs. The adjective "wallend" describes his state of mind when he notices Chelion for the first time as she is walking beneath the palm trees to draw water from the well. His marriage to the girl is not based on genuine love either, because love calls for devotion, trust, unselfishness and self-sacrifice on the part of both partners. Jodokus does not forgo his desire to return to Europe, but expects Chelion to accommodate herself to his wishes. When an inner voice tells him later that he should not have transplanted such a delicate being to the harsh northern

environment where she is condemned to waste away, he is too selfish to make the sacrifice and return with her to her native land. To be sure, it appears on the surface as if Jodokus is devoted to his wife. He caters to her amiably, houses her in a beautiful palace and imports tropical plants and animals for her garden. Nevertheless, his devotion is more like that of a man to a rare exotic bird in a gilded cage than that of a husband to a wife. One critic calls Jodokus's act of marrying and uprooting Chelion: "Gewalt und Verführung."⁷ What is more, he not only continues to be overbearing and egotistic in his treatment of his wife, but he never places any confidence in her; when the slightest doubt about her fidelity arises, he immediately harbours suspicion and mistrust. Susi Gröble says about him:

"Jodokus zerreisst das Band der Ehe. Es geht nicht mehr um das Misstrauen gegenüber einem Versprechen, er verletzt eine heilige Ordnung. Die Ehe ist das Symbol des Vertrauens, auf dem die Liebe beruht. Sie verpflichtet zu ewiger Achtung und Treue.... Jodok aber ist der Ehe nicht gewachsen und zerstört das Vertrauen, auf dem sie gegründet ist."⁸

Jodokus's passion bursts forth with unprecedented intensity when he is confronted with Chelion's presumed unfaithfulness. His fit of jealousy is passion in its most abhorrent form because it almost transforms him into a murderer. Indeed, although he does not kill her, his passionate outburst does lead to her death. The author

compares Jodokus's passion with an avalanche which may be perched on a slope for some time until the slightest tremor causes it to crash down into the valley: "Die Lawine hing nun--der feinste Hauch konnte sie stürzen machen--und er blieb auch nicht aus, dieser Hauch" (I, 456). Jodokus destroys both Chelion's and his own life because he is incapable of subduing his passion. Yet he is not the only individual who heaps guilt upon himself. His brother Sixtus also falls victim to his sensuousness. Consumed by the "Fieber der Leidenschaft" (I, 454), he attempts to seduce Chelion and thus contributes to her downfall, not to speak of his own.

Chelion, on the other hand, remains beyond reproach. As the daughter of a pariah she is the embodiment of untouched innocence. She genuinely loves Jodokus, and she becomes a wife dedicated to her husband to the point of sacrificing her own well-being. Moreover, in contrast to Jodokus and Sixtus she is not a passionate person. The fact that she permits Sixtus to enter her chamber and sit at her bedside can be attributed to her charity and her sense of compassion for a suffering being. "'Sein Angesicht war so unglücklich, dass es mich im Herzen dauerte und ich ihn recht heiss liebte; denn er ist ja dein armer, vertriebener Bruder'" (I, 460), she tells Jodokus later. Even when she embraces Sixtus and kisses him, she retains her innocence, for she does not regard her actions as sinful.

Her affection for him is in essence an extension of her love for her husband. She only begins to sense that her conduct was immoral in the eyes of her husband when he appears at her bedside. Nonetheless, the girl remains irreproachable because her transgresssion is an unwitting act. The concepts passion and unfaithfulness are alien to her; she is only capable of love. The author takes pains to demonstrate her continued innocence: When Jodokus returns to her chambers on the following morning, he finds her on the floor pressing a dove to her heart.

The passionate nature of the central figure in Abdias reveals itself at many points throughout the novella. The description of the adolescent Abdias already shows an individual in whom the potential for passion is manifest. He is portrayed as "ein Knabe mit schwarzen, rollenden Augenkugeln und mit der ganzen morgenländischen Schönheit seines Stammes ausgerüstet" (II, 244), and at another point his eyes are described as "feurig" (II, 247). Abdias displays his innate passion for the first time in his relationship with Deborah. Their union is not founded on love which has slowly matured and mellowed, but on sensual attraction. Abdias is drawn to Deborah because of her beauty; just as she is captivated by his physical attributes. Love does not develop during their many years of marriage; a deeper, more meaningful relationship cannot be established as long as they are unable to forsake the passion which initially

drew them to each other. Once Abdias is disfigured by disease, there is nothing to sustain their purely physical relationship, and Deborah turns from him in disgust.

To be sure, the author casts a disapproving eye on Abdias's sensuality, but what he finds even more censurable is the other aspect of his passionate nature, namely his obsession to dominate others. It is precisely that unchecked inclination which becomes the source of Abdias's egoism, his violence, his cruelty, his lust for power and recognition, and his avarice. To put it another way, passion is interpreted in this novella not just as an uncontrolled sensual urge, but, more important, as the elimination of all natural restraints, as the reckless gratification of all desires. On his travels through the African desert Abdias indulges his taste for every pleasure. In his quest for "Hochachtung, Ansehen, Oberherrschaft" (II, 253) he becomes a man obsessed with the finest attire and equipment. He is perched on his camel proud and magnificent, "gleichsam wie ein König der Karawanen" (II, 253). When the caravan is attacked, he is transformed into a fierce military leader who mercilessly dispenses suffering and death. After his moment of triumph he formulates plans for becoming Bey and even Sultan. Even when placed in a situation where he should demonstrate prudence and restraint, Abdias cannot control his passionate nature. He taunts Melek "mit dem unbeschreiblichsten, inbrünstigsten Hohne und Hasse" (II, 257) and later attempts to kill him--an act for which he is beaten severely. After

Melek's raid it appears that Abdias has finally tempered the violence of his emotions. He lives quietly and humbly in his home, devoting himself to the care of his daughter and preparing for their emigration to Europe. Because of his changed life he even gains the respect of his neighbours for the first time. Yet his nature has not really changed; basically he remains the violent, avaricious and vindictive individual he has always been. "Der Augenblick der Rache schien noch nicht gekommen zu sein" (II, 288), the author reports while describing Abdias's new life. When he discovers that Ditha is blind, he once again sets out to amass wealth in order that the girl's physical needs might be met. Because of his cupidity he becomes an object of hatred in the community once more. The incident with his dog, in particular, shows that Abdias has not left his old nature behind him in Africa. He shoots the animal on impulse, only to discover a few moments later that the dog had tried to warn him. Beside himself with grief over the loss of the dog, he almost takes his own life: "Abdias sprang nun auf und wollte sich die weissen Haare ausraufen--er heulte--er stiess ungeheure Verwünschungen aus--er lief gegen das Maultier hin und riss die zweite Pistole aus dem Halfter und krämpfte seine Finger darum. Nach einer Weile warf er sie in das Gras des Waldes. Den Gürtel nahm er zehnmal auf, warf ihn zehnmal hin und stampfte ihn mit den Füßen" (II, 322). Moreover, he never overcomes his

passionate hatred for Melek, and he continues to devise plans for revenge even after lapsing into insanity. Abdias remains the pawn of his passions throughout his life; he never learns to repress his instincts. "Abdias' ganzes Trachten," Steffen remarks, "geht vom Leibe aus und ist dem Leibe zugewendet."⁹ This is largely the reason why Abdias is unable to surmount the diverse crises facing him in his life.

Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel is described to us initially as a young man of twenty possessing a virginal innocence "wie es heutzutage selbst tief auf dem Lande kaum vierzehnjährige Knaben besitzen" (II, 350). He pledges to remain faithful to the motto inscribed on his family seal and never to allow the slightest blemish to stain his honour. For years he manages to live up to his principles and remains "rein und stark, wie eine Jungfrau" (II, 361). Yet in spite of appearances, in spite of the ascetic and principled life Hugo leads, he is not by nature a passionless individual. In fact, quite the opposite proves to be true; passion simply lies unawakened in the youth's breast until it breaks through with full force at the first opportunity. Stifter alludes to Hugo's latent passion on several occasions early in the novella. We are told that old Veit's speech on war and the expected uprising against Napoleon inflame the boy's heart to such a degree "dass es sich in heimlicher und einsamer Glut abarbeitete" (II, 356). The sense of

longing which plagues the young man from time to time and which he attributes to his unstilled thirst for action is interpreted by the author as "ein sanftes Anpochen seines Herzens" (II, 361). Furthermore, while paying his first visit to St. Peter's church, Hugo is inwardly shaken when several beautiful women take notice of him. However, it is not until he meets Cöleste that his dormant passion is fully aroused.

With the arrival of the letter bidding him to come to the church of St. Peter, Hugo's life enters a new phase. The sudden appearance of a visitor in his room while he is reading the anonymous note causes him for the first time to ignore the injunction of the family seal: "Er riss den Brief, der auf dem Tische lag, an sich, verbarg ihn in der Tasche und ward so rot, als hätte er eine Schandtät begangen" (II, 364). Hugo fully appreciates the breach of his principles; from that moment on he can no longer claim total and unfaltering commitment to his moral code. He accepts the invitation out of curiosity, not realizing that his action will lead to grave consequences. When he meets Cöleste after several visits to the church, he is enchanted by her beauty. Although they do not communicate with each other for many weeks, Hugo is drawn more and more into the orbit of passion after their first meeting. He returns to the church daily to catch a glimpse of Cöleste, but he no longer enters the building, for he senses that the

unaccustomed emotions in his heart are incompatible with his code of honour and hence might defile the holy place: "Er meinte, dass er den Ort entheiligen würde, wenn er drinnen wartete; darum blieb er draussen" (II, 372).

