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THE AMBIVALENCE OF NATURE
IN THE WORKS OF
ADALBERT STIFTER

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By
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The Ohio State University
1969

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PREFACE

To the professors in the Ohio State University German Department I express my thanks for stimulating and rewarding years as a graduate student and teaching assistant. To Professor Wolfgang Wittkowski I owe a debt of gratitude for his guidance and patience from the inception of this study to its completion. Professor Hugo ("The Axe") Bekker I thank for his stylistic criticism.

I was fortunate enough to have known and worked for Professor Dieter Cunz until his death in February of this year. My humble thanks and good-bye to this teacher, scholar and friend.

To Dr. and Mrs. John Herrick I can only insufficiently express my appreciation for a home away from home and encouragement in hours of tribulation.
TO JOHN AND MABEL
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Studies in Language
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INTRODUCTION

In the introductory section of Adalbert Stifter's novella *Abdias* there occurs a remarkable observation about the forces of nature, an observation which provided the original idea for this dissertation:

Aber es liegt auch wirklich etwas Schauderndes in der gelassenen Unschuld, womit die Naturgesetze wirken, dass uns ist, als lange ein unsichtbarer Arm aus der Wolke, und tue vor unsern Augen das Unbegreifliche. Denn heute kommt mit derselben holden Miene Segen, und morgen geschieht das Entsetzliche. Und ist beides aus, dann ist in der Natur die Unbefangenheit, wie früher.

When in this passage Stifter remarks that there is something "Schauderndes" in the calm innocence of the forces of nature, this quality lies not in nature itself but in man's response to the manifestation of these forces. In his anthropomorphic way of looking at things, man—here Stifter himself—senses an uncanny and ambivalent discrepancy between the effects of natural forces and the peacefulness with which they occur. This type of discrepancy occurs often in Stifter's *Studien*, and plays an important role in one of the works we will be investigating closely, *Der Hoch-

The apparent contradiction between the appearance and the effects of nature's forces can be so disturbing that man automatically applies human attributes to these forces which are in reality nonhuman. He experiences the absence of any sympathetic involvement on nature's part with human problems and destinies as apathy in nature. As nonhuman existence, nature is neither apathetic nor otherwise. Thus the "gelassene Unschuld" in the above passage arises from the subjective perspective of man, who perceives the tranquility of nature in such a way. Man sees nature in terms of an anthropomorphic "as if." Thus it seems to him as if an invisible arm were reaching down from the clouds and doing incomprehensible things. This tendency to view phenomena in nature in human terms creates the uncanny impact of the cosmic event in the first work we will be discussing, Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842.

"Schaudernd" is not only the seeming discrepancy between the peacefulness of nature and its often disastrous effects. With frightening awe man also experiences the latent ambivalent potential of natural forces. Without changing their peaceful countenance ("mit derselben holden Miene") these forces can bring blessings one day and terror the next. In the case of Abdias, the same forces bring simultaneously blessings and
destruction. This latent ambivalence characterizes the forces of nature in the confrontation of the two lost children with the icy reaches of the mountain Gars in Bergkristall, the third work which we want to interpret in detail.

The aspects mentioned above in connection with the quote from Abdias are essential for a meaningful appraisal of nature and man's relationship to it in Stifter's works. The first three chapters of this dissertation present interpretations of Stifter's essay Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842, the Studien novella Der Hochwald, and the story Bergkristall from the Bunte Steine, each time with special emphasis on the problematic and ambivalent aspects of the man-nature confrontation. The final chapter traces the occurrence of these aspects in the rest of Stifter's stories, but excludes his novels.

For nearly eighty years secondary literature dealing with Adalbert Stifter ignored any problematic features in his view of nature. Only in the last twenty years have critics begun to turn away from the naively optimistic interpretation to an awareness of deeper and more problematic elements of Stifter's nature descriptions and his works in general.

One of the earliest analyses of Stifter's writings is the dissertation of the Nietzsche biographer Ernst
Bertram. In one chapter devoted entirely to an investigation of Stifter's nature description Bertram discusses the essence of German romantic nature description as formulated in theoretical remarks by August Wilhelm Schlegel and in quotes from Növalis' Die Lehrlinge zu Sais. He then points out that Stifter's reverence for the essence of things ("Wesenheit der Dinge") as typified by Der Nachsommer and his accuracy of nature description ("Naturtreue") provide a glaring repudiation of the German romantic stylistic ideal. After pointing out various stylistic techniques at work in Stifter's nature depictions, above all the many nuances of light effects and contrasts, Bertram concludes with an observation on the undramatic and optimistic character of Stifter's landscapes.

In the 1930's with the awakening of interest in literary Biedermeier, there appear many articles trying to classify Stifter as a Biedermeier writer, among them the dissertation of Günther Weydt. Weydt's study amounts to an enumeration of the various landscapes, types of objects and stylistic features of Stifter's

portrayal of nature. He wants to prove that Stifter's outlook on nature and his depiction of it correspond to the concepts of literary Biedermeier in the nineteenth century. Such correspondences he finds in Stifter's works in the "Sammeln und Hegen," detail description, genuine nature settings, limited landscape areas, precise knowledge of stones and plants—all of which he of course lists—, study of the atmosphere, and a refinement of sense impressions. Confronted with such a vast inventory, one cannot help feeling that Weydt cannot see the woods for all the trees and thus detects no problematic features in Stifter's nature.

In her dissertation, Marianne Ludwig also overlooks any problematic aspects in Stifter's presentation of nature, primarily because she is more concerned with illustrating the dominant role of "things" and thus the "Gegenständlichkeit" in his works. She finds that for Stifter nature manifests divine guidance in the world, whether it be the smallest object or the most splendid phenomenon.

This religious interpretation of Stifter's view of nature characterizes a trend in secondary literature. In his rhapsodic book, Adalbert Stifter, Leben, Werk

5 Ibid., pp. 66ff.
Josef Michels continually finds nature to be a beautiful and innocent manifestation of the glory of God and the order of the universe, even when the passages to which he alludes could imply just the opposite, as we shall later see. Similarly, Kurt Michel sees Stifter's conception of nature as a "geordnete, heilende Sphäre."7

Hermann Kunisch tends also towards an optimistic, religious view of Stifter's concept of nature. He observes that nature is never depicted for its own sake, but is always the carefully chosen background for particular human events. Kunisch finds a development in the man-nature relationship during Stifter's career:


As does Bertram nearly fifty years earlier, Kunisch

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9 Ibid., p. 72.
uses Der Hochwald to demonstrate that Stifter's depiction of nature is removed from the magic and enticing nature which the German romantics portrayed. Identifying the remarks of the old woodsman Gregor with Stifter's own views, Kunisch states:

Das Verhältnis des Menschen zur Natur ist nicht mehr das eines von ihr Ergriffenen, sondern das eines Betrachters und Beobachters... Die Natur ist nicht mehr gefährlich. Wenn er ihre Stimme recht hört, dann ist sie nicht betörend, sondern klar und gut.

Yet as we saw in our initial quote from Abdias (see above, pp. 1ff), this very Ergriffensein of man in his confrontation with nature, plays an important role in Stifter's works. In his religious optimism, Kunisch, whose book is incidentally dedicated to the Catholic philosopher Romano Guardini, joins with Gregor in seeing nature as God's wonderful creation and the work of a great and good gardener. Man is frightened only because he misunderstands nature.

Emil Staiger tends also to regard nature as symbolic of the divine, although he abstains from the pronounced religious interpretation of Kunisch.¹¹

Konrad Steffen speaks in his dissertation of the empirical world in general in Stifter's works, and

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 84.
¹¹ Emil Staiger, Adalbert Stifter als Dichter der Ehrfurcht (Zürich, 1952).
finds this world to be an expression of the absolute ("Ausdruck des Absoluten"). This expression can be found in every individual object of creation, and it is man's obligation to recognize the uniqueness of these "Dinge" and to act accordingly. Disregard of that which the "Dinge" demand can lead to man's defeat and destruction. Respect for nature teaches respect for one's fellow man, much along the lines of the preface to the Bunte Steine. Here Steffen touches on the moral and ethical implications of man's relationship with nature, which Stifter himself formulates in Witiko as the "Forderung der Dinge," and which is discussed in virtually every book about Stifter.

Paul Hankamer sees also an ethical and moral obligation placed upon man in his relationship with nature:

Das Leben, das er zu führen hat, gegenüber der schicksalhaften Unschuld der Pflanze und dem geistunggebundenen und deshalb schamlosen Tier, an die er doch geschöpftisch grenzt, ist Werk aus Naturtrieb und Vernunft, ist eine kulturell-sittliche Leistung, wie sie allein dem Menschen möglich ist und seine Würde ausmacht.

Whereas Steffen interprets man's relationship with nature optimistically, Hankamer sees the moral obliga-

12 Konrad Steffen, Adalbert Stifter und der Aufbau seiner Weltanschauung (Zürich, Leipzig, 1931), pp. 84ff.
tion arising from man's inclusion in an inhuman natural process:

Keine einfache und grenzenlose Herrschaft über die Lebensdinge wurde dem Menschen verliehen, denn zugleich ist er der Natur selbst eingeordnet und untersteht ihren unmenschlichen Gesetzen. Bis zur Er­schütterung erfährt Stifter, dass "die Natur im Ganzen" auch den Menschen als ihren letzten Kreis umfängt. Eingeglie­dert ist er ihr, die nicht menschlich ist, weder dem Ursprung nach noch nach ihren Gesetzen. Öfters stellt er in ehrender Furcht ihr unschuldig unbeirrtes Walten fest, gerade wenn es menschliches Verhältnis schafft.¹⁴

Written in 1938, this passage is one of the first in the secondary literature indicating a disturbing and problematic aspect in man's relationship to nature in Stifter's works. Hankamer does not develop this aspect, but instead discusses man's moral duty to recognize the essence of things, however disturbing the insight into one's own position in the natural process may be.

Robert Mühlher also draws parallels between nature and human behavior.¹⁵ With the aid of Stifter's distinc­tion between inner and outer nature (man versus the external phenomena) in the preface to the Bunte Steine, Mühlher endeavors to show that man is part of the greater part of nature. Hence the "sanftes Gesetz"--which manifests itself in the gentle breeze rather than in the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 105.
storm creating ocean waves—is also valid for man. Man's true essence is not found in passionate outbursts but in calm behavior and controlled emotions. For this reason the spectacular natural events in the Bunte Steine do not win out over the less conspicuous but perennial life-preserving forces of nature.  