A slow, strange courtship follows, and affection gradually grows between the two figures. Although their relationship grows step by step and the reader is informed at one point that love breaks out in their hearts, it is, nonetheless, not one based on genuine love. For one thing, Hugo does not truly love and respect the girl; his attraction to her derives from his sensuality. The more he sees of her, the more he becomes the captive of his passion. Pent up in his breast his life long, passion erupts with ever greater intensity until it reaches its climax in the night the child is conceived. The fact that that very night Hugo casts doubts on the purity of their love in his mind and as a consequence neglects to return to the "Lindenhäuschen" for several days, points to a lack of love on his part. Because in his childhood he had experienced only his father's masculine, unsentimental love and never the tender affection of a mother or other members of the family, he is as an adult quite incapable of loving. Love is not an innate instinct, but a human virtue, and the ability to love can only be acquired through association with warm, loving individuals. Passion, on the other hand, is an animal characteristic which does not have to be acquired, but is

present in everyone. This is precisely Hugo's predicament; because the capacity for love was never instilled in him, the surge of feeling which overwhelms him during his affair with Cöleste is synonymous with passion.

The relationship between Hugo and Cöleste must be designated as one founded on passion for a second reason, too. A happy union based on love is, in the eyes of the author, never consummated before the marriage ceremony is performed. There are very few instances in Stifter's works where a child is conceived out of wedlock. In fact, since love has little to do with sexuality, the author never refers to it when portraying a happy and enduring marriage.

Although Stifter depicts Hugo as a character who becomes the victim of his sensuality, he does not censure that facet of his passion severely. As a matter of fact, he leaves no doubt that the passionate relationship between the two protagonists could develop into a happy, sanctified love-union. To be sure, Cöleste is also guilty of the sin of passion. Yet, unlike Hugo, she is capable of transforming the emotion which initially brings man and woman together into genuine love. Stifter describes Cöleste as "unschuldig" and "treu," as "ein liebliches Kind" (II, 393) who is devoted to Hugo. She is capable of deep compassion--she weeps bitterly at the funeral of her husband in spite of the fact that he treated her cruelly--and true humanity. Her sin is interpreted as "'menschlicher'" (II, 410) than

his virtue and thus deserving of remission. Moreover, whereas Hugo does not accept his guilt, Cöleste acknowledges her transgression. She atones for her sin by her many years of suffering, and in the eyes of the author has earned the right to a happy union by the time she meets Hugo again at the castle in France. A fruitful relationship is rendered impossible by Hugo's rigid concept of virtue. His devotion to abstract principles is simply another aspect of his passionate nature--albeit the extreme opposite of his sensuality--and it is precisely that facet of his "tigerartige Anlage". (V, 469) which Stifter finds most sinister and which causes the impoverishment of Hugo's later years. Just as sensuality, when allowed to develop unchecked, is a negative trait in man, a virtue, when adhered to without compromise and carried to its extreme, becomes a dehumanizing thing. Whereas the author could forgive Hugo's sensuality because it contained the potential for a transformation into love, he must condemn his passionate adherence to the cold ideal of honour because it is the source of his sense of ascendancy, his egoism and his inhumaneness. Eric Blackall sums up: "Hugo Almot has ruined his life by a too-blind devotion to the abstract principles, for he choked all the humanity out of experience."¹⁰

In Der Hagestolz Stifter once more juxtaposes pure, refined love and unrestrained passion. The ideal of love is manifested at the end of the story in the marriage of

Hanna and Victor and in their harmonious life together on their estate in the country. The two young people were raised together by Ludmilla and have loved and respected each other as brother and sister all their lives. As they mature to adulthood, a new dimension is added to their relationship: their Geschwisterliebe gradually develops into a tender sexual love without ever degenerating into sensuality. After they become aware of their new, hitherto unfamiliar feelings for each other, they do not aspire to the immediate realization of their desires, but intend to wait until Victor has returned from a long Bildungsreise before consummating their relationship.

The potentiality of a fulfilled life as embodied in the union between Victor and Hanna also had presented itself to Ludmilla and the "Hagestolz" when they were young, but they had been separated "durch Unglück und Verschuldung" (III, 141) and had lived in remorse ever since. What had kept them apart had been the recluse's passionate nature. His offer of marriage to Ludmilla did not spring from feelings of deep love and respect for her, but, on the contrary, he was driven by sexual instinct to choose a partner with whom to produce children. Even fifty years later his attitude toward marriage has not basically changed, for he tells Victor: "'Wenn du schon eine Vorneigung zu einer Frauenperson hast, so tut das bei dem Heiraten gar nichts, es ist nicht hinderlich und fördert

oft nicht, nimm sie nur: hast du aber keine solche Vorneigung, so ist es auch gleichgültig'" (III, 124). Ironically, it is exactly the ingredients of marriage the old man has scoffed at all his life which he so desperately requires in order to make his days more bearable--namely, love and companionship. His great need for love and affection is conveyed throughout the novella, but most strongly in the outcry directed Victor's way: "'Dich hätte ich geliebt'" (III, 117). Although he sorely lacks love in his life, the harshness of his character and his self-centredness--he is described as a man "der sich wehrt und der sich selber unzählige Jahre geliebt hat" (III, 84)--make it almost impossible for him to engender love in another being. The servants with whom he shares the hermitage do not love him, and even his dogs do not show any signs of affection for him. Ludmilla is fully aware of the undesirable aspects of the recluse's personality; she tells Victor: "'Er hat auch eine rauhe und harte Seite, darum hat er es nie machen können, dass jemand ihn liebe'" (III, 137). It is probably for that reason that she rejected him five decades earlier.

The recluse's passionate nature reveals itself in several other ways. His jealousy brings him close to murdering his own brother. Although he does not carry out his plan, he has, nevertheless, committed an offence which Stifter considers evil. His sense of supremacy not only

provokes the "Hagestolz" to mock Ludmilla and treat her with disdain after Hippolyt has left her, but also prevents him from ever accepting blame for the failure of his own relationship with her. In his conversations with Victor, he still maintains that it was lack of strength and understanding on Ludmilla's part which prevented them from sharing a happy life together. The recluse's passion and his consequent inability to love another person or bring another being to love him are the underlying causes of his failure in life. It is only when it has become clear that his situation in life has become hopeless that he admits to his acute need for love and companionship. That need is met for only a brief period of time when he gains the affection of his nephew.

In Turmalin passion does not play as significant a role in the decline of the main character as it does in the other stories. What characterizes the relationship of the "Rentherr" and his wife is more the dearth of any emotion than the presence of uncontrolled passion. Although they have produced a child together, there is not the slightest hint of affection--not to speak of genuine love--between husband and wife. In fact, they lead completely separate lives; the "Rentherr" devotes his attention and energies to his numerous hobbies, while his wife is relegated to a lonely, boring existence in her chambers. They do not have, as Joachim Müller believes, "eine harmonische Ehe,

die im Eltern Glück ihre Erfüllung fand" nor is their marriage suddenly destroyed by the "Dämonie eines grossen Künstlers."¹¹ Their marriage appears to have failed long before the onset of the crisis, that is, before the wife becomes erotically involved with the actor. The emptiness of their union becomes particularly evident when it is compared to the happy and enduring relationship between the narrator of the story and her husband.

Although, as will be documented later, the failure in life of the "Rentherr" must in the main be attributed to his eccentricity and his delusion, passion does have a part to play in his downfall. The fervour with which he pursues his sterile activities must be considered as synonymous with passion. Like his friend, the actor Dall, he is totally absorbed in his own self. His egocentricity causes him to switch unmindfully from one pursuit to another in his quest for self-gratification, and in doing so, he completely neglects his family. Egoism, as we have seen,¹² is, in the mind of the author, another facet of a person's passionate nature. Moreover, the man's rage at his wife's infidelity and his impulse to kill Dall also attest to his passion. Yet, although his passion--not to speak of his wife's and Dall's sensuality--plays a role in the story and precipitates his crisis, it is not the most important cause of the catastrophe. Passion is only one of the links in the chain leading to his downfall.

Passion is the most important cause of the misfortune which Georg and Korona in Der Waldgänger must endure in their old age. However, the passion which brings about their downfall is not related to sensuality. To be sure, Stifter repeatedly tells us that Georg "eine mächtige Leidenschaft fasste" (V, 98; 111) when he first meets Korona, but we soon discover that his initial passion for her is transformed into love, just as she is attracted to him because of her love for him. "Sie behandelten sich achtungsvoll, sie näherten sich--taten es aber nicht versteckt, sondern offen vor der ganzen Welt--die Blume der Neigung brach hervor, und da beide zum ersten Male empfanden, was gründliche Zuneigung und Liebe sei, so waren zwei Menschen, die bisher allein gewesen waren, es nicht mehr" (V, 112-13), we read. Moreover, there is no question that Georg and Korona continue to love and respect each other even after they have been married for many years. It is their overwhelming desire to have children which becomes a passion for them--a passion which not only overshadows their happiness together, but also eventually destroys it. The yearning for the fulfilment and the sense of security represented in children becomes so important for them that they are willing to sacrifice the success in life which they have achieved. Unable to come to terms with their limitations as human beings, they dissolve their marriage. By doing so, they not only transgress against

divine moral code, but also against each other because they rob each other of their limited fulfilment in life. To be sure, it is Korona who initially proposes divorce, but by acquiescing, Georg is equally guilty.