Whereas Mühlher discounts Stifter's fascination with the spectacular event, Joachim Müller draws particular attention to the presence of the elemental and catastrophic in Stifter's portrayal of nature, above all in the stories Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters and Abdias, and in the account of a remarkable snowfall in Aus dem bairischen Walde. Müller detects in the unusual frozen landscape in Die Mappe and the snowfall in the Bavarian Woods the ambivalence of these phenomena which are "furchtbar und erhaben zugleich." Like Mühlher, he believes that the catastrophic element cannot triumph:

Wohl ist das Katastrophische, das Elementar-Ausbrechende das Mächtige, und die Landschaft muss es über sich ergehen lassen, aber gerade in den Bedrohungen und Heimsuchungen wird sie ihre Seele bewahren und bewahren, denn diese Seele kann nur das in allem jähen Wechsel Konstante sein, das alle äussere Vernichtung Überlebt. Ja im Durchstehen aller Stürme wird sie erst ihre echte Seinsgehalt auskristallisieren.

17 Ibid., p. 146.
Although not developed, Müller's observation as to the two-sidedness of natural phenomena earns him a place in more recent criticism, which detects contradictory and problematical elements in Stifter's nature presentation and in his works in general. This new trend begins in the 1950's, thanks mainly to Eric Lund- ing's book, which not only created new waves in the tepid waters of Stifter criticism but provoked a new appraisal of the poet. Applying Kierkegaard's methods of existential literary criticism to Stifter's life and works, Lunding builds an argument for the gradual development from the young Stifter's loneliness to the existential "Lebensangst" of the sick and aging poet.

In an article appearing a few years after Lunding's book Heinz Otto Burger illustrates with scenes from Der Hochwald a double aspect (consoling-disconsoling) to the apparent indifference ("Gleichgültigkeit") of nature in the face of human disaster. Again a few years later, Walter Höllerer follows Burger's line of thought and arrives at the themes of indifference and the continued growth of nature beyond all human existence.

Since Burger and Höllerer will be mentioned again in our discussion of Der Hochwald, it suffices for now to say that they were the first critics to deal explicitly with the ambivalence of the man-nature confrontation in Stifter's works. Here we might also mention Kurt Gerhard Fischer, who, although not concerned with ambivalence, interprets the aspect of nature's indifference as symbolizing man's existential exposure to nature, the tiger in his own breast, and the absurdity of existence in general.\(^21\)

Walter Haussmann detects contradictory elements in the description of the Hungarian pussta in Brigitta:

Faszinierend ist an dieser heroischen Schönheit vor allem die Widersprüchlichkeit, das Geheimnisvolle. Die Pussta ist prachtvoll und öde, feierlich und eintönig, sprechend und schweigsam.\(^22\)

Whereas Burger perceives two sides to the "Gleichgültigkeit" in nature, Haussmann finds it ambivalently "leidenschaftslos." Nature is dispassionate and just and causes a similar behavior in man, free of destructive and threatening passion. However, this lack of passion means also a total lack of feeling:

"Unfühlend ist die Natur"—sie kann gleichgültig, feindselig, kalt und fremd sein, und gelassen zerstören.


Das lockt, in der Abdias-Vorrede, den Dichter in ein düsteres Grübeln hinein. Werther's Entdeckung, Hölderlins Leiden, die Ambivalen, der Sprache der natürlichen Dinge ist auch Stifters Anfechtung.  

Fritz Martini touches also on the double aspect of nature in his discussion of the Bunte Steine:


Martini finds Granit, Bergkristall, Kalkstein and Katzensilber characterized by the same theme: the breakthrough of destructive forces which gain a foothold in the peaceful world with its moral norms. Yet man's position in nature is such that even in terrible and sublime moments it can become a place of security for him. Here where Martini could elaborate on the twosidedness in nature, he interprets the beneficial forces as revealing provident actions by the divine.  

He attributes salvation in these stories to life-preserving human strength in moments of greatest need.

In recent years Paul Böckmann and Wolfgang

23 Ibid., p. 40.
25 Ibid., pp. 515ff.
Preisendanz have drawn attention to the importance of perspective in Stifter's works. Preisendanz concentrates his study on the man-nature confrontation:

Stifters Naturdarstellung ist auf menschliche Wahrnehmung bezogen und kann dadurch ein wesentliches Moment des erzählbaren Geschehens werden.  

Preisendanz observes that in the early Studien the description of nature is often a reflex of the inner mood of the person viewing it. Often this view proves inadequate, so that there results a discrepancy between this perspective of nature and reality. Furthermore a changing perspective often brings an entirely different view of a particular landscape, so that:

...sich etwas aus einer neuen Perspektive anders ausnimmt als zuvor, dass sich die Aspekte der Dinge im Zuge der Fahrt oder Wanderung, im Laufe der Zeit wandeln, dass sich bisher Verborgenes enthüllt, vermeintliche Zusammenhänge als falsch erwiesen und neue Zusammenhänge offenbar werden.

The discrepancy between subjectively perceived nature and its autonomous reality creates tension in many of Stifter's stories, for it indicates the problem behind the subjective perception of all reality:

Was aber menschliche Erfahrung und Orientierung schwierig machen mag, welche Gefahr in der subjektiven Vermittelheit alles Wirklichen liegen kann; das will auch ein guter Teil...

28 Ibid., p. 417.
der Naturdarstellung zum Vorschein bringen. 29

We feel that man's human perspective does indeed play a vital role in Stifter's man-nature confrontations. In our first chapter we shall see how this perspective with its expectations and subjective feelings helps transform the impressive solar eclipse into a vision of apocalyptic proportions.

Two other discussions dealing explicitly with Stifter's depiction of nature have appeared in the past year, both of them after the first draft of this dissertation was nearly finished. Heinrich Mettler's published dissertation remains in the spirit of traditional Stifter interpretation. 30 In the first half of his book he discusses some of the basic unproblematic features of Stifter's nature description and attempts to define Stifter's nature descriptions within the intellectual-historical development of the nature portrayal in German literature. In the second half of his work Mettler traces Stifter's development away from Jean Paul and the German romantic writers towards a more objective portrayal of nature. Bertram, Kunisch and Ludwig dealt with this problem much earlier (see above, pp. 4ff.)

29 Ibid., p. 418.
Mettler's most exciting observations come almost as an afterthought. At the end of his chapter on Feldblumen, while intent on showing something else, he makes an important observation about nature's seeming indifference in moments of man's distress:

Die Natur bleibt vom Schicksal eines Menschen völlig unberührt. Das Eigen-dasein der Natur, in das der Mensch doch einbezogen ist, kann bei einem persönlichen Unglück geradezu grausam wirken.31

In connection with Der Hochwald Mettler makes a similar observation to which we shall return in our discussion of this novella.

In the most recent article on Stifter's view of nature Herbert Seidler points out "positive" and "negative" aspects of man's relationship to "Naturgrösse." He discusses a threefold manifestation of the disturbing side of man's position in nature:

Es zeigt sich, dass das negative Verhältnis des Menschen zur Natur sich auseinanderfaltet in drei Erscheinungsweisen: Versagen, Bedrohtheit, Vergänglichkeit des Menschen. Es ist ohne weiteres klar, dass diese Erscheinungen nur der grossen Natur gegenüber möglich sind, nie gegenüber kleinen Dingen. Gerade also im Verhältnis zum Menschen offenbart sich die Grösse der Natur.32

After giving examples of each of the three manifesta-

31 Ibid., p. 80.
tions quoted, Seidler turns his attention to manifestations of the man-nature relationship. Again he comes up with three possibilities:

Damit wenden wir uns dem positiven Verhältnis des Menschen zur grossen Natur zu... Es sollen drei Möglichkeiten an Einzelbelegen geprüft werden: das Bestehen der erschütternden Größe, die Geborgenheit des Menschen und die Erhebung und Ehrfurcht, die sie im Menschen auslöst und bildet.33

The various problematic situations which Seidler discusses do occur in Stifter's works, but by treating them in two separate groups he seems to overlook that in many instances two or more of the manifestations quoted above appear simultaneously in man's encounter with the forces of nature. Seidler sees two types of man-nature relationships, but not the simultaneous two-sidedness of any one such relationship. In this study I want to direct particular attention to this two-sidedness in the man-nature confrontations in Stifter's works.

33 Ibid., p. 232.
CHAPTER I

DIE SONNENFINSTERNIS AM 8. JULI 1842

In 1842 Stifter experienced in Vienna a total solar eclipse. His account of this event appeared in three installments in the Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode. Written early in Stifter's poetic career, this little work stands in close proximity to Der Hochwald, which we shall also discuss in detail.

In Der Hochwald as well as in several other stories and in two of the novels, Stifter sets the events within the familiar landscape of the Bohemian Woods where he spent his childhood. These settings do not correspond entirely to reality and are an integral part of the moods and plots of the fiction which Stifter creates. The unusual events in nature which he depicts, such as the snowfall in Bergkristall, the unusual frozen woods and the cracking of the ice in Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters, or the hailstorm in Katzensilber are the products of poetic creativity, even though actual events in nature may or may not have given Stifter the impetus for them. The description of the eclipse, on the other hand, is the allegedly accurate account of an event which historically took place and which Stifter actually experienced.
But his account goes beyond mere factual description. Using the tools of his poetic trade, he recreates the eclipse and the human feelings of those who viewed it. He depicts the same situation which plays a central role in Der Hochwald and Bergkristall, namely the confrontation of man with the awesome forces of nature. An examination of this recreated historical event provides insights into Stifter’s treatment of nature in the other two stories as well.

Any similarity between Die Sonnenfinsternis and Stifter’s stories has gone virtually unnoticed by Stifter scholars. In fact, the sketch of the eclipse has received very little attention in secondary literature. Konrad Steffen fails to include it in his book which otherwise discusses all Stifter’s poetic works. Eric Lunding refers to it only in passing as an "aussen-künstlerischer Beleg." Of the general works about Stifter only Joachim Müller’s study gives Die Sonnenfinsternis any attention, and then only to retell the story with the accompanying brief commentary often characterizing Müller’s analyses. 

2 Eric Lunding, Adalbert Stifter (Copenhagen, 1946), p. 44.
3 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter: Weltbild und Dichtung (Halle, 1956), pp. 140-142.
Sedlmayr in the Adalbert Stifter Institute's reprint edition of Die Sonnenfinsternis with accompanying essays comments merely on the unusual and often expressionistic language of the eclipse description. Willy Rey and Gunter Hertling refer to the eclipse briefly in connection with other works. Herbert Seidler mentions the eclipse description as an example of Stifter's most powerful depiction of nature's impressive magnificence. This unwarranted dearth of interest in Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842 seems reason enough to begin our study with this work.

At the start of Die Sonnenfinsternis Stifter acknowledges the impossibility of viewing the eclipse objectively:

Es gibt Dinge, die man fünfzig Jahre weiss, und im einundfünfzigsten erstaunt man über die Schwere und Furchbarkeit ihres Inhaltes.

8 Adalbert Stifter, Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters. Sonnenfinsternis. Aus dem alten Wien (Augsburg, 1957), p. 303. All subsequent quotes from this edition in this chapter are in parentheses. All italics are mine unless otherwise noted.
The word "erstaunt" indicates a subjective reaction on the part of the viewer. The viewer reacts in such a way because the eclipse exceeds his human expectations and preconceived notions of what the phenomenon is going to be. There are things which one objectively knows ("weiss") for fifty years, but when they happen one is astounded anyway ("erstaunt"). This is precisely what happens to Stifter upon viewing the eclipse:

So ist es mir mit der totalen Sonnenfinsternis ergangen. (Sf., p. 303)

The surpassed expectation transforms the natural phenomenon which the viewer originally intends to view objectively—or so Stifter would have us believe—into a moving and breathtaking subjective experience:

Aber, da sie nun wirklich eintraf... da geschahen freilich ganz andere Dinge, an die ich weder wachend noch träumend gedacht hatte, und an die Keiner denkt, der das Wunder nicht gesehen. — Nie und nie in meinem ganzen Leben war ich so erschüttert, von Schauer und Erhabenheit so erschüttert, wie in diesen zwei Minuten—es war nicht anders, als hätte Gott auf einmal ein deutliches Wort gesprochen, und ich hätte es verstanden. (Sf., pp. 303-304)

At the end of his initial comments on the description to follow Stifter states his aim and purpose in depicting the eclipse:

Ich will es in diesen Zeilen versuchen, für die tausend Augen, die zugleich an jenem Momente zum Himmel aufblickten, das Bild, und für die tausend Herzen, die zugleich schlugen, die Empfindung
He wants to describe his view of the eclipse ("Bild") and his reactions to the unexpected scene ("Empfindung") as representative for all those who viewed the solar event. This description offers an impression of the eclipse as seen through the subjective human perspective of one Adalbert Stifter, narrator-viewer and active character in the story of this event, which unfolds before the reader through his eyes and feelings. Any ambivalence in the solar spectacle will thus originate from Stifter's reactions to it.

The initial lines of the account of the eclipse provide a factual and objective look at the setting in and around Vienna on the morning of the event, but several indications of human feeling and anticipation show through this matter-of-fact description. The sun does not merely shine; it shines "freundlich" (Sf., p. 305) upon the meadows, water and buildings. The subjective impression of the narrator imbues the sun with a human quality which it in reality does not and cannot possess. The narrator perceives the sun to be friendly in light of what he knows is going to be happening in a few minutes. All eyes are looking to the sun with strange anticipation:
Mit einem seltsamen Gefühl schaute man die Sonne an, da an ihr nach wenigen Minuten so Merkwürdiges vorgehen sollte. (Sf., p. 305)

Already before the eclipse has begun the expectation of the imminent cosmic event casts a mood of anticipation and strangeness over the scene. This mood remains in some degree or other until the light begins to appear again after the moment of total eclipse. The viewers' fear of the clouds on the horizon arises not from fear of the coming eclipse but from concern that these clouds may obscure the event.

The next paragraph gives a factual account of the preparations for viewing the eclipse and retains its objective tone until shortly before its conclusion, when a rhetorical question switches the narrative temporarily to present tense and reveals the viewers' increased feelings of anticipation directly before the onset of the eclipse:

...und wie viele tausend Augen mochten in diesem Augenblick den umliegenden Bergen nach der Sonne schauen, nach der selben Sonne, die Jahrtausende den Segen herabschüttet, ohne dass Einer dankt—heute ist sie das Ziel von Millionen Augen—aber immer noch wie man sie mit den dämpfenden Gläsern anschaut, schwebt sie als rote oder grüne Kugel rein und schön umzirkelt in dem Raume. (Sf., p. 306)

The hovering sun, purely and beautifully haloed, provides anticipatory contrast to the imminent change.

The description of the disappearance of the sun—
light begins with a poetic image of death:

Endlich zur vorausgesagten Minute—gleichsam wie von einem unsichtbaren Engel empfing sie den sanften Todeskuss...  
(Sf., p. 306)

Whereas on the one hand this theme of death increases in intensity until the moment of total darkness, on the other hand it changes this depiction from objective reporting into a subjective experience. Coupled with this death imagery is a strange sensation:

Die erste seltsame fremde Empfindung rieselte nun durch die Herzen...
(Sf., p. 306)

Neither the death imagery nor the strange sensation are reactions to the eclipse itself, for its effects are not yet visible. These reactions arise from the expectations and preconceived notions as to what is to come, and are triggered by the commencement of the natural phenomenon. The narrator-viewer expects the sunlight to die out, so to speak, and thus compares the first trace of the eclipse to a kiss of death. The strange sensation in the viewers' hearts does not arise from the eclipse but from their expectation of an event which man has calculated exactly:

...es war die sensation, dass draussen in der Entfernung von Tausenden und Millionen Meilen... nun auf einmal etwas zur selben Stunde geschehe, auf die es schon längst der Mensch auf Erden festgesetzt.  
(Sf., p. 306)

In addition to the expectations and preconceived
notions of the eclipse, the narrator's general awe for the sublimity of the cosmos influences his account of the event:

...schon in dem ungeheuern Raum des Himmlischen wohnt das Erhabene, das unsere Seele Überwältigt, und doch ist dieser Raum in der Mathematik sonst nichts als gross. (Sf., p. 306)

Although there is still no visible evidence of the disappearing light in the immediate surroundings, the anticipation and tension of the viewers mounts:

Alle harrten, die Spannung stieg; aber so gewaltig ist die Fülle dieses Lichtmeeres, das von dem Sonnenkörper niederregnet, dass man auf Erden keinen Mangel fühlte.... (Sf., pp. 306-307)

The immediate surroundings are bright and friendly as before:

...die Wolken glänzten fort, das Band des Wassers schimmerte, die Vögel flogen und kreuzten lustig über den Dächern, die Stephanstürme warfen ruhig ihre Schatten gegen das funkelnde Dach, über die Brücke wimmelte das Fahren und Reiten, wie sonst.... (Sf., p. 307)

In keeping with his preconceived idea of the dying sun, Stifter speaks of the sunlight which is languishing away secretly:

...sie ahnten nicht, dass indessen oben der Balsam des Lebens, das Licht, heimlich wegsieche.... (Sf., p. 307)

Not only is Stifter describing something which he cannot yet actually see, but the "dying" of the sun, as he presents it, in reality never does occur. The light of
the sun disappears temporarily due to the position of man with respect to the geometric constellation of the heavenly bodies involved in the eclipse. The sun remains undisturbed. The light only dies from the perspective of the viewer in Vienna.

Although as a scientist Stifter knows precisely what an eclipse is, he still turns to an anthropomorphic conception of the sun. The *languishing away* ("weg-sieche") implies a type of human suffering completely in keeping with the kiss-of-death imagery. Through his subjective perspective Stifter views the oncoming darkness in the landscape as menacing. Like a mean animal ("böses Tier") gray darkness creeps up upon his friendly observation platform (Sf., p. 307).

As the narrator's glance turns from his immediate surroundings to the sun again, the effects of the encroaching moon are clearly visible. The beautiful soft moon which otherwise illuminates the night with silvery florescence now has become an uncanny deep-black clump-like thing devouring the sun:

Seltsam war es, dass dies unheimliche, klumpenhaft tiefschwarze vorrückende Ding, das langsam die Sonne wegfrass, unser Mond sein sollte, der schöne sanfte Mond, der sonst die Nächte so florig silbern beglänzte; aber doch war er es.... (Sf., p. 307)

In reality the moon does change, but its appearance as an uncanny, devouring clump-like thing is strictly the
result of the narrator's subjective perspective. Whether this subjective view is triggered by the unusual sight itself or is still the product of the viewers' preconceived idea of the eclipse is a different matter. Perhaps it is a combination of both. In any event this view reveals a dichotomy which is caused solely by the fact that the moon is now in an unfamiliar position. The moon, which the narrator knows to be a soft silvery body, now appears to him as an ominous clump-like thing. We must not construe these two opposing faces of the moon as ambivalent, for at the moment its silvery aspect is not present.

The realization of this double aspect, the awareness that something which normally appears beautiful and friendly can suddenly seem so different, contributes to the feeling of strangeness in the narrator ("Seltsam war es...") (Sf., p. 307) and thus indirectly to his later ambivalent reactions to the eclipse.

The close-up view through the telescope reveals more of this double aspect. The narrator detects "terrible" mountains rising up on the otherwise friendly smiling surface of the moon. Again the disturbing aspect of the moon results from an unfamiliar situation and the narrator's reaction to it.

In the earthly sphere the effects of the eclipse begin to be noticeable. As the narrator's glance re-
turns to his surroundings, he notices that they become steadily paler, motionless and less colorful:

...der Fluss schimmerte nicht mehr, sondern war ein taftgraues Band, matte Schatten lagen umher, die Schwalben wurden unruhig, der schöne sanfte Glanz des Himmels erlosch, als lief er von einem Hauche matt an, ein kühlles Luftchen hob sich und stiess gegen uns, Über den Auen starrte ein unbeschreiblich seltsames, aber bleisicheres Licht, Über den Wäldern war mit dem Lichterspiele die Beweglichkeit verschwunden, und Ruhe lag auf ihnen, aber nicht die des Schlummers, sondern die der Ohnmacht—und immer fahler goss sich's Über die Landschaft, und diese wurde immer starrer.... (Sf., p. 307).

This description increasingly reveals the subjective view of the narrator, who, in keeping with the initial kiss of death, now sees the darkening landscape as a dying process. His conception of nature and the event is anthropomorphic (compare above, p. 26). Paleness of color is only one aspect of the twice-occurring word "matt." This word connotes also exhaustion or lifelessness, human qualities reinforced by the reference to the calm in nature as "Ohnmacht." A burdening heaviness lies across the landscape ("bleisicheres Licht"). Rigor mortis has set in ("starrte...immer starrer").

Stifter extends this death imagery to the viewers themselves:

...die Schatten unserer Gestalten legten sich leer und Inhaltslos gegen das Gemäuer, die Gesichter wurden aschgrau.... (Sf., pp. 307-308)
Human shadows do not merely become paler. Empty and without content they fall against the buildings, like corpses. Faces are not just gray. They have the color of ashes, the substance to which all men must eventually return.

The narrator momentarily interrupts his portrait of a dying world in order to comment on his reaction to the scene:

...erschütternd war dieses allmäßige Sterben mitten in der noch vor wenigen Minuten herrschenden Frische des Morgens. (Sf., p. 308)

The word "erschütternd" is important. We have mentioned repeatedly that the narrator-viewer's expectations and preconceived notions strongly influence his observation of the event. We also indicated that some of the impact of the eclipse derives from the way in which it exceeds these notions and expectations. Here the narrator's expectations and the surpassing of them by the effects of the eclipse combine to elicit such a strong reaction from the viewers:

Wir hatten uns das Eindämmern wie etwa ein Abendwerden vorgestellt, nur ohne Abendröte; wie geisterhaft aber ein Abendwerden ohne Abendröte sei, hatten wir uns nicht vorgestellt, aber auch ausserdem war dies Dämmern ein ganz anderes, es war ein lastend unheimliches Entfremden unserer Natur.... (Sf., p. 308)

The actual effects of the eclipse surpass the narrator's original expectations, and present him with something
completely different ("ganz anderes").