In Der Waldgänger childlessness is not only a symptom, but--because it becomes a passion--also a cause of failed life. Having children is an important part of fulfilment in life, the author seems to be saying, but when it degenerates into a passion, it becomes a destructive element. The novella concludes with the statement that love and companionship are sufficient justification for a marriage, even if it remains without offspring: "'Die zwei Menschen, die sich einmal geirrt hatten, hätten die Kinderfreude opfernd, sich an der Wärme ihrer Herzen haltend, Glück geben und Glück nehmen sollen bis an das Grab..." (V, 147).

Because Stifter views passion as the most loathsome and dehumanizing of man's negative characteristics, it is hardly surprising that the inability to control that instinct is, with few exceptions, the single most important factor contributing to the individual's failure in life. Only those protagonists in Stifter's works who learn to suppress and continue to restrain their "tigerartige Anlage" (V, 469) have any prospect of achieving a fulfilling life. The elevated existence befitting a human being can be attained only by those individuals for whom morality, reason and love becomes the highest ideals.

Eccentricity

Although uncontrolled passion is more often than not the most noteworthy cause of the individual's failure to succeed in life, it is not the only destructive trait exhibited by him. There are other undesirable characteristics that can contribute to a character's downfall in Stifter's works. The central figure in Turmalin fails in life at least in part because of his eccentricity. The term eccentricity is used to define the quality or habit of deviating from what is considered to be the norm, from what is usual or regular. Behaviour that digresses substantially from conventional conduct must be classified as eccentric. The adjective eccentric aptly describes the life led by the unsuccessful protagonists after they have failed to master the crises, for it diverges considerably from the established pattern. Whereas the attributes of a successful existence are symmetry, moderation and harmony, a failed life is characterized by imbalance, excess and aberration. In the case of the "Rentherr" eccentric behaviour is not only the outcome of failure in life, but also one of its sources. Although Stifter does not use the term eccentricity in his writings per se, the concept, nevertheless, plays a role in his character portrayal. Like passion, eccentric behaviour is engendered by the individual's disposition, but unlike passion, it cannot be classified as a bestial instinct. Although, to be sure, all forms of passion are in essence

eccentricities, all eccentricities are not necessarily synonymous with passion.

The "Rentherr" is described as "ein wunderlicher Mensch, wie in solchen grossen Städten verschiedene Arten von Menschen wohnen und sich mit den verschiedensten Dingen beschäftigen" (IV, 134). It is precisely the quality of being "wunderlich" which contributes to his decline. Because he no longer pursues an occupation, he spends most of his day at home dabbling "in den mannigfaltigen Geschäften, die er sich aufgeladen hatte" (IV, 136). His activities range from playing various musical instruments, painting in oil, sketching and writing poetry to making art objects from cardboard. He spends hours at a time with his friend Dall gazing at portraits of famous personalities and mindlessly discussing their lives. All of these pursuits are devoid of substance, for the "Rentherr" is not committed to a single one of them; he prefers to drop one before finishing it in favour of another. Eve Mason comments: "The Rentherr does not pursue any of his talents with the necessary disinterested devotion. Like Dall, he gives into whim, passing mindlessly from one form of art to another in search of self-gratification, never finding the absorption that alone would lift him out of his egocentricity."¹³ Not only do his efforts lack the required devotion and continuity, but there is some question as to whether he possesses any real talent at all. The fact that he paints, writes poetry

and at the same time works with cardboard points to a distorted attitude toward art on his part, a trait which is in the eyes of Stifter akin to a warped stance toward life. The passive adoration of great personalities is equally disturbing, for it is a frivolous, parasitic activity, a pursuit for individuals whose life has lost all meaning and purpose. "Statt zur Leistung anzuhalten," Steffen remarks, "treibt ihn die Betrachtung der Bilder erst recht in wesenlose Begeisterung und entrückt ihn damit der Wirklichkeit."¹⁴

The life which the "Rentherr" leads is the outward sign of his growing inner imbalance and his loss of self-direction. Whereas many of Stifter's protagonists dissipate their energies through unrestrained surrender to a single passion, the "Rentherr" exhausts his vitality because of his inclination toward the excessive. His eccentricity is the reason behind his complete disregard for his family. The only activity which he shares with his wife is their periodic passive admiration of their daughter. Yet the child can hardly be classified as the "sorgsam von Engel- und Gottesmutterbildern behütete Mädchen,"¹⁵ as Müller would have us believe. The "Rentherr" treats his daughter like just another domestic object; he gazes at her in much the same fashion as he admires the pictures of the celebrities which cover his study walls. The neglect of wife and child for the sake of his eccentric hobbies leads eventually

to the break-up of his family, and thus he destroys the one entity that could protect him from mental collapse.

Although his wife's adultery triggers his crisis, that act is not the major cause of his downfall, for, as Hertling correctly points out, "sind doch alle Keime für Unglück und Tragik schon von Anfang an vorhanden--in der verbauten und zergliederten Lebensführung."¹⁶

Like the "Rentherr," the actor Dall exhibits a perverted attitude to life and art. He is drawn to the home of his dilettante friend because he is fascinated by his many hobbies. "Besonders war es die Kunst, die Dall in allen ihren Gestalten, ja selbst Abarten anzog" (IV, 141), we are told. He too possesses no serious commitment to his various pursuits, but merely dabbles in them to pass the time and to fill an inner void. Although Dall is thought to be a sensational actor, he never accepts roles on the stage which require any "künstliches Nachsinnen oder ... Vorbereitungen und Einübungen" (IV, 139), that is, any discipline or effort on his part, thereby indicating his unwillingness, and possibly even lack of ability, to expand or refine his talents. Moreover, like the "Rentherr," he gives in to whim, allowing himself to drift from one activity or relationship to another: "Er lebte daher in Zuständen und verliess sie, wie es ihm beliebte" (IV, 141). Dall not only contributes to his friend's decline by supporting and even encouraging his eccentric conduct. Had the "Rentherr"

not found in Dall such a devoted admirer of his empty activities, his eccentricity might never have evolved to such an extent.

In Die Narrenburg Stifter repeatedly makes reference to the eccentric behaviour of Jodokus's forebears. Because the ancestor of the Scharnast family, Count Hanns, had committed "so viele Narrheiten und Übereilungen . . . , und es war ihm daraus so viel Beschämung und Verdruss zugewachsen" (I, 357), he had established two peculiar conditions of inheritance: each heir to the family castle had to agree to write down his experiences in life for the benefit of succeeding generations and also had to promise to read the accounts of all those who preceded him. In this way Count Hanns had hoped to prevent his descendants from committing the follies of their ancestors. However, his plan had the opposite effect; later Scharnasts had attempted to outdo each other in foolishness and inanity:

Es musste nämlich von ihrem Ahnherr her so viel tolles Blut und so viel Ansatz zur Narrheit in den Scharnasts gelegen haben, dass sie, statt durch die Lebensbeschreibungen abgeschreckt zu werden, sich ordentlich daran ein Exempel nahmen und so viel verrücktes Zeugs taten, als nur immer in eine Lebensbeschreibung hineingeht--ja selbst die, welche bisher ein stilles und manierliches Leben geführt hatten, schlugen in dem Augenblicke um, als sie in den Besitz der verwetternen Burg kamen, und die Sache wurde immer ärger, je mehr Besitzer bereits gewesen waren und mit je mehr Wust sich der neue den Kopf anfüllen musste. (I, 357-58)

Because of the eccentric behaviour of its former occupants, Rothenstein is called the "fools' castle," and the Scharnasts are considered to have been a "'recht närrische Familie'"

(I, 364) whose members "'hatten alle einen Sporn im Haupte'" (I, 369). The foolishness of Hanns von Scharnast's many descendants manifested itself in their frenzied building activities. They vied with each other in constructing an enormous variety of buildings and gardens which are striking for their lack of any uniformity in style. The "'halbe Stadt von Schlössern'" (I, 364), as the innkeeper calls the agglomeration of decaying structures on the hill, serves as a fitting symbol for the eccentricities of its builders. When Heinrich, the latest heir, visits the castle, it lies in ruin and has become a monument to man's transitoriness and the futility of his endeavours. The follies and the eccentricities of the Scharnasts have contributed not only to their unhappiness and misfortune as individuals, but also to the decline of the family as a whole. Heinrich recognizes that fact, for he says about his ancestors: "'Ihre Narrheit ist ihr Unglück, und ihr Herz'" (I, 466).