From this discrepancy between expectation and actual reality issues an oppressing alienation of the narrator's familiar world, which compels him to describe the estranging effect of the empirical world as a menacing apocalypse:

...gegen Südost lag eine fremde gelbrote Finsternis und die Berge und selbst das Belvedere wurden von ihr eingetrunkene—
die Stadt sank zu unseren Füssen immer tiefer, wie ein wesenloses Schattenspiel hinab... (Sf., p. 308)

In support of this we quoted from Stifter's initial remarks: "Nie und nie... war ich so erschüttert..." (see above, p. 21). In reality the darkening of the landscape is not an apocalyptic dying process, but serves to intensify the subjective and frightening view of the narrator.

The tension and excitement of the narrator and the other viewers reach a high point at the moment of total eclipse ("die Spannung stieg aufs höchste...") (Sf., p. 308), a moment which the narrator experiences as sad ("es war ein ordentlich trauriger Augenblick") (Sf., p. 308). This is the moment of death, the instant when the "Balsam des-Lebens" (Sf., p. 307) dies like the last gleam of a dying wick (Sf., p. 308). The effect of this moment is "herzzermalmed" for it exceeds all expectations ("das hatte keiner geahnt") and evokes a gasp of awe ("ein einstimmiges 'Ah'")
from everyone's lips (Sf., p. 308).

Whereas the account of this gasp is objective, the narrator's view of this moment is not. He feels the quietness of the moment as "Totenstille" (Sf., p. 308), in keeping with the description of the eclipse as a process of dying. But Stifter can also say of this "deathly" stillness:

...es war der Moment, da Gott redete, und die Menschen horchten. (Sf., p. 308)

This reference to the divine at this death-like moment indicates that the narrator senses also the magnificence and sublimity of the scene.

After God has spoken, the scene appears even more frightening and threatening than it was before:

Hatte uns früher das allmähliche Erblassen und Einschwinden der Natur gedrückt und verödet, und hatten wir uns das nur fortgehend in eine Art Tod schwindend gedacht; so wurden wir nun plötzlich aufgeschreckt und empörgerissen durch die furchtbare Kraft und Gewalt der Bewegung, die da auf einmal durch den ganzen Himmel lag.... (Sf., p. 308)

Bloodied giants vault through the sky, fog banks tremble in a terrible glow, and the entire expressionistic scene—truly a Georg Heym vision—leads one to wonder just what sort of words God has spoken:

...die Horizontwolken, die wir früher gefürchtet, halfen das Phänomen erst recht bauen, sie standen nun wie Riesen auf, von ihrem Scheitel rann ein fürchterliches Rot, und in tiefem kalten schweren Blau wölberten sie sich unter und drückten
den Horizont--Nebelbänke, die schon lange an äussersten Erdsäume gequollen, und bloss missfärbig gewesen waren, machten sich nun gelten, und schauderten in einem zarten furchtbaren Glanze, der sie Überlief--Farben, die nie ein Auge gesehen, schweiften durch den Himmel.... (Sf., pp. 308-309)

In this passage words like "fürchterlich," "schau- derten," and "furchtbar" accentuate the frightened reaction to this sight, though the occurrence of "zart" suggests that the narrator experiences another, less distressing side to this scene. And indeed, everything is not frightening and threatening. In this world of eerie colors the disturbing black moon clump of an earlier moment is now a semi-transparent disc with a halo; the sight is breathtaking:

...der Mond stand mitten in der Sonne, aber nicht mehr als schwarze Scheibe, sondern gleichsam halb transparent wie mit einem leichten Stahlschimmer Überlaufen, rings um ihn kein Sonnenrand, sondern ein wundervoller, schöner Kreis von Schimmer, bläulich, rötlich, in Strahlen aus einander brechend, nicht anders, als gösse die oben stehende Sonne ihre Lichtflut auf die Mondeskugel nieder, dass es rings aus einander spritzte--das Holdeste, was ich je an Lichtwirkung sahl. (Sf., p. 309)

This most sublime light effect reveals the mixed feelings at work in the narrator. In spite of the dreadful and frightening aspects of the scene, he is also sensitive to the awesome majesty of the phenomenon he is experiencing.

However, the frightening aspects predominate in the
account. Upon the moon's propitious light effects follows the ghastly pyramid of light, the unnatural sulphur-colored flaming out beyond the Marchfeld:

Draussen weit über das Marchfeld hin lag schieβ eine lange, spitze Lichtpyramide grässlich gelb, in Schwefelfarbe flammend, und unnatürlich blau gesäumt; es war die jenseits des Schattens beleuchtete Atmosphäre, aber nie schien ein Licht so wenig irdisch und so furchtbar.... (Sf., p. 309)

The sulphur flames and the eerie unearthly light bring to mind the netherworld in which the narrator sees himself and his fellow viewers caught:

...unsere eigenen Gestalten hafteten darinnen wie schwarze, hohle Gespenster, die keine Tiefe haben.... (Sf., p. 309)

The surroundings appear so strange and unfamiliar that Saint Stephans Cathedral, before the eclipse a "ruhiges Gebirge" (Sf., p. 305) now hangs in the air, a phantom of the shadowy netherworld:

...das Phantom der Stephanskirche hing in der Luft, die andere Stadt war ein Schatten.... (Sf., p. 309)

Faced with this strange world at a moment when all activity has ceased and every eye is focused on the solar phenomenon, Stifter interrupts his description with the comment:

...nie, nie werde ich jene zwei Minuten vergessen.... (Sf., p. 309)

The view of our familiär earth in a powerless state prompts this interruption:
This is the second occurrence of "Ohnmacht" in the description. As in the picture of the dying landscape (see above, pp. 27f) it implies death, if only temporary, and testifies again to Stifter's subjective view of the eclipse. Stifter knows, as does everyone, that a section of the earth has merely darkened for two minutes. However, since he is conditioned by his preconceived notions of the eclipse as a dying process, the actual impressiveness of the cosmic phenomenon so moves him that for him the world has temporarily died, has fainted into a Scheintod. This "death" provides a climax in keeping with the death imagery which accompanies the sketch from the first kiss of death onward.

As indicated earlier (see above, p. 21) Stifter wants to recapture the feelings of the viewers as well as the cosmic event itself. We must keep in mind the consequences of such a view. Any ambivalence in the natural event will depend upon subjective perspective and interpretation. This is not to say that the event itself is not spectacular. But it first becomes impressive when there is someone to see and react to it. The moving aspects of the eclipse issue from the viewers who all react similarly to what they see:

"...der Eine hob die Hände empor, der
Andere rang sie leise vor Bewegung,
Andere ergriffen sich bei denselben"
We the readers experience the impact of the eclipse as it is refracted through the feelings and reactions of the narrator and the other viewers whose reactions he portrays.

During the moments of total eclipse the narrator looks at the unconsciousness of the world around him, but he does not describe the light and its disappearance. He comments on it entirely in terms of human feelings and responses:

Wie heilig, wie unbegreiflich und wie furchtbar ist jenes Ding, das uns stets umflutet, das wir seelenlos geniessen, und das unseren Erdball mit solchen Schaudern überzittern macht, wenn es sich entzieht, das Licht, wenn es sich nur so kurz entzieht. (Sf., p. 309)

The above underlined words bear testimony to the mixed feelings and reactions of a man who is simultaneously thrilled and frightened by the cosmic event.

The disappearance of the light awakens in the narrator-viewer a feeling for the divine ("heilig") aspect of the sight. Because divine, the scene is incomprehensible ("unbegreiflich"), and because incomprehensible it is also awful. The reverse is also true. Because the scene is awful it is also incomprehensible.
and divine. Since the exclamation "wie furchtbar" follows almost as an automatic response to the words "wie heilig" the awe-inspiring divine aspect of the eclipse is simultaneously the frightening and death-like aspect as mirrored in the narrator-viewer's reactions. Both aspects are part of the same response.

Other instances bear this out. On the one hand, the moment of total eclipse is when God speaks, when he lifts his cloak to give man a glimpse of his magnificence:

...es war nicht anders als hätte Gott auf einmal ein deutliches Wort gesprochen, und ich hätte es verstanden. (Sf., p. 304)

...gleichsam nur den Mantel hat er von seiner Gestalt gelüftet, dass wir hineinsehen, und augenblicks wieder zugehüllt, dass Alles sei wie früher. (Sf., p. 311)

Yet at the same time this divine revelation is so frightening and alienating that it moves man to the very depths of his being:

Nie und nie in meinem ganzen Leben war ich so erschüttert, von Schauer und Erhabenheit so erschüttert...

(Sf., pp. 303-304)

The narrator's feelings are ambivalent and arise not only from the obvious contrast between "Schauer" and "Erhabenheit" but from the double aspect of these words themselves. Primarily as a result of the pietistic influences on the German language, the word "Schauer" has strong religious connotations in the nineteenth
century. As a type of awe ("ehrfurchtsvolle Scheu")\(^9\) it hints at the sublimity and grandeur expressed in the word "Erhabenheit." Yet from Stifter's reactions to the eclipse it clearly implies fear and fright also.\(^{10}\) This word expresses Stifter's mixed ambivalent feelings of awe and fright at the sight of the eclipse and the divinity which it reveals. As part of the same spontaneous reaction, the word "Erhabenheit" also expresses this ambivalent reaction to the eclipse, as does the word "heilig" (see above, p. 35). Stifter's fellow viewers have a similar two-sided reaction to the event:

> Nach dem ersten Verstummen des Schrecks geschahen unarticulierte Laute der Bewunderung und des Staunens.... (Sf., p. 310)

The climax to the eclipse moves the viewers to exclaim: "Wie herrlich, wie furchtbar!" (Sf., p. 311). This apparently contradictory exclamation reveals the ambivalent mood of the entire eclipse description. The eclipse appears "herrlich," but at the same time strikes the viewer as "furchtbar." The word "furchtbar" has the connotation of being "awful,"\(^{11}\) but also

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that of being "awe-ful" (awesome). One speaks of the awful altar of God and means this in the positive sense of awe-inspiring. Here in the cry of wonderment on the part of the viewers, the word possesses this second meaning also.

Thus we see that the ambivalence of the viewers' exclamation lies not so much in the apparent contradiction between the two phrases as in the ambivalence of the words themselves. The "Wie herrlich, wie furchtbar!" has a parallel in the similar exclamation discussed earlier (see above, p. 35). By virtue of its association with the word "furchtbar" in the spontaneous viewer reaction, "herrlich" expresses the same ambivalent mixed feelings as does "furchtbar," just as do "heilig" and "furchtbar" in the earlier passage (see above, p. 35).

We must not forget that the ambivalent words and phrases used are not qualities of the eclipse itself, but rather issue from the narrator's subjective comments.


12 Grimm, IV, erste Abteilung, p. 692: "aber diese eigentliche bedeutung geht nicht selten in die über: durch Überwältigende größe furcht hervorbringend, daraus entwickelt sich dann noch die weitere: durch Überwältigende größe oder durch gewaltige macht tiefen eindruck machend, all bedeutungen lassen sich mit- unter schwer scheiden, namentlich die beiden letzten."
tary on the event. As already often mentioned, this commentary is evoked by Stifter's expectations and preconceived notions as to what the eclipse is going to be like, and by the powerful effects of the phenomenon itself. The ambivalence of the solar eclipse lies solely with the ambivalent feelings and reactions of Stifter and the other viewers.

With brushes dipped in the colors of his own subjective perspective Stifter applies the various coats to his painting of the eclipse. He paints a frightening and alienating scene of dying, the sad moment of the earth's disturbing lifelessness. Yet this same dreadful moment is when God speaks and man listens, when man's thoughts turn to the power and magnificence of the divine. The first aspect does not follow upon the second. They exist simultaneously as a manifestation of the ambivalence of the narrator-viewer's reactions and the broadness of his feeling for the divine.

The simultaneous presence of ambivalent feelings in the narrator disagrees with the religious interpretation by Willy Rey. He speaks of the existential unrest experienced by man who has been separated from religious foundations (Cornelia in Der Condor).\(^1\) Rey

\(^1\) Rey, p. 11.
finds Stifter's answer to this unrest and the religious basis of his realism in the narrator's reaction to the eclipse. Stifter's strong religious faith, the result of his traditional rural Benedictine upbringing, protects him from nihilistic despair. This faith spontaneously emerges from his innermost being and transforms the shock of cosmic terror into an impulse of deep piety.\textsuperscript{14} We would agree with Rey that Stifter's reactions, and also those of the other viewers whom Rey does not mention, are spontaneous and conditioned to a certain extent by religious upbringing. After all, religion teaches man to think in terms of the divine. However, in interpreting Stifter's alleged deep piety as protection against cosmic terror and nihilistic despair, Rey fails to see that both feelings issue from the same impulse. They are two sides of the same reaction (see above, pp. 35ff). Religious awe is as much a feeling of fear as the frightful cosmos is the word of God.

Although it is difficult to say for certain, Gunter Hertling is apparently commenting on the religious response when he writes about \textit{Die Sonnenfinsternis}:

\textit{Diese "Scheu und Ehrfurcht" vor dem Göttlichen ist jedoch keine Gotteshuldigung im allverbindenden Sinne der christlichen\textsuperscript{14}}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 12.
Liebe, denn sie wurzelt in der Angstempfindung der totalen Abhängigkeit alles Schönen von einem lebensvernichtenden Naturgesetz, das im Grenzübergang erst sichtbar wurde...

Hertling's "Angstempfindung" goes beyond the spontaneous religious reaction which Rey mentions. Hertling correctly sees the turn to the divine not as a traditional religious reaction resulting from Christian upbringing but as an actual fear reaction. He senses how closely religious feelings in certain situations are related to the existential terror which man feels. One such situation, as we have already seen, is the exclamation of the viewers to the eclipse ("Wie herrlich, wie furchtbar!")

The very passages containing the religious references of which Rey must be thinking when he speaks of the deep piety providing protection from nihilistic cosmic terror are permeated with fear. Let us return again to the moment of total eclipse:

Die Luft wurde kalt, empfindlich kalt, es fiel Tau, dass Kleider und Instrumente feucht waren--die Tiere entsetzten sich;--was ist das schrecklichste Gewitter, es ist ein lärrender Trödel gegen diese todesstille Majestät....

(Sf., pp. 309-310)

The ambivalence of the narrator's feeling is evident. Simultaneously he detects the majesty of this quiet scene and also its disconsoling and frightening aspect.

15 Hertling, p. 74.
He speaks not just of a quiet majesty but of a deathly quiet majesty. Once again the reaction consists of a mixture of fright and religious awe.

Stifter's thoughts turn to Lord Byron's poem *Darkness*, in which men burn houses and forests in order to be able to see light. But immediately he sees the divine aspect of the scene again:

...aber auch eine solche Erhabenheit, ich möchte sagen, Gottesnähe war in der Erscheinung dieser zwei Minuten, dass dem Herzen nicht anders war, als müsste er irgendwo stehen. (Sf., p. 310)

Stifter feels the frightful aspect of the stillness (Byron's poem) but also the sublimity and nearness of God in the scene.

It is interesting in light of Rey's interpretation that when Stifter does turn to traditional religion and quotes from the Bible, he chooses one of the more frightening passages from the New Testament:

...es kamen, wie mit einmal, jene Worte des heiligen Buches in meinen Sinn, die Worte bei dem Tode Christi: "Die Sonne verfinsterte sich, die Erde bebte, die Toten standen aus den Gräbern auf, und der Vorhang des Tempels zerriss von oben bis unten."  

(St., p. 310)

Instead of helping the narrator overcome his fright, this passage, which Rey would have to call an impulse of deep piety, only intensifies the atmosphere of fright and death. Again fright and religious awe are inseparable.
This same mixture of awe and dread provides the basis for the following reference to the divine. Stifter calls the unusual play of colors and lights an indescribably tragic music ("namentlos tragische Musik") (Sf., p. 310). The mention of music immediately draws the association with a requiem, with a "Dies irae" (Sf., p. 310). This requiem introduces the religious aspect which becomes stronger and stronger as the sentence continues. The requiem not only rends man's heart so that it (the heart) sees God and the departed souls, it actually forces the heart to resound with God's praises ("dass es in ihm rufen muss") (Sf., p. 310). This course of associations on the part of the narrator (tragic music—requiem—Dies irae—God's praises) corresponds to the "Angstempfindung" of which Hertling talks (see above, p. 41), yet completely within the framework of traditional religion.

The very words of God's praise reveal how much they are a fear reaction:

"Herr, wie gross und herrlich sind deine Werke, wir sind wie Staub vor dir, dass du uns durch das bloße Weghauchen eines Lichteilchens vernichten kannst, und unsere Welt, den holdvertrauten Wohnort, in einen wildfremden Raum verwandelst, darin Larven starren!" (Sf., p. 310)

Although the sentence begins with words of praise, the "furchtbar" (awful—awe-ful) feeling grows steadily.

Man is like dust in the eyes of a God who can annihilate
him and transform his lovely familiar surroundings into an utterly strange place—"wildfremd" loses in the translation—where faces stare rigidly. The word "Larven" rouches on the death motif, while the verb "starren" calls to mind again the rigor mortis of the dying landscape as the sun's rays are disappearing (see above, pp. 28ff).

Thus the narrator can say of a moment in which God apparently raises his cloak to give man a glimpse of his majesty, that it lasted fortunately only a very short while:

Aber wie Alles in der Schopfung sein rechtes Mass hat, so auch diese Erscheinung, sie dauerte zum Glucke sehr kurz.... (Sf., pp. 310-311)

The feelings for the divine are so deeply rooted in an existential fear reaction that Stifter and his fellow viewers are relieved that this frightening and moving moment is soon over.

Throughout this chapter we have reiterated that the expectations and notions as to the nature of the eclipse determine the view of and reaction to the solar event. Nothing illustrates this more convincingly than the reactions as the sunlight begins to return. Merely the first half of the eclipse in reverse, the reappearance of the sunlight brings the same eerie and alien colors, but they now register a different effect:
The gray light, which before signified impending darkness and hence seemed so frightening, now puts the viewers in a joyful mood, for they know (expect) that this light heralds the return of the sun. Everything is now joyful and bright:

The viewers, who were tense with anticipation before the eclipse, and shaken by the unusual light effects, do not even watch these colors. Since they expect, indeed know, that the daylight will return again, they do not even wait until the phenomenon is past.

These lines illustrate once again the importance of the
subjective human perspective of Stifter and the other viewers for the depiction of the cosmic event.

Stifter states in the beginning his intention of recapturing both the picture and the feelings of the viewers in Vienna on this day in July, 1842. That he succeeds is borne out by the extent to which the feelings determine the actual picture in his sketch. In *Die Sonnenfinsternis* the natural event is experienced and described not directly through the observant eye of an objective narrator, but through the subjective human reaction of a conditioned viewer. Any ambivalence which occurs lies not in nature (the cosmic event itself) but in the ambivalent human feelings and reactions to the solar phenomenon. Stifter presents a cosmic event, a phenomenon in nature, through the looking-glass of human perspective.
CHAPTER II.

DER. HOCHWALD

THE SETTING

The novella Der Hochwald begins with a vast view of the northwest corner of Austria known as the Bohemian Woods. A general feeling of melancholy characterizes the sketch of this landscape with its expansive forests and friendly valleys. The narrator appears to have mixed feelings at the sight of this familiar countryside.

In the second paragraph we learn that there are two points in the landscape which the narrator wants to bring before our eyes:

Vorerst wollen wir es versuchen, die zwei Punkte jener düsterprächtigen Waldesbogen dem geneigten Leser vor die Augen zu führen... Möchte es uns gelingen, nur zum tausendsten Teile jenes schwermutig schöne Bild dieser Waldtale wieder zu geben, wie wir es selbst im Herzen tragen, seit der Zeit, als es uns gegönnt war, dort zu wandern, und einen Teil jenes Doppeltraumes dort zu träumen, den der Himmel jedem Menschen einmal und gewöhnlich vereint gibt, den Traum der Jugend und den der ersten Liebe.1

1 Adalbert Stifter, Studien I (Augsburg, 1955), p. 193. All subsequent references to the two volumes of Studien are in parentheses with abbreviations St. I and St. II. All italics are mine unless otherwise indicated.
Although it is not yet clear whether the narrator finds a dichotomy between the forests and the valleys, there does exist for him an ambivalence within each of these two types of landscape. The woods are gloomy and splendid ("düsterprächtig"), the valleys sad and beautiful ("schwermütig schön"). The two separate locations within the landscape and the compound adjectives modifying them indicate a double aspect in the natural setting as seen and experienced by the narrator. We emphasize the importance of the narrator, for the dichotomy lies not in nature itself but within the subjective human perspective. As in Die Sonnenfinsternis nature itself is not ambivalent. The narrator only views and interprets it this way. He himself states that he does not hope to give an objective description, but only the picture as he has been carrying it in his heart since his youth.

The two points now portrayed bear out the ambivalent impression which the countryside makes upon the narrator. The first of these two points is an eerie black lake, the Plöckenstein, approximately two-thirds of the way up the mountain behind Stifter's birthplace, Oberplan. The approach to the lake reveals a picture of desolation:

...--aber es ist eine wilde Lagerung zerrißener Grunde, aus nichts bestehend, als tiefswarzer Erde, dem dunklen.
Personifying similes and metaphors from the realm of death ("Schädel," "Totenbett," "Gerippe") imbue the scene with an intense coldness, rigidity and death-like atmosphere. The hillside is nature's graveyard. Torn contours and fallen trees attest to the potential violence of this barren strip of land. Variations of the word "liegen" ("liegen," "Unterlage," "liegt," "blossgelegt") accentuate the motionlessness of the setting. Adding to the uninviting appearance of the scene is the absence of any trace of past or present human existence. Despite all this there is a certain beauty present. The stream from the lake is so clear that the stream-bed sand glistens like flickering gold nuggets, while the silence ("jungfräuliches Schweigen") strikes an appealing chord (St. I, p. 195).