To be sure, Jodokus's failure in life must for the most part be attributed to his inability to exercise full control over his passionate nature. However, he has inherited a large measure of his forefathers' eccentricity, and that eccentricity also contributes to his downfall. After reading the life-stories of several of his ancestors, he realizes, "es war Torheit, was alle meine Vorfahren taten" (I, 451), and consequently he decides to structure his own life according to a different pattern. "Ich wollte Neues tun"

(I, 451), he writes in his memoirs. Yet in spite of his plans to make a new beginning, Jodokus cannot break the chains of the past. He cannot escape the legacy of his forebears and simply repeats their follies. In an attempt to allay his discontent, he journeys into the world and pursues a number of diverse activities. He tastes the glory of battle only to discover that war is but "dies ekle, blutige Getränke." He dabbles in art for a time, but must realize, "sie sagt nichts, wenn das Herz nichts sagt." He learns that the sciences are only "Rechtpfennige" and that friendship amounts to nothing more than "Eigennutz" (I, 451). The varied pursuits do not fulfil Jodokus or bring about a basic change in his nature because he proceeds from one to another without any sense of where he is going. His activities lack direction, and because he does not find in them the engrossment necessary to free him from his eccentricity, they remain devoid of any purpose. Moreover, those pursuits cannot give meaning to his life because they are in essence not new and unique, but just as hollow and aberrant as the deeds of his predecessors. The final manifestation of his eccentricity is his flight to the Himalayas, which leads directly to his downfall through a marriage of passion.

While Jodokus failed in his attempt to throw off the burden of the past, Julius, Heinrich's great-great-grandfather, was able to escape the curse of his Scharnast blood by

leaving the castle of his ancestors permanently and by marrying a peasant girl and becoming a tiller of the soil. By returning to the soil and devoting himself to agriculture, Julius initiated a genuine rejuvenation of his branch of the family. Konrad Steffen remarks: "Auch er kehrt wie Jodokus zu den Ursprüngen zurück, aber nicht zu erträumten paradiesischen wie im Hochwald, sondern, wie Felix im Haidedorf, zu bäuerlichen, also in älteste geschichtliche Anfänge."¹⁷ As a descendant of this revitalized side-line of the family, Heinrich is able to bridge the gap between the eccentric world of Rothenstein castle and the world of the villagers in the community below who live harmonious and contented lives. He brings order, moderation and fruitful activity to the castle for the first time in its history. His marriage to Anna, a child of the village, in the closing scenes of the story underscores and cements the union between the two contrasting spheres. Although Heinrich is distinguished from all the former heirs to the castle by virtue of his positive character traits, he has, nonetheless, inherited a certain measure of their eccentricity. That eccentricity manifests itself in his attire, his belongings and his conduct. Stifter describes him as a handsome young man who presents a friendly face to society, but the author is also quick to point out that he is, nevertheless, "lächerlich anzusehen; denn er war verworren angezogen und mit den seltsamsten Dingen

bepackt" (I, 358-59). Heinrich also has the strange habit of carrying on conversations with himself, and, what is even more peculiar, he usually accompanies those monologues with gestures. Furthermore, he spends day after day by wandering through the forests and hills of the Fichtau and pursuing such diverse tasks as collecting the rocks and plants of the region and painting the landscape. Yet, whereas Stifter utilizes such adjectives as "närrisch," "toll" and "verrückt" to describe the previous owners of the castle and their activities, he uses only the more benign term "lächerlich" when referring to Heinrich's appearance and behaviour, thus indicating that he, unlike his forerunners on the Rothenstein, enjoys his sympathy. What is more, although Heinrich's hobbies appear at first glance to be similar to those of the "Rentherr," they are, in fact, not manifestations of dilettantism, but fruitful and fulfilling activities. Like his namesake in Der Nachsommer, Heinrich derives great pleasure and satisfaction from those pursuits.

Delusion

Throughout his life-time every individual interprets the world in which he lives and what is taking place there. That process of interpretation--which is, for the most part, unintentional--is important for the shaping of his existence. If the individual construes reality correctly, that is, if he interprets it in much the same manner as the majority of his

fellow-beings, his life probably will be influenced positively. If, on the other hand, he gains a false or distorted impression of actuality, that likely will have a negative impact on his existence. The false perception of reality often has an important role to play in Stifter's character delineations. A significant number of main figures in his prose works at one point or another in their lives become incapable of distinguishing between the real world and illusion. However, for the majority of the figures the incapacity to discriminate between Sein und Schein does not become a permanent condition. For those who succeed in life it is a passing--albeit perilous--phase; ultimately they are able to overcome their delusions and once again appreciate the true nature of the world. For several of the failed protagonists, on the other hand, delusion becomes another element leading to catastrophe.

Klarissa's and Ronald's inability to restrain their passion must be interpreted as the single most important cause of the catastrophe in Der Hochwald. Nevertheless, Ronald's deludedness also becomes a contributing factor in the final catastrophe. The Swedish prince is the embodiment of the romantic dreamer. Driven by the exuberance of his feelings, he hastens through the world in quest of adventure. Klarissa says of him: "'Ja, ja, den Sonnenschein hat er wollen auf den Hut stecken und die Abendröte umarmen'" (I, 315). Just as he never learns to subdue his restlessness

and his thirst for action, he never acquires the ability to differentiate between the real world and fantasy. As if in a dream, he rushes through life in the belief that the world is his realm alone and that he can manipulate events and attain his goals at will. When he meets Klarissa again at the secluded lake, he is deluded into believing that he has found ultimate and lasting happiness. He loses contact with the real world of destruction and pain; he feels "'als wäre draussen nicht der Sturm und die Verwüstung, sondern, wie hier, die stille, warme Herbstsonne . . . , als gäbe es gar kein Draussen, gar keine Menschen als die hier, die sich lieben und Unschuld lernen von der Unschuld des Waldes'" (I, 328-29). While Klarissa remains dimly aware of the possibility that the moment of presumed happiness might become the source of future misfortune, Ronald has no such premonitions. He confidently departs for Wittinghausen in the belief that he can put an end to the fighting and thus save the castle and its inhabitants from further harm. Ironically, Ronald's intervention would have been unnecessary as the reader discovers at the end of the story. The knight Bruno tells Klarissa, while relating the events leading up to the deaths of her relatives: "'O Klarissa, alles wäre noch gut geworden. Der erste siegestrotzige Anfall wurde zurückgeschlagen--eine Woche verging schon--und noch eine,--der Feind, bereits abgekühlt und einsehend, wie wenig ihm eigentlich an dem Hause gelegen

sein könne, hatte nur den Schein von Ehre zu wahren und bot willig die Hand zur Unterhandlung'" (I, 350). Klarissa's father also becomes a victim of delusion. When he discovers Ronald among the Swedish soldiers, he falsely assumes that the man has betrayed him. Stifter alludes to Count Wittinghausen's deludedness when he has the knight Bruno reflect on the outbreak of the final battle for the castle: "'War es nun Verblendung, war es Verhängnis, das sich erfüllen musste'" (I, 351).

Just as Hanns von Scharnast in Die Narrenburg was deluded in his belief that the thought of giving an account of their lives in writing would deter his descendants from committing the mistakes of their ancestors, Jodokus falsely assumes that he can overcome the curse of his Scharnast blood by grasping at the innocence of nature. His marriage to Chelion does not accord him contentment and peace of mind. By marrying her he does not accomplish anything new, as he had intended, but merely repeats the follies of his predecessors on a different plane.

Delusion plays an important role in the life of Abdias, too, and contributes significantly to his downfall. Günter Hertling believes that Abdias's biography must be seen as a "mahnvolles Symbol einer Erblindung vor den seelisch-göttlichen Bezugsmöglichkeiten."¹⁸ His spiritual blindness reveals itself at many points in the novella, finally culminating in the mental stupor which characterizes the

last thirty years of his life. As a young man Abdias devotes his energies almost exclusively to the acquisition of material goods and to the gratification of his physical wants as well as those of his parents, his wife and later his daughter. Because of his tenacity and endurance he is able to amass a fortune: "Das Glück und der Reichtum häuften sich immer mehr" (II, 251). Yet while Abdias accumulates great wealth, he remains spiritually impoverished. In his quest for possessions he completely neglects to cultivate his inner self. He never reflects upon his ethnic and religious heritage, his purpose in life, or upon "Vorsicht, Schicksal und letzten Grund aller Dinge" (II, 241). He simply ignores his inner life, just as he never shows concern for the emotional well-being of his dependants. Because he pays no heed to his spiritual needs and longings, he fails to recognize that he is following the wrong path through life. There is evidence in the story to indicate that Abdias's true mission in life would be to serve his people as a seer and a prophet. The fact that he is compared not only to the divine messengers who had appeared to the Jewish race from time to time, but is also compared to Mohammed, who had generated ideas "die dann eine Flamme wurden und über den Erdkreis fegten" (II, 247), suggests that he was preordained to serve his people in a similar capacity. The reference to his father's plan to have his young son educated by a doctor in Cairo "dass er weise

würde, wie es die alten Propheten und Führer seines Geschlechtes gewesen" (II, 245)--a course of action which is never pursued--also supports this contention. Hertling is quite justified in asking while discussing Abdias's purpose in life: "Kennzeichnen ihn prophetisch-gottverbundene Eigenschaften, ist er selber ein Botschaftsverkünder, oder ist es sein Dichter? Sind wir berechtigt, dem so häufig mit einem Raubtier, mit einem Tiger oder Schakal gleichgesetzten Menschen seherische Kräfte zuzuschreiben, in ihm vielerlei Züge der einen oder anderen biblischen Gestalt zu sehen, ihn als Hiobsfigur zu betrachten, den Jehova grausam richtet ...?"¹⁹