The forbidding quality of the approach to the lake applies also to the lake itself. As before, the narrator's description is subjective. He is in the landscape and projects it through his own feelings:

Ein Gefühl der tiefsten Einsamkeit Überkam mich jedesmal unbesieglich, so oft und gern
ich zu dem märchenhaften See hinaufstieg.
(St. I, p. 195)

Chunks frequently break loose from the surrounding cliffs and plunge into the lake. Branchless, protruding shafts from trees spotted throughout the spruce stands, and the bleached trunks in "grässlicher Verwirrung" (St. I, p. 195) around the lake testify to violent destruction and decay in the setting.

Since the wind never blows the lake remains a rigid mirror, the black color of which heightens the un-friendliness of the area:

Da in diesem Becken buchstäblich nie ein Wind weht, so ruht das Wasser unbeweglich, und der Wald und die grauen Felsen, und der Himmel schauen aus seiner Tiefe heraus, wie aus einem ungeheuern schwarzen Glas-spiegel.
(St. I, p. 195)

Overhead the sky ("eintönige Himmelsbläue") (St. I, p. 195) is as motionless as the rigid lake. Not the slightest movement, such as a cloud passing overhead, disturbs the uncanny image of a huge nature eye:

Oft entstieg mir ein und derselbe Gedanke, wenn ich an diesen Gestaden sass:—als sei es ein unheimlich Naturauge, das mich hier ansehe--tief schwarz--überragt von der Stirne und Braue der Felsen, gesäumt von der Wimper dunkler Tannen--drin das Wasser regungslos, wie eine versteinerte Träne.
(St. I, p. 196)

This natur eye—again the subjective impression of the narrator ("als sei")—is a paradoxical personification. A human quality, the allusion to the eye, does not en-
liven nature. On the contrary, it is precisely this "humanizing" "eye" of the lake which imbues the landscape with a rigid and deathlike atmosphere. Lacking verbal activity, the sentence structure itself reflects this rigidity. Like the lake which it portrays, the sentence is "versteinert." The petrified tear adds an atmosphere of perennial sadness.

The narrator's view swings out from the lake to the vast expanse of forests which reaches to the horizon. In marked contrast to the lake, these forests appear living and dynamic:

Rings um diesen See, vorzüglich gegen Baiern ab, liegen schwere Wälder, manche nie besuchte einsame Talkräume samt ihren Bächlein zwischen den breiten Rücken führend, manche Felsenwand schiebend mit dem tausend an der Sonne glänzenden Flittern, und manche Waldwiese dem Tagesglanze unterbreitend, einen schimmernden Versammlungs­saal des mannigfachsten Wildes.

(St. I, p. 196)

Verbs, especially in present participial form, bring the landscape alive. The woods are "leading" brooks, "shoving" cliffs, and "spreading out" forest meadows. The brooks and spangles on the cliffs combine with the participles "glänzend" and "schimmernd" in providing a mixture of movement and brightness which contrasts sharply with the dark rigid lake. Glittering reflections from the sun have replaced the monotonous blue sky and the lifeless lake. Yet in this dynamic land-
scape we feel a contradictory heaviness and motionlessness in the "schwere Wälder" which "liegen."

However, these woods are only a transition to the actual second location which the narrator wants to introduce.

The second focal point is a far cry from the dark and lonely Plöckenstein lake:

*Es ist auch ein Wasser, aber ein freundliches, nämlich das leuchtende Band der Moldau.... (St. I, p. 196)*

The bright and friendly Moldau valley shows a different face from the isolated lake region:


The brightness of "glänzend," "Lichtfaden," "licht," "Silbergürtel," "Glanz," and "Wellensilber" provides stark contrast to the dark and mournful blacks and grays predominant at the lake. The "flatternd Band,"
the "wanderndes Waldwasser," and the fact that the Moldau first "quillt" into the valley, while the valley carries its fields to this water and then "schiesst" like "Wellensilber" back into the shadows, all indicate that, in contrast to the lifeless eye of the black lake, this "zärtlich Auge" is indeed alive ("aufgeschnäppt"). There are no signs of hardness, destruction and decay, but rather of peaceful growth and softness. Instead of granite rocks, worn down by the pounding rains, and chunks of cliffs frequently breaking loose, the friendly valley has "gastliche Felder" and "grüne Wiesen" which from a distance appear to be a soft velvet pillow ("Sammetkissen"). In the middle of this inviting softness, in sharp contrast to the lake stretched between hard forbidding cliffs, lies the little village with the friendly name Friedberg.

Throughout the description of the valley one has the constant presence of the gloomy forests from before. The "duftblaue Waldrücken" and the "Wölbung dunkler Waldesbusen" accompany the Moldau and bring out its contrasting brightness even more. The river flows "geklemt" through the "Talwindungen" formed by the woods and back into the firs and evergreens, finally to be "devoured" by the "Teufelsmauer." "Ringsum trauernder Waldesdunkel" surrounds the inviting valley. This "trauernd" aspect is consistent with an earlier
reference to the woods as "einsam und traurig" (St. I, p. 194). The bright friendly valley framed by the dark woods reveals the dichotomy in the landscape, that mixture of feeling which the narrator expresses at the beginning as "dästerprächtig" and "schwermütiwig schön" (see above, p. 48).

Nature has for the narrator two contradictory faces. Depending largely upon the type of landscape, it is hard, wild, lonely, and sorrowful or soft, friendly and peaceful.

The primary object of the narrator's attention is not the Moldau valley itself but a fallen-down castle hovering on the uppermost edge of a wide strip of wood, which, when seen from the valley below, appears to be a "luftblauer Würfel" (St. I, p. 197). Again the narrator puts himself into the landscape:

Oft sass ich in vergangenen Tagen in dem alten Mauerwerke, ein liebgewordenes Buch lesend, oder bloss den lieben aufkeimenden Jugendgefühlen horchend, durch die ausgebrockelten Fenster zum blauen Himmel schauend, oder die goldnen Tierchen betrachtend, die neben mir in den Halmchen liefen, oder statt all dessen bloss müßig und sanft den stummen Sonnenschein empfindend, der sich auf Mauern und Steine legte—oft und gern verweilte ich dort, selbst als ich das Schicksal Derer nicht kannte, die zuletzt diese wehmütige Stätte bewohnten. (St. I, p. 197)

The narrator enjoys spending time at this melancholy place ("wehmütige Stätte"), even after he knows
of the fateful destiny of those who once inhabited the castle. The outer structure has fallen apart and chunks lie scattered about in the grass. The walls have lost the last trace of mortar. Not a single room is in liveable condition. All objects which might indicate the presence of humans in the castle in earlier times have been replaced by nature. The only weapons hanging on the walls are the slanting rays of the sun. The gems glittering in the jewelry niche are the eyes of a red-breasted robin. Where rafters once held up the roof, many a little spruce sapling now seeks to live. Little flowers have taken up occupancy in the rubble in the cellar, passageways and rooms.

On the one hand these ruins present a picture of destruction and decay. But at the same time we detect the rebirth taking place in nature. Living things have replaced the dead and inanimate objects of a human past. The red-breasted robin is hatching, giving birth to new life. The process of decay is simultaneously one of new growth. The roots of the spruce saplings further deteriorate the castle walls, but at the same time provide vital nourishment for the saplings. Throughout the lifeless rubble dark-eyed flowers and wild forest plants are springing up. The intermingling of past human existence and the growth of nature manifests the eternal process of death and rebirth (Sterben
It is the realization of this double aspect which draws the narrator so often to the castle ruins. He finds the ruins sad ("wehmütig"), since they testify to human mortality. The continuing growth of nature over the traces of past human existence is a sad reminder of man's transience within a seemingly everlasting nature. This reminder occurs not only again at the end of Der Hochwald but also frequently in the other stories in the Studien.

Despite the melancholy of the scene, the narrator finds consolation in the fact that this transience is part of the eternal and wonderful natural process:

Dem, der ihn [one of the piles of rubble] erklimmt, wird ein Anblick, der, obwohl im geraden Gegensatze mit den Trauerdenkmalen ringsum, dennoch augenblicklich fühlen lässt, dass eben er die Vollendungslinie in das beginnende Empfinden lege.... (St. I, p. 198)

In spite of the sad reminders around him the narrator "nevertheless" feels that the view ("er") places the "Vollendungslinie" into his feelings. This "Vollendungslinie" is the subconscious awareness of another aspect in the scene, the magnificent permanence of nature as manifested in the overwhelming view:

...Über alle Wipfel der dunklen Tannen hin ergiesst sich dir nach jeder Richtung eine unermess'ne Aussicht, strömend in deine Augen und sie fast mit Glanz erdrückend.--Dein staunender und verwirrter
This immense and awe-inspiring panorama does not stop but fades out into a blue strip of haze on the horizon. And on the far horizon stand the Alps. For Stifter, mountains manifest the permanence of the natural world. In Der Hagestolz human existence and the passage of time are set against the backdrop of never-changing mountains (see below, pp. 180ff). Das alte Siegel concludes with a vivid contrast between the passing of generations and the abiding mountains (see below, pp. 177f). The first section of Bergkristall devotes pages to the description of the never-ending yearly cycle of the alp Gars. Small wonder that that man-mountain contrast occurs again and again in Stifter's paintings. In Der Hallstädter Friedhof magnificent blue mountains in the background accentuate the transience of man as symbolized in the gravestones.

The beauty and permanence of nature, whether it be the little plants and flowers in the rubble or the impressive Alps on the southern horizon, combine with the reminders of human transitoriness in the castle ruins to evoke ambivalent feelings in the narrator.
towards the setting:

Es wohnet unsäglich viel Liebes und Wehmütiges in diesem Anblicke.

(St. I, p. 199)

This ambivalent view of the setting sets the mood for the following story. It also provides a contrast to the view of nature of the old woodsman Gregor.
Most of the secondary literature on Der Hochwald treats the figure of the old woodsman Gregor when discussing Stifter's conception of nature in the story. Gregor is a man of the woods and of nature; the "Genosse des Mittagsbrandes und des Sturmes" (St. I, p. 220). As a brother of the cliffs (St. I, p. 220), he stands in close relationship to nature and understands many of its secrets.

For Gregor the world regulated by natural laws has no place for myths and fairy tales. He therefore disproves the old myths and fables with which others in their ignorance and superstition have surrounded nature. Every natural phenomenon must have a natural explanation. The leaves of the aspen-tree are not continually in motion as punishment for being too proud, but because they have slender stalks which vibrate at the slightest trace of a breeze. Likewise there is a rational explanation for the strange shape of the Plöckenstein rock formation. Countless rains and not heathen kings carved out the three stools.