Abdias continues to be deluded about his true vocation and about life itself for the remainder of his existence on earth; he never attempts to overcome his spiritual blindness in spite of many divine messages transmitted in the form either of blessings or of castigations. He gains insights neither from his positive experiences nor from his encounters with misfortune. When he becomes permanently disfigured in Odessa, he does not contemplate the cause of his illness. He does not feel compelled to examine his actions or his outlook, but he simply accepts his disfigurement as a visitation of fate and continues to tread the same path as before. After his moment of triumph in battle he has delusions of becoming a famed military leader and subjugating the entire world at the point of his sword. The

thought of becoming a great spiritual figure who convinces by the power of his word never enters his mind. His hubris results in the destruction of his home and the death of his wife, but he does not comprehend that either. To be sure, it appears that Abdias finally overcomes his delusion and attains an understanding of reality at precisely that moment of crisis, for as he looks at the little daughter Deborah has borne him, "fiel es ihm von den Augen herunter wie dichte Schuppendecken, die darübergerlegen waren--es war ihm mitten in der Zerstörung nicht anders, als sei ihm das grösste Glück auf Erden widerfahren" (II, 261). Nonetheless, the change which has taken place in Abdias's attitude toward life is superficial at best and certainly not enduring. Although he cares for the child with loving concern, he does not, as Lachinger points out, recognize "den eigentlichen Ursprung seiner Seligkeit, die sich anbahnende Epiphanie des Numinosen in dem Kinde," or reach "die höchste Stufe der Liebe, die Hingabe an das Göttliche, das ihm in seinem Kinde erschienen ist."²⁰ What is more, although Abdias gazes at his newborn child in wonderment, he does not interpret the miracle of birth as a sign from the heavens, but simply accepts it as a fact, just as he later accepts the marvel of her cure from blindness as if it had been lucky chance. The fact that he can neither recognize his dying wife's gestures as signs of her re-kindled love for him nor grasp the significance of her

words of greeting (II, 261) also supports the contention that he has not been truly cured of his delusion.

Abdias's spiritual shortsightedness further reveals itself in his relationship with his daughter once they are in Europe. Although he attends to Ditha's physical needs and comforts, he pays little heed to her emotional requirements. He provides her more than adequately with shelter, clothing and food, but he neglects to cultivate her inner self. He is deluded to such a degree that for years he mistakes her physical handicap for a mental disability: "Abdias konnte sich nicht helfen, er musste denken, dass Ditha blödsinnig sei" (II, 313). He ultimately realizes that she is blind, but instead of devoting himself to educating her and to cultivating her soul, he once more becomes a usurer and a miser in order to hoard up riches for the child "dass es sich dereinst mit jedem Genusse seiner andern Sinne umringen könnte, wenn es schon den des einen entbehren müsste" (II, 318). Walter Silz is misguided in suggesting that the girl's "blindness calls forth every resource of his [Abdias's] ... pedagogical patience."²¹ Ditha's physical blindness underscores and emblemizes her father's spiritual blindness. However, whereas her sightlessness is cured, his condition is not.

Abdias does not change his tactics appreciably even after the girl's vision has been restored. He does not recognize her cure as a sign from above. To be sure, he

pays even more attention to her bodily needs and introduces her with infinite patience to the world of seeing, but, Stifter tells us, "aus Büchern lesen oder sonst etwas lernen hatte er Ditha nicht lassen; es war ihm nicht eingefallen" (II, 338). Ditha's largely dormant inner life is awakened and begins to blossom once she has gained her sight, in spite of the fact that her father contributes little to her development. Lachinger points out: "Während das Gesicht des in dauernder Verblendung befangenen Abdias in seiner Schwärze und mit den 'gekreuzten Narben' den 'Verfall' bezeichnet, heisst es von der im Sehen aufblühenden Ditha, dass ihr Antlitz nicht nur schöner wurde, sondern auch zu leben begann 'und sichtlich immer mehr das Schönste' zeigte, 'was der Mensch vermag, das Herz.'" ²² Ditha possesses not only a "Herz," but like her father in his youth, she is endowed with attributes that set her above the average individual, suggesting that she too is preordained for a higher, divine mission. Abdias fails to recognize the significance of her extraordinary qualities. It is precisely because he does not comprehend her mystical destiny and because he neglects to cultivate to the fullest potential the soul of that special being entrusted to his care that it is taken away from him again. Ditha's death robs him of his reason; his delusion has become absolute.

Hugo Almot in Das alte Siegel also suffers from spiritual shortsightedness. He falsely assumes that by

living according to his code of honour, he will gain happiness and assure himself of fulfilment in life. Because he so unquestioningly adheres to the abstract principles inscribed on the ancient seal, he sees only the flaws in Cöleste's character and fails to recognize her purity and innocence. He forsakes her and as a consequence forfeits his happiness. It is only at the end of Hugo's life that a process of disillusionment sets in. In his old age he begins to comprehend that he himself is the author of his misfortune, and he discards the ancient seal.

The main figure in Der Hagestolz also reaches the conclusion in his later years that he has lived under an illusion for much of his life. After his offer of marriage had been rejected by Ludmilla, he had decided not to marry and raise a family, but instead to devote his time and energy to his business ventures and his travels in the hope of finding fulfilment in those activities. Once he settles on his secluded island, however, the recluse begins to realize that he was deluded in his belief that those activities could take the place of a wife and a family. Because he understands the consequences of his misguided resolution and wants to prevent a similar fate for his nephew, he urges him to get married and to refrain from becoming deeply involved in a career, "'was dir doch langsam das Leben aus dem Körper frisst'" (III, 120).

Korona in Der Waldgänger proposes to her husband the

dissolution of their barren marriage because she believes that each partner should be free to enter another relationship in the hope that any new marriage might bring him children. She convinces Georg that they must attempt a new start in life: "'Wir wollen wieder sein wie früher, wollen anfangen, wo wir angefangen, als ich von meinen Verwandten und du nach dem Tode deiner Eltern von Eiserode fort in die Welt gingest'" (V, 137). They leave their house, the scene of their many happy years together, "an einem trüben, mit Regen kämpfenden Sommermorgen" (V, 140) in order to finalize their plans for divorce. After Georg and Korona have gone their separate ways, the narrator tells the reader: "Die seltsame Tat war nun getan--und beide konnten jetzt dem Plane gemäss frisch und frei an den Bau des noch übrigen künftigen Lebens gehen, als wäre es ein anfangsfähiges, ursprüngliches, gerade aus der ersten Hand des Schicksals gegebenes" (V, 140-41). The narrator's choice of the subjunctive "als wäre" as well as the weather conditions on the day of their final departure from home indicate that the possibility of any new beginning in life is a mere illusion.

Korona soon realizes that she has sacrificed her happiness by allowing her yearning for children to dominate her life. She never remarries and eventually moves to the area in the country which is very similar to the one where she lived so happily with Georg. In the case of Georg, the

process of disillusionment does not set in until the day when he meets Korona again. It is only then that he recognizes his deludedness.

Although the eccentric behaviour of the "Rentherr" in Turmalin must be seen as the key to his eventual decline, his life-long delusion, which eventually culminates in insanity, also serves as an important contributing factor. The seclusion of his flat on the fourth floor of a building, the iron gate which guards its entrance, the separateness of the rooms and the dark, heavy curtains on the windows point to an individual who has escaped from the world and has withdrawn into a cocoon. Reality enters these quarters only as abstract representations, in the form of the pictures of famous men and the figure of the actor Dall. By passively gazing at these abstractions of actuality and by sharing his observations with an actor, who is, after all, a person who only simulates real-life happenings on the stage, the "Rentherr" becomes even further removed from the real world. On the rare occasions when he ventures from his illusory domain, he remains a spectator of life. As a consequence, it is not surprising that he lacks the ability to discriminate between Sein und Schein. The actor, like his host, lives in a world of illusions; his extraordinary success and popularity on the stage are based on his ability to give up his own individuality and to become so absorbed by his role, "dass er auf diese

Weise nicht die Rollen spielte, sondern das in ihnen Geschilderte wirklich war" (IV, 139). "So wie er aber auf der Bühne das Theater mit der Wirklichkeit vermischte," Hans Dietrich Irmischer comments, "so verwechselte er auch, ohne es zu merken, im alltäglichen Umgang die Wirklichkeit mit der theatralischen Darstellung."²³

The wife of the "Rentherr" has lived in her husband's imaginary world for so long that she too can no longer clearly differentiate between reality and fantasy. She falls prey to Dall's advances because she simply mistakes "dessen ästhetisch-darstellerische Existenz ... in ihrer Weltunerfahrenheit für das Leben selbst."²⁴ Her departure is a crushing blow for her husband. Because he has lived in his illusory sphere for so long, he can no longer cope with naked reality when suddenly confronted by it. His delusion lapses into insanity and thus, as is the case with Abdias, becomes absolute. The bizarre music which the "Rentherr" plays, his peculiar mode of living and his abnormal treatment of his child attest to his total delusion.