Gregor's explanations rob the landscape of its mysterious and romantic nimbus. Frederick Ritter says of Gregor that he has "die klarsichtige Nüchternheit"
des Stifterschen Menschen."¹ Lunding and Kunisch go so far as to identify Gregor's views on nature with those of Stifter. Lunding does this with the help of Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842, which he assumes to be Stifter's personal statement on nature. During the eclipse initial fear and anxiety at the moment of darkness give way to a feeling that this event reveals the order of the universe and the word of God. Gregor's thoughts are similarly directed toward manifestations of the divine in nature.² Kunisch believes that man need not be disturbed by nature if he understands it, for fear arises only from a misunderstanding of what nature really is (see above, p. 7). Gregor never trembles at the sight of nature because he understands it intimately. Kunisch also identifies Gregor's attitude with the religious views in the eclipse description and hence with Stifter himself.³

Lunding and Kunisch fail to recognize that this disturbing "Schaudern" accompanies and is an integral part of the viewer-narrator's ambivalent reaction not only to the frightening deathlike aspects of the darkness but also to the awesome divine majesty of the

² Lunding, pp. 43-44.
³ Kunisch, pp. 85-86.
eclipse (see above, pp. 35ff). The "awe-ful" reaction is present for the entire duration of the cosmic event. Gregor's one-sided "all-good" view of nature can therefore not be equated with the deep and mixed feelings of the narrator depicting the eclipse. Kunisch's argument is questionable when he writes:

Man kann alles verstehen, und es ist nicht nötig, zu schaudern. Stifter gebraucht dieses Wort; aber es bedeutet für ihn eine Haltung, die der Natur gegenüber nicht angepasst, nicht der Sache entsprechend ist. Die übrigen Kreaturen kennen auch kein Schaudern, nur noch der Mensch, weil er nicht mehr im Einverständnis mit den Dingen ist....

This very feeling occurs again and again in Stifter's stories as one aspect of the ambivalent reaction to natural phenomena. The words of the little girl Emma after the hailstorm in Katzensilber come to mind:

"Schauerlich war es und beinahe prächtig." Kunisch would have great difficulty, in the light of his statement, explaining the words of Stifter himself in the introduction to Abdias:

Aber es liegt auch wirklich etwas Schauderndes in der gelassenen Unschuld, womit die Naturgesetze wirken...

(St. II, p. 5)

Where is the similarity here between Stifter and the naive woodsman Gregor who never experiences nature.

4 Kunisch, p. 86. Italics are Kunisch's.
5 Adalbert Stifter, Bunte Steine und Späte Erzählungen (Augsburg, 1960), p. 249. Hereafter in parentheses as B.S. All italics are mine.
this way?

Furthermore, Gregor is not as realistic and objective as Kunisch and Lunding would have us believe. Ritter calls Gregor "der begnadete Mensch" because the old man has never come in contact with culture and civilization and therefore has maintained his innocence and simplicity. Ritter considers him an example of pure poetic existence, and the story bears him out. When Johanna asks her father to what kind of a man he has entrusted her and her sister, the father alludes to Gregor's phantasy and poetic temperament. He tells the girls that when Gregor used to talk and his phantasy began to roam, it was as if he were reading from an old poetic book. Heinrich Mettler writes that Gregor has changed since the time he and the father used to hunt together. His imagination has given way to an attentive understanding of things. Mettler is partially correct in observing that Gregor's understanding of nature has increased over the years. But he has not sacrificed any of his poetic imagination. There is a later reference to his "Dichtungs- und Phantasiefülle" (St. I, p. 241). With this poetic imagina-

tion he creates his own world within the realm of nature.

Gregor has fashioned his life in accordance with the values he sees in the woods.

"Seinen ganzen Lebenslauf, seine ganze Seele hatte er dem Walde nachgedichtet, und passte umgekehrt auch wieder so zu ihm, dass man sich ihn auf einem anderen Schauplatz gar nicht denken konnte."

(St. I, p. 241)

Weathered only by the "Anstand der Natur" (St. I, p. 220), he has formed the laws of his own existence from the laws of nature as he interprets them. Since he believes that in nature there is "Sinn und Empfindung" (St. I, p. 225), he has only to look and hear correctly in order to find the order and regularity of nature.

For Gregor nature speaks only good words:

..."Alles erzählt und nur der Mensch er-schaudert, wenn ihm einmal ein Wort vernehmlich wird.—Aber er soll nur warten, und da wird er sehen, wie es doch lauter liebe gute Worte sind." (St. I, p. 225)

Since nature is good, Gregor can form his own ethical and religious code according to the laws of nature:

..."denn seht, ich habe mir immer mehr und mehr ein gutes Gewissen aus dem Walde heimgetragen." (St. I, p. 225)

With Gregor we can truly speak of a "religion of the woods." The woods are his church.

Gregor tells the girls that he has learned how wonderful the woods are "ohne dass die Menschen erst
nötig hatten, ihre Fabeln hinein zu wäbren" (St. I, p. 249). Yet he himself does this very same thing. While taking the myths of others out of nature he reads his own myths and religious beliefs into it.

...so hätte er (one) sie (the sisters) für Elfen der Einöde gehalten, um so mehr, wenn er die Geister- und Zaubergeschichten gewusst hätte, die ihnen Gregor von manchen Stellen des Waldes erzählte, wodurch vor ihrer Fantasie er, sie, und die Umgebung in ein Gewirre von Zauberfäden geriet....

(St. I, p. 241)

Like the narrator in Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842 Gregor sees God in nature, but to a far greater extent. He sees the woods as a big garden where the Lord loves and cherishes the most insignificant weed. He tells the two sisters about the big gardener whom he imagines he would have to see wandering among the trees now and then.

On the day of the rifle shot Gregor is disproving some of the old fables and myths connected with the woods. At one point he remarks:

Hat Gott der Herr dem Menschen grössere Gaben gegeben, so fordert er auch mehr von ihm—aber darum liebt er doch auch nicht minder dessen andere Geschwister, die Tiere und Gewächse....

(St. I, p. 250)

And now his imagination begins to roam as he talks of the little plants and animals. Only a sudden return to reality because of the rifle shot interrupts Gregor's train of thought and the new fable he is spinning.
Clearly this naive fable is not to be taken as Stifter's view of nature, nor Gregor as Stifter's mouthpiece. To be sure Gregor as well as Stifter can detect divine (god-like) aspects in the natural world. Stifter, however, knows of the destructive, frightening or disconsoling aspects of nature; Gregor does not. As we saw in the eclipse sketch and shall see often in the other stories, Stifter and many of his characters are acutely aware of ambivalent aspects of nature and natural events. Gregor in his simplicity can only see the good side of nature.

Gregor lives his entire life in the security of the woods, apart from inter-personal relationships and the tragedies of human existence. Ritter describes this state well:

Für sich selbst freilich bleibt Gregor in der Abgeschlossenheit und Unschuld seiner dichterischen Existenz ein unzerstörbares Wesen, er weiss nichts von Tod und Vernichtung, sein Leben ist eine selige Waldwanderung, von der er ein Ende nicht denken kann.

Emil Staiger has observed that when Stifter dwells upon the psychology of one of his characters, this indicates that the person has fallen away from God. Such figures as the grandmother in Das Haidedorf and Gregor allow no psychology, "weil sie von Gott durchdrungen

8 Ritter, p. 18.
The naive man \textit{par excellence}, this simple and religious woodsman is not concerned with human passions and problems. This, of course, further prevents his complete identification with Stifter. As long as he is dealing with matters from the realm of nature, Gregor is adequate. He can teach the sisters an awareness and appreciation of natural phenomena. Where human problems intrude, his inadequacy becomes painfully evident.

Clarissa's and Ronald's engagement in the sanctuary of the sylvan meadow proves a decisive moment for the characters in the story and for their fate. Yet at this most important moment Gregor is little more than a helpless bystander. He is only capable of soothing Johanna with words which he has memorized from the Bible, to the effect that a man must eventually leave mother and father and cleave to his wife. These words of old wisdom have general validity for mankind, but in this particular instance they amount to nothing more than catechetic repetition. Gregor thinks only in terms of nature. He consoles Johanna with the words: "es ist schon so Natur" (St. I, p. 272).

His choice of the word "Natur" is completely in keeping with this simple man who never leaves the realm of nature and the woods. These five little words indicate his inability to cope with the situation, for they are so general that they answer nothing and could be applied to anything.

As temporary guardian of the sisters Gregor does feel his obligation to pose the customary questions as to Ronald's identity, home and intentions:

...da will es mich nun bedürfen, dass ich Dich fragen müsse, wer bist Du denn, dass Du um diese freiest? wess Volkes und Geschlechtes, dass ich es ihm vermeiden lassen kann, und wo steht Deine Hütte? (St. I, p. 272)

Ronald gives Gregor only a brief and inadequate answer before directing his explanations to Clarissa (St. I, pp. 272-273). To everything which Ronald says, Gregor has but one objection, and it has nothing to do with the present situation. Still thinking in terms of nature, he tells Ronald that he should not build any house on the lake, but destroy the present house, so that the woods will remain as before. This is entirely irrelevant to the problem, and Ronald does not even reply to this advice. If it were pertinent he would at least have voiced his agreement. It is as if Gregor were being ignored by people occupied with much deeper problems.
In the days following the engagement Gregor narrates and explains as before, as if no change had taken place:

Er dichtete und erzählte auf den Wanderungen wie früher, und schwärmte sich in Fantasien und Gefühle der Einöde hinein, wie früher, aber der dichterischen Rede fehlte jetzt das dichterische Ohr; denn er in seiner Einfalt wusste nicht, dass Clarissa viel öfter an Ronald dachte, als er selber, und Johanna an Clarissen.

(St. I, p. 283)

Incapable of understanding the feelings of the girls, Gregor wanders on in his nature phantasies. He ignores the human problems because he is not aware that they exist. The incident with the butterflies bears this out.

Johanna has come across some butterflies on a hot day in late autumn. She feels sorry for the butterflies because the warm autumn sun has lured them out of their cocoons and she fears that they will perish in the winter cold. Gregor tells her she is mistaken:

"Da irret Ihr Euch, Jungfrau," fiel der alte Jäger ein, "es kommt nur darauf an, ob sie sich vermählen oder nicht...Wenn sie sich aber nicht vermählen, so erstarren sie..." (St. I, p. 281)

These words weigh so heavily on Johanna that in her pain she cannot speak. Whereas Gregor is thinking only of the butterflies, his words, especially the "sich vermählen" reminds her that she will lose Clarissa to Ronald. In his simplicity the old man is
unaware of the reason for Johanna's sadness.