Lack of Education

Shocked by the confusion and anarchy which he witnessed in Austria in the summer and fall of 1848, Stifter began to realize that a nation's social and political problems are

merely reflections of the moral shortcomings of its citizens. In a series of newspaper articles written between 1848 and 1849 and in his letters of the same period, he shifted his attention from the political issues of the day to ethical problems and the subject of education. Bildung, Eric Blackall contends, became for Stifter "the panacea, yet the word does not mean 'learning' but what results from true education, culture of mind and body."²⁵ Stifter became more and more convinced that only through education of all members of society could existing evils be removed and standards of morality be raised. He felt that the individual could gain control over his desires and passions only by striving toward "seine reinstmögliche Menschwerdung" (XIV, 267) and that ideal could only be achieved through Bildung. In a letter of March 6, 1849, addressed to his publisher, Gustav Heckenast, Stifter states while discussing the aftermath of the revolution: "Das Ideal der Freiheit ist auf lange Zeit vernichtet, wer sittlich frei ist, kann es staatlich sein, ja ist es immer; den andern können alle Mächte der Erde nicht dazu machen. Es gibt nur eine Macht, die es kann: Bildung. Darum erzeugte sich in mir eine ordentlich krankhafte Sehnsucht, die da sagt: 'Lasset die Kleinen zu mir kommen'; denn durch die, wenn der Staat ihre Erziehung und Menschwerdung in erleuchtete Hände nimmt, kann allein die Vernunft, d. i. Freiheit, gegründet werden, sonst ewig nie."²⁶ On April 26, 1849 he writes to his

friend Joseph Türck: "Das oberste Prinzip steht noch nirgends fest; dass nämlich Erziehung die erste und heiligste Pflicht des Staates ist; denn darum haben wir ja den Staat, dass wir in ihm Menschen seien, und darum muss er uns zu Menschen machen, dass er Staatsbürger habe und ein Staat sei, keine Strafanstalt, in der man immer Kanonen braucht, dass die wilden Tiere nicht losbrechen."²⁷ And in a newspaper article entitled "Mittel gegen den sittlichen Verfall der Völker" (1849), Stifter tells his readers: "Ich glaube, es ist die erste und heiligste Pflicht des Staates, dass er die Menschen zu eigentlichen Menschen mache; dies tut aber nur Unterricht und Erziehung. Ohne diesen bleibt oder wird die Menschheit verwildert und zerstört sich selbst" (XIV, 224-25). Without doubt, Stifter believed that the moral improvement of mankind was largely dependent on educational reforms. His strong views on the importance of education eventually led to his appointment in 1850 as supervisor of elementary schools for the province of Upper Austria.

To be sure, Stifter realized that the state and its various institutions could never be held solely responsible for the education of its citizens. He recognized that the family unit had an important role to play in the upbringing of the individual. "Ausser der Kirche, der Schule, den Gemeinden und Zünften," he writes in an article entitled "Schlusswort über unsere sittliche Verbesserung" (1849),

"gibt es noch eine Körperschaft im Staate, die auf Erziehung und Verbesserung der Menschen grossen Einfluss hat, die Familie" (XIV, 228). As a consequence, he felt that the state should do everything in its power to ensure the well-being of the family.

Admittedly, the above statements apply to a time when Stifter had already written all but one of the novellas on which this study is based. However, there is little doubt that he considered Bildung to be an important force in men's lives even before the revolution of 1848. He always believed that his writings should be looked upon not only as works of art but, more important, "als sittliche Offenbarungen."²⁸ In a letter to Heckenast on January 9, 1845, he is delighted over that fact that "die tiefe, sittlich schöne Absicht der Bücher"²⁹ has made a lasting impression on the serious readers. And in the preface to the first edition of Studien (1843), he expresses his hope that the collection of stories "irgend ein sittlich Schönes fördern hilft" (I, 54). "So bescheiden Stifter auch immer ist, wenn es sich um den künstlerischen Wert seiner Arbeiten handelt," Joachim Müller comments, "so selbstbewusst betont er ihre ethischen und pädagogischen Möglichkeiten."³⁰

Because Stifter placed so much emphasis on an extensive Bildung of the individual, it is not surprising that a false or distorted education or lack of an education contributes to the decline of his characters. In Die Narrenburg the

heirs to the castle are required to read the memoirs of their predecessors. The stipulation has a pedagogical purpose; Hanns von Scharnast had established this condition of inheritance in the hope that his descendants would learn from the experiences of their forebears and thus would be able to avoid their mistakes in life. Unfortunately, what Hanns had hoped for did not occur; in fact, as we have seen,³¹ the regulation had the opposite effect on succeeding generations of Scharnasts. Michael Kaiser points out that the readers of the memoirs cannot learn anything from the past "weil sich ihnen die Aufgaben anders stellen und sie andere persönliche Voraussetzungen mitbringen."³² Jodokus comes to this realization while writing the account of his life: "Und darum kann ich euch keinen Dank haben, Ubaldus und Johannes, und Prokopus und Julianus--und wie ihr heisset; denn der Dämon der Taten steht jederzeit in einer neuen Gestalt vor uns, und wir erkennen ihn nicht, dass er einer sei, der auch schon euch erschienen war--und eure Schriften sind mit unnütz. Jedes Leben ist ein neues, und was der Jüngling fühlt und tut, ist ihm zum ersten Male auf der Welt: ein entzückend Wunderwerk, das nie war und nie mehr sein wird" (I, 448). Jodokus cannot thank his predecessors because reading about their experiences in life has not only failed to give positive direction to his own but has even had a negative impact on it. He believes that he would never have committed evil if he had

not been incited to do so by his ancestors' example. Their deeds not only made their lives what they were, Jodokus feels, but also "verzehrten dieses Leben" (I, 450).

Although it is left to the reader to decide to whose life the demonstrative "dieses" refers, it may be interpreted to apply to Jodokus's own life. At another point, Jodokus also places part of the blame for his tragic relationship with Chelion on his ancestors' memoirs. He calls Chelion the "Engel meiner schwersten Tat" and adds: "und aus den Pergamenten des roten Felsensaaes kam dieser Engel zu mir" (I, 449). Because he believes that his ancestors' memoirs have had a detrimental influence on his life, Jodokus advises his heir to destroy the vault and to burn the rolls so "dass sich die Gespenster all ihres Tuns nicht in dein Leben mischen und es trüben, sondern dass du es lieber rein und anfangsfähig aus der Hand deines Schöpfers trinkest" (I, 450).

When Abdias is about to leave his home for the first time in order to earn his living in the desert, his father says to him: "'Jetzt, Sohn Abdias, sei gesegnet, gehe hin und verrate nichts von dem Neste, in dem du aufgeätzt worden bist'" (II, 246). Aron's use of the participle "aufgeätzt" to describe his son's upbringing is illuminating. Abdias has been etched rather than molded or educated into manhood by his father. In fact, what characterizes Abdias's childhood years is an almost total lack of Bildung of any

kind. To be sure, Aron had planned to have him trained by a physician in Egypt, but, we are informed, "auch aus dem ist wieder nichts geworden, weil es in Vergessenheit geraten war" (II, 245). As a consequence, the boy has nothing to do. He occupies much of his time by standing on the rubble in front of his house gazing at the sky above. What Abdias does learn from his father is avarice and love of material goods. Aron heaps on his wife and son all the luxuries he acquires on his travels through the desert. Esther, the mother, spends many hours putting the finest attire and jewellery on her child, thus instilling in him a sense of vanity.

Because his parents kindled only his sensual enjoyment in his youth, Abdias becomes a man obsessed with the satisfaction of his physical needs. As an adult he is "hart und unerbittlich, wo es seinen Vorteil galt" (II, 247). His vanity, his love of earthly possessions and his lust for power emanate from his one-sided upbringing. His spiritual life remains rudimentary because it was never truly awakened. As a consequence, he not only fails to recognize his mission in life, but later also ignores his daughter's inner life. "Als Mensch rein äusserer Zielsetzungen ist er unfähig, Dithas knospenreiches, alsdann beinah über Nacht sich zu vollen Blüten entfaltendes Seelenleben zu erkennen, geschweige es zu kultivieren,"³³ Günter Hertling points out.

Old Veit in Das alte Siegel decides to educate his son himself because he believes "dass es niemand so gut zu tun vermöchte als er" (II, 349). Yet the old man is ill-equipped to prepare Hugo for later life, and his ineptness as a tutor has serious consequences. Although Veit had acquired a wealth of knowledge in the sciences and in politics, it has become hopelessly outdated "bei dem indessen vorgerückten Stande der Wissenschaften" (II, 349). What he is able to convey to Hugo is knowledge which might have been current in the middle of the eighteenth century but is no longer applicable more than sixty years later. What is more important, however, is that he imparts to his son views on life which, because they were acquired on the battlefield more than half a century before, have become equally antiquated. Eric Blackall calls Veit's pedagogy "Übertragung der eigenen Ansichten, die sich wohl auf dem Schlachtfeld, doch kaum auf dem Schauplatz des Lebens bewährt haben."³⁴ Hugo's fixation on his father's Weltanschauung, particularly his sense of righteousness and integrity, has the effect that he becomes as inflexible as "ein Obrist des vorigen Jahrhunderts" (II, 350). Furnished with Veit's advice that he should accomplish a task which would be worthy of mention "wenn man einmal abends bei seinem eigenen Ofenfeuer beisammensitzt" (II, 351), he pursues that goal with singleness of purpose.

While old Veit is able to implant uprightness and honesty

and a sense of mission in his son, he cannot awaken his inner life. "Das Herz und seine Leidenschaften waren bei dem Vater schon entschlummert, daher blieben sie bei dem Sohne ungeweckt und ungebraucht in der Brust liegen" (II, 350), we read. Because Hugo's heart and feelings remain undeveloped and unused in his youth, he cannot cope with human emotions as an adult. Never having experienced love as a child, he is bewildered by his surge of feeling for Cöleste. Moreover, he is incapable of coming to terms with human frailty. When suddenly confronted by Cöleste's shortcomings as well as his own weakness, he clings unbendingly to the cast-iron ideals instilled in him by his father. Susi Gröble suggests: "Hugo ist deshalb dem Leben nicht gewachsen; er lernt die Stimmen in seinem Innern nicht kennen. Er wächst mit einem von aussen an ihn herangetragenen Ehrbegriff heran, statt aus sich selbst Gut und Böse abwägen zu lernen."³⁵ While Hugo is successful in war, where harshness and blind devotion to principles might be considered virtues, he is a failure in life, where tolerance and forgiveness are desirable qualities.

It is not surprising that the absence of adequate guidance plays a significant role in Turmalin when it is considered that the novella was written several years after the revolution of 1848. However, in this case it is not the life of the main figure of the story which is influenced by the lack of an education, for we know nothing about his

past. It is rather the daughter of the "Rentherr" who suffers the consequences of a bizarre upbringing. In the preamble to the novella the author remarks: "Es ist darin wie in einem traurigen Briefe zu entnehmen, wie weit der Mensch kömmt, wenn er das Licht seiner Vernunft trübt, die Dinge nicht mehr versteht..." (IV, 134). The introductory paragraph points not only to the abnormal mode of life of the "Rentherr" and his eventual downfall, but is equally applicable to his daughter's unfortunate situation. There is no question that the treatment the child receives at the hands of her father is tantamount to "das Licht der Vernunft trüben."

When the girl is first introduced to the reader, she is described as a normal child with "winzigen roten Lippen" and "rosigen Wangen" (IV, 138), thus showing promise of developing into a healthy adult. Sixteen years later she is depicted as a person with an enormous head who speaks in such a strange manner "dass man das Ganze für blödsinnig hätte halten können" (IV, 164). Her physical and psychological disabilities are the direct result of "jene wilde und zerrissene, ja fast unheimliche Unterweisung" (IV, 180). To be sure, the girl's condition improves after she is brought back into society by the narrator of the story. Because she receives good care and a modest education, she is able to overcome her obsessions, learns to read simple books and perform everyday tasks. Her large head, the

external evidence of her retardation, even gets a little smaller. Nonetheless, the consequences of her abnormal upbringing can never be fully overcome. She continues to live alone and must earn her livelihood by making blankets and carpets, which she is only able to sell because of her customers' compassion. Her humble way of life is particularly distressing in light of the fact that she might have developed into a gifted individual, if she had received a proper education in her youth. The narrator points out that the essays which the girl had written about her mother and father showed promise of unusual ability:

"Ich würde sie Dichtungen nennen, wenn Gedanken in ihnen gewesen wären oder wenn man Grund, Ursprung und Verlauf des Ausgesprochenen hätte enträtseln können.... Der Ausdruck war klar und bündig, der Satzbau richtig und gut, und die Worte, obwohl sinnlos, waren erhaben" (IV, 178).

The characters who meet with failure in life do so because they exhibit serious shortcomings which they are unable to overcome. The potentially most destructive of these negative characteristics is passion. The passionate person is lost unless he can control that debilitating trait. Eccentricity and delusion can also play a significant role in the downfall of these unfortunate individuals. In some instances the absence of a proper education also becomes a factor contributing to failure.

NOTES

- 1 See above, pp. 24-25.
- 2 Adalbert Stifter, Sämtliche Werke, XVI, 341-342.
- 3 Joachim Müller, Vergleichende Studien zur Menschauffassung und Menschendarstellung Gottfried Kellers und Adalbert Stifters, p. 41.
- 4 The importance of nature and, more particularly, nature as a foil to Klarissa's passion is discussed briefly in Eric Blackall, Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study, pp. 118-119.
- 5 Hans Dietrich Irmscher, Adalbert Stifter: Wirklichkeitserfahrung und gegenständliche Darstellung, p. 52.
- 6 Elisabeth Kläui, Gestaltung und Formen der Zeit im Werk Adalbert Stifters (Bern, 1969), p. 35.
- 7 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen, p. 76.
- 8 Susi Gröble, Schuld und Sühne im Werk Adalbert Stifters, p. 35.
- 9 Steffen, p. 94.
- 10 Blackall, Stifter, p. 94.
- 11 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung, p. 114.

- 12 See above, p. 116.
- 13 Eve Mason, "Stifter's Turmalin: A Reconsideration," p. 355.
- 14 Steffen, p. 148.
- 15 Joachim Müller, "Stifters Turmalin: Erzählhaltung und Motivstruktur im Vergleich beider Fassungen," Vierteljahresschrift des Adalbert Stifter-Instituts des Landes Oberösterreich, 17 (1968), 40.
- 16 G.H. Hertling, "'Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr': Zur Zentralsymbolik in Adalbert Stifters Turmalin," Vierteljahresschrift des Adalbert Stifter-Instituts des Landes Oberösterreich, 26 (1977), 25.
- 17 Steffen, p. 77.
- 18 G.H. Hertling, "Adalbert Stifters zeitlose Botschaft: Obadja-Abdias," p. 125.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 117-118.
- 20 Johann Lachinger, "Adalbert Stifters Abdias," p. 106.
- 21 Walter Silz, "Stifter, Abdias (1842)," p. 56.
- 22 Lachinger, p. 109.
- 23 Irmscher, p. 220.
- 24 Ibid.

- 25 Blackall, Stifter, p. 252.
- 26 Adalbert Stifter, Briefe, p. 115.
- 27 Ibid., p. 118.
- 28 A letter to Joseph Türck, dated February 22, 1850.
Ibid., p. 125.
- 29 Ibid., p. 79.
- 30 Müller, Stifter, p. 28.
- 31 See above, p. 146.
- 32 Michael Kaiser, Adalbert Stifter: Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung seiner Erzählungen, p. 111.
- 33 Hertling, "Abdias," p. 122.
- 34 Eric Blackall, "Das alte Siegel," p. 70.
- 35 Gröble, p. 70.

VI

PARTIAL SUCCESS IN LIFE

There are in Stifter's novellas a number of characters who, although they avoid failure in life, do not find complete fulfilment either. They are individuals who are only partially successful in mastering the crises in their lives and as a consequence must become reconciled to a lesser station in life. Their lives lack at least one of the attributes of a successful existence. In a sense they represent Stifter's most realistic character portraits. Complete failure in life is the exception rather than the rule in the real world; it is just as uncommon as a life of unclouded happiness. Much more prevalent is a way of life which, although it is relatively satisfying, has serious shortcomings. An investigation of the theme of failed life would appear incomplete without at least a brief look at the protagonists who occupy this position in life.

Gustav R., the young painter in Der Condor (1844),¹ is called an "armer, getäuschter Mann" (I, 80) and "ein unbekannter, starker, verachtender Mensch" (I, 81) toward the end of the story. The author's choice of words to describe the young man suggests that he has forfeited his happiness. To be sure, Gustav has become separated from the girl he loves, and he leads a lonely existence in the

Cordilleras, but his life cannot be called a failure. Although he is deeply troubled by the separation, he has sublimated his sorrow in his work, and he has become a successful artist whose paintings command admiration. His passion for his work has forced him to make sacrifices, but he has been able to achieve his goal in life--to appear "geistesgross und tatengross vor allen Menschen der Welt" (I, 77). "Also auf diese Weise," the narrator of the story reflects, "ist dein Herz in Erfüllung gegangen und hat sich deine Liebe entfaltet" (I, 80).

Felix in Das Heidedorf (1844)² faces a predicament similar to Gustav's. By devoting himself to his art, he has to forgo marriage and thus sacrifices his domestic happiness. He continues to live alone in the house which he had built for two because the father of his sweetheart refuses her permission to marry a poet. However, Felix resigns himself to his fate and accepts his station in life. "'Gott macht ja immer alles, alles gut, und es wird auch dort gut sein, wo er Schmerz und Entsagung sendet'" (I, 242), he tells his father. Although Felix is deeply disturbed by the loss of the girl he loves, it is made clear that he will find compensation for his sorrow in his poetry: "Im tiefen, tiefen Schmerze war es wie eine zuckende Seligkeit, die ihn lohnte" (I, 244). "Felix's poetic mission brings him bliss and pain," Margaret Gump points out, "--the unspeakable bliss of creation and the loss of ordinary human happiness."³

Although Felix does not marry, he will not lead an isolated existence. In spite of his unfamiliar occupation, he is accepted by the villagers as one of them. He participates in their activities and shares their joys and sorrows. At the end of the novella he joins the population of the village in church to give thanks for the deliverance from drought.

When Hanns in Der beschriebene Tännling (1850)⁴ discovers that Hanna, the girl he loves, has become betrothed to a young nobleman, he sets out to kill his rival. However, like the other characters in Stifter's novellas who contemplate murder,⁵ he is able to control his destructive passion and does not go through with his plan. He falls asleep beneath the tree where he hopes to avenge Hanna's betrayal, and in a dream he sees an image of the Virgin Mary. The vision helps him realize that he had planned "etwas Verworrenes" (III, 436). He returns to his place of work apparently a broken man. He never marries, remains poor and in later years is described as a person "dessen Angesicht Furchen hatte" (III, 440). Yet, by overcoming his passion, Hanns gains new strength and dignity as a human being. In hard work and in his love for the forest he finds compensation for what life has withheld from him. Moreover, by devoting himself to his sister's children, whom he has adopted, he gains a sense of purpose in life. Otto Pouzar is correct in suggesting: "Die grosse Lehre der Klassiker von Entsagung und Tätigkeit, Tüchtigkeit im Kreise, der dem Menschen

gemäss ist ..., ist das Verdienst dieser Erzählung."⁶

In contrast to Hanns, Hanna finds worldly fulfilment. She marries a rich man whose beauty matches her own and moves into a castle where she is surrounded by luxury. When she meets Hanns again, she is riding in a carriage, while he is hitched to a little wagon. Nevertheless, the paleness of her features and the fact that she is alone in the carriage suggest that Hanna has not found real happiness in spite of the fact that her material wishes have been fulfilled.

When the young count in Prokopus (1848)⁷ brings his bride to his ancestral castle, there are signs that their life together will not be one of undisturbed happiness. The cheers of the wedding-guests seem more like "ein sturm-ähnliches Brausen, wie wenn sie eher Unheil als Glück verkündeten" (V, 183), than shouts of welcome, and the wedding-ceremony takes place in a dark chapel, "in der die steinernen Heiligenbilder fast drohend herabsahen" (V, 186). Later that night, a shooting star crosses the sky--an ill omen for the future. Count Prokopus, like most of the members of the Scharnast family, is an exuberant, restless and ambitious person. He is well educated in various fields of knowledge and is very attached to his family's past. His bride, on the other hand, is described as quiet and unsophisticated: "Gertraud war eine tiefe, stille Natur, der alles klar, unverworren und eben sein

musste, sonst machte es ihr Pein" (V, 205). Because of her sheltered upbringing, she is overwhelmed by her new life at Rothenstein Castle. She admires her husband's erudition, but is also bewildered by his learned activities. Although Prokopus and Gertraud love each other, they grow estranged from each other over the years because their natures are so different. The gap that widens between them cannot even be bridged by the five children they have together. Prokopus and Gertraud grow old alongside each other, "sie hatten aber den Anfang der Ehe, die Einigung der Herzen zu demselben Klange, noch nicht gefunden" (V, 214).

Although unclouded happiness eludes Prokopus and Gertraud, they cannot be added to the ranks of the failing characters in Stifter's works. They must be deemed at least partially successful in life for several reasons. Although their marriage is full of discontent and has few happy moments, they do not separate, and they reach advanced age alongside each other. Their intense love for each other never diminishes in spite of their many differences. Moreover, they have five children--an exceptionally large number in Stifter's works. What is most significant, however, is the fact that one of their two sons is Julius von Scharnast. Julius, we learned in Die Narrenburg, is able to escape the curse of his Scharnast blood. By becoming a tiller of the soil and by marrying a peasant girl,

he initiates a genuine revitalization of his family. His descendant Heinrich becomes the first Scharnast who leads a contented and harmonious life. Thus Prokopus and Gertraud are linked through one of their children to a generation which brings moderation and happiness to Rothenstein Castle.

NOTES

- 1 The first version of Der Condor appeared in 1840.
- 2 Das Heidedorf was first published in 1840.
- 3 Margaret Gump, Adalbert Stifter, pp. 28-29.
- 4 The first version of Der beschriebene Tännling was published in 1846.
- 5 Jodokus in Die Narrenburg, the colonel in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters and the uncle in Der Hagestolz also plan to murder their rivals.
- 6 Otto Pouzar, Ideen und Probleme in Adalbert Stifters Dichtungen, p. 56.
- 7 Although Stifter wrote Prokopus at a time when he was revising many of his stories for Studien, he did not include it in the collection.

VII

CONCLUSION

For many decades after his death, Stifter was regarded by critics primarily as a naive and idealizing writer who depicted scenes of idyllic, harmonious life.¹ Even several fairly recent publications, although they draw attention to the exploration of the negative sides of the human condition in his works, still present him essentially as the portrayer of an untroubled, serene style of life.² There is little doubt that his prose reflects the relatively standard Catholic value system of his time with its stress on family and community life, fruitful activity and personal restraint. Stifter's works on the whole are affirmations of that system of values. He believed that man must strive for fulfilment in life. That fulfilment is only found by the individual who lives in close association with his fellow-beings, channels his energies into meaningful work, curbs his excessive passion, is happily married, and has children. Many of Stifter's literary figures manage such meaningful lives. Albrecht and Angela in Feldblumen, Augustinus and Margarita in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters, Stephan Murai and Brigitta in Brigitta, Tiburius and Maria in Der Waldsteig, and Alfred and Camilla in Zwei Schwestern, to name a few, reach the fundamental goals in life they seek. There are, to be sure, several others.

Although Stifter often focused attention on the exemplary in life, he did not avoid depicting the darker aspects of human existence.³ He repeatedly portrayed characters who experience much suffering and who never achieve the self-fulfilment they desire. Their lives must clearly be deemed failures. This study was undertaken with the object of identifying and analyzing the theme of failed life in Stifter's narratives. To be sure, scholarship has not been oblivious to the presence of this theme; several critics have recognized that it plays an important role in the author's art.⁴ However, while the scope and intent of some of these critical analyses obviously prevented elaboration of the theme of failed life, other studies have failed equally to develop the well-founded suspicion that it is a central theme in Stifter's works; by examining the works on an individual basis, they have treated it only in isolation. Only in one previous study has failure been the focal point of an analysis of some of Stifter's early stories.⁵

An examination of Stifter's concept of fate has shown that the misfortunes which befall his protagonists are not arbitrary manifestations of chance. The pain and sorrow endured by them are the consequence of wrong-doing. Human inadequacy provokes a negative reaction. The shortcomings of the figures result in their own downfall and can also bring misfortune to others. It has also become

evident in this study that the circumstances of those who have suffered failure show remarkable similarities. They are condemned to live out their lives in solitude without hope of deliverance. Not only are they cut off from the world around them, but they also have no partner or descendants at their side. The absence of children makes them much more readily the prey of passing time. More often than not they pursue no functional or rewarding activities.

The immediate cause of the characters' decline, it was discovered, may be one or several crises which they encounter and which they cannot overcome. The protagonists are unable to surmount the crises because they exhibit serious shortcomings--shortcomings which they cannot rid themselves of. With few exceptions the single most important of these negative traits is unbridled passion. Passion, it was found, is more than just an overpowering sensual urge. For Stifter it is also the source of anger, egoism, lust for power and violence. In some instances the characters' eccentricity also contributes to their downfall. The term eccentricity was used in this study to describe behaviour which deviates substantially from what is considered to be conventional conduct. Delusion was seen to be a further element leading to catastrophe. Several of the figures destined to fail in life are and remain spiritually blind. Because Stifter considered

education to be an important force in the life of man, it was not surprising to discover that a distorted education or the complete absence of it can contribute to the decline of his protagonists.

In the novellas there were found to be a number of persons who could not be counted as failing characters in spite of the fact that they are denied complete self-fulfilment. They are the individuals who, because they are only partially successful in overcoming their crises, must resign themselves to a less desirable position in life than they had hoped to achieve.

As a result of the evidence presented in this study, it would appear that failure to achieve a fulfilling life was a major concern to Stifter, the author. Particularly in his first decade as a writer, it was an ever-present, gnawing fear, awesome in its implications. By probing into failure in the stories of Adalbert Stifter, this study hopes to have served a two-fold purpose; first, of contributing in some measure to a fuller understanding of the novellas and, second, of pointing to the overall importance of the theme of failed life in them.

NOTES

- 1 Among others see Ernst Bertram, Studien zu Adalbert Stifters Novellentechnik (Dortmund, 1907); Josef Bindtner, Adalbert Stifter: Sein Leben und sein Werk (Wien, 1928); and even Otto Pouzar, Ideen und Probleme in Adalbert Stifters Dichtungen.
- 2 See Hermann Augustin, Adalbert Stifter und das christliche Weltbild (Basel, 1959); as well as Emil Staiger, Adalbert Stifter als Dichter der Ehrfurcht (Heidelberg, 1967), to name only two.
- 3 For insights into the negative sides of life in Stifter's works see Eric Blackall, Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study; Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter: Deutungen; J.P. Stern, "Propitiations: Adalbert Stifter;" Michael Kaiser, Adalbert Stifter: Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung seiner Erzählungen; and, above all, Erik Lunding, Adalbert Stifter.
- 4 For some discussion of meaningless life and its causes in individual works see the above publications and Margaret Gump, Adalbert Stifter; Alexander Gelley, "Stifter's Der Hagestolz, an Interpretation;" G.H. Hertling, "Adalbert Stifters zeitlose Botschaft: Obadja-Abdias;" Johann Lachinger, "Adalbert Stifters Abdias;"

Eve Mason, "Stifter's Turmalin: A Reconsideration;"
Walter Silz, "Stifter, Abdias (1842);" and Rosemarie
Hunter, "Wald, Haus und Wasser, Moos und Schmetterling:
Zu den Zentralsymbolen in Stifters Erzählung Der
Waldgänger."

- 5 Rosemarie Hunter, "Das Problem des verfehlten Lebens
in einigen Novellen Adalbert Stifters aus der Zeit
1843-1848."

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