Gregor can shut out human problems; Johanna cannot. Johanna immediately sees the other implications of his words. He sees only the side which pertains to the butterflies. He remarks that the butterflies can live through the winter, and that if Johanna has ever seen a butterfly fluttering around with pale and frazzled wings on the first days of spring it is an "Überwinterer" (St. 1, p. 281). At the end of the novella, Clarissa, like the frazzled butterfly, is also an "Überwinterer."

Nothing expresses Gregor's inadequacy and limitations in the human realm more clearly than his insistence that no harm has come to the inhabitants of the castle, even though it has been pillaged:

"Macht mich nicht selbst zum Toren," rief er unwillig aus, "und jagt mir nicht kindisch Angst ein—ich sage Euch ja, es ist nichts geschehen, weil's zu unvernünftig wäre....

(St. 1, p. 288)

The words "weil's zu unvernünftig wäre" is no reason, but rather the unconscious admission of his incapacity for coping with problems outside the realm of the woods. It is of consequence that the castle is situated on the open land adjoining the woods. Gregor cannot grasp the painful consequences of fate and destiny. Gregor speaks no more in the novella after the dis-
covery of the catastrophe. The events have gone beyond his comprehension.

When the knight Bruno returns to the castle, he sees the old man standing in a dark corridor, but he pays no attention to him and knocks on Clarissa's door. Gregor is no longer even in the same room with the girls. Outside the world of the woods he has lost all importance for the two sisters. Clarissa is aware of the old man's inadequacy. She asks Bruno to stay and help and tells him:

"wir haben niemand als einen alten Mann und seinen Enkel." (St. I, p. 298)

Gregor returns to his own world of the woods, where life is a "selige Waldwanderung" removed from passion, fate, and other problems of human existence. The fact that no one can say when he dies lends a mythical quality to him, similar to that of the ancient grandmother in Das Haidedorf. For Gregor the woods are an escape from harsh reality, a paradise on earth. Unfortunately for the persons in the story these woods are not the only world.

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10 Ritter, p. 18.
THE MAN-NATURE CONFRONTATION

We have already discussed the ambivalent feelings which the narrator has when depicting the initial nature setting. We observed that the woodsman Gregor with his unproblematic existence is in complete harmony with the countryside. We now shall examine the confrontation of the two sisters with the various nature manifestations in the story.

Before she has set foot in the woods around the Plöckenstein lake, Johanna imagines the area as an enchanting yet frightening place:

Ein schöner schwarzer Zaubersee soll in ihrer Mitte ruhen, und wunderbare Bäume um ihn stehen, und ein Hochwald ringsherum sein, in dem seit der Schöpfung noch keine Axt erklingen.

(St. I, pp. 204-205)

Although she has not yet set foot in the woods, Clarissa speaks from the realistic perspective of those who have experienced the high forest first hand:

"Alle, die jein jene Waldländer gerieten, fanden eine schöne Wildnis voll gesunder Blumen, Kräuter und herrlicher Bäume, die Wohnung unzähliger fremder Vögel und Tiere, aber nicht das mindeste Verdächtige."

(St. I, p. 205)

The father, who has long ago been initiated into the secrets of the woods by Gregor, shares Clarissa's
realistic view. He refers to the woods as: "wundersam lieblich und anmutreich, gleichsam ein freundliches Lächeln der Wildnis" (St. I, p. 210). For him the woods are "schön und traulich" (St. I, p. 211).

When the father tells his daughters that they will soon be going into this wonderful area, the girls are frightened, for rumor has it that a magic hunter and murderer prowls the forests. The father's reassures them that this is not the case, but the girls do not forget their fears until they enter the woods:

Wer die Gesichter der Mädchen ansieht, wie sie doppelt rein und zart neben dem dunklen Grunde des Waldlaubes dahinschweben, wie sie blühend und vergnügt aus dem wallenden weissen Schleier des Kopfschmuckes herausblicken—der hätte nicht gedacht, dass sie sich noch kürzlich so sehr vor diesen Wäldern fürchteten und scheuten. (St. I, p. 218)

The splendor and beauty of the woods makes them receptive to its wonders:

Die Pracht und Feier des Waldes mit allem Reichtume und aller Majestät drang in ihr Auge und legte sich an ihr kleines Herz, das so schnell in Angst, aber auch so schnell in Liebe Überfloss—und jeder Schritt gab ihrer Einbildungskraft neuen Stoff....Alles fiel in ein schon aufge-regtes empfangendes Gemüt. (St. I, p. 218)

There is a strong religious undertone in the effect which nature has on the sisters:

...wie ein schöner Gedanke Gottes senkte sich gemach die Weite des Waldes in ihre
Seele, die dessen unbewusst in einem stillen und schönen und sanften Fühlen dahinwogte. (St. I, pp. 218-219)

This undertone lies not within nature itself but within the subjective impression of the narrator who draws the comparison.

The party stops to enjoy a magnificent view:

Ein Unmass von Liebllichkeit und Ernst schwebte und wehte über den ruhenden dämmerblauen Massen.—Man stand einen Augenblick stumm, die Herzen der Menschen schienen die Feier und Ruhe mitzufühlen; denn es liegt ein Anstand, ich möchte sagen ein Ausdruck von Tugend in dem von Menschenhänden noch nicht berührten Antlitz der Natur, dem sich die Seele beugen muss, als etwas Keuschem und Göttlichem,—und doch ist es zuletzt wieder die Seele allein, die all ihre innere Grösse hinaus in das Gleichnis der Natur legt. (St. I, p. 223)

These lines are Stifter's own statement of what he and the characters of his stories do, not only in Der Hochwald but also in the other works, including Die Sonnenfinsternis. The soul projects its inner splendor into a nature simile or metaphor. Man projects his inner condition into nature, but he does not create a nature entirely in terms of his own present inner state, as do the early German Romantics. Because of his subjective perspective he imbues nature with human attributes. He reacts to and describes a non-human phenomenon in human terms. Hence earnestness ("Ernst"), solemnity ("Feier"), virtue ("Tugend"), face ("Antlitz"),
chastity ("Keusches") and divinity ("Göttliches") are not empirical features of nature but the "perspective" with which the characters or the narrator view the scene. The narrator-viewer in Die Sonnenfinsternis reacts to the eclipse similarly (see above, pp. 20ff).

The most striking feature of the countryside is its tranquility ("Ruhe"). Already in his letter to the baron Bruno writes of the peacefulness of the high forest:

Kein Hauch, keine Ahnung von der Welt draussen dringt hinein, und wenn man sieht, wie die prachtvolle Ruhe Tage-reisen weit immer dieselbe, immer ununterbrochen, immer freundlich in Laub und Zweigen hängt...so hat man schwere Mühe, daran zu glauben, dass in der Welt der Menschen schon die vielen Jahre her der Lärm des Krieges und der Zerstörung tobe.... (St. I, p. 209)

The sisters later experience this same tranquility. Their first undertaking at the lake is a hike to the top of the Flöckenstein for a look at Wittinghausen through the telescope. While the instrument is being unpacked, all eyes are eagerly scanning the area below:

...wie eine glänzende Wüste zog der heitere Himmel hinaus über alle Wälder weg, die wie riesenbreite dunkle blühende Wogen hinauslagen...siehe, der geliebte kleine Würfel, wie ein blauer Punkt schwebt er auf seinem Rande! (St. I, p. 238)

Seen without the telescope, the castle is merely a charming little dot in the immense and peaceful forest panorama, while overhead the cheerful sky extends to
the farthest horizon.

Then the telescope causes places and objects in the landscape to appear alien and frightening because of the unfamiliar perspective:

Bis zum Erschrecken klar und nahe stand alles vor sie gezaubert, aber es war alles wildfremd.–Abenteuerliche Rücken und Linien und Vorsprünge gingen wie Träume durch das Glas.... (St. I, p. 238)

But the viewers' main interest, the castle, appears beautiful and peaceful through the glass:

...blank, unversehrt, mit glänzendem Dache stand es in der Ruhe des Himmels. O wie schön, wie freundlich...so ruhig und so lieb stand es da, und so unverletzt... Alles war gar so schön und gar so reinlich. (St. I, p. 239)

The various little intensifiers "so," "wie," and "gar" let the castle seem almost too peaceful. Every time the sisters set up the telescope they see "immer dasselbe schöne, reine, unverletzte Bild" (St. I, p. 240).

There is a deceptive shroud-like calmness in nature. Important events could be happening at the castle, yet the overriding tranquility of the expansive landscape would swallow this activity, just as it later covers the traces of human existence around the lake. The motif of the shroud ("Tuch") adds tension to the quietness of the landscape. The lake is situated between cliffs like a "gespanntes Tuch" (St. I, p. 195). Growth covers the wall of the Plöckenstein "mit einem grünem Tuche" (St. I,
p. 195), while the green grass between the trees spreads out like a "reines Tuch" (St. I, p. 215). From a distance the wild berry bushes with their red fruit give the appearance of a "rotes Tuch" spread across the hillside (St. I, p. 227). After the discovery of the gutted castle at the end of the story the darkness of the surrounding forests becomes a "schwarzes Bahrtuch" (St. I, p. 289), a black shroud covering over human existence which has ceased to be.

As with Bruno (see above, p. 74), the calmness of nature makes the sisters feel as if there were the other world outside the forest:

...ja, da draussen alles so schön und ruhig lag, als wäre nirgends in der Welt ein Krieg...so erheiternten und stillten sich wieder ihre Gemüter.... (St. I, p. 240)

Later the woods have a similar effect upon the Swedish prince Ronald:

...ich weiss nicht, geht von Dir dieser Zauber der Verwandlung aus oder von dem Walde--mir ist, als wär' ich ein Anderer, als wäre draussen nicht der Sturm und die Verwüstung, sondern, wie hier, die stille warme Herbstsonne...mir ist, als gäbe es gar kein Draussen, gar keine Menschen als die hier, die sich lieben....

(St. I, pp. 273-274)

The tranquility of the sylvan setting makes Bruno, the sisters and Ronald feel as if there were no world full of violence and war. For Gregor, there is no other world (see above, section on Gregor). Unfortunately
for the other characters in the story this secluded region provides only temporary illusion and deception before the reality of war destroys their peaceful existence.

Even the rifle shot which shatters the stillness and echoes down the canyons is swallowed up more or less by the immensity and peacefulness of the lake surroundings:

In der Totenstille der Wälder war die Lufterschütterung fast grauenhaft gewesen—und wieder war es nun totenstille und reglos, wie vorher... *(St. I, pp. 250-251)*

There is a certain splendor in the never-ending tranquility of the forest. One can perhaps also find consolation in this one manifestation of permanence amidst the turbulent times of the Thirty Years War. However, after the rendezvous and engagement at the lake there is a steadily growing discrepancy between this calmness and the uneasy premonition accompanying the human events. For the two sisters the world has changed:

Clarissa war nicht mehr ruhig—Johanna nicht mehr glücklich. *(St. I, p. 277)*

Yet the same serenity prevails over the woods, as if nothing had changed:

Und die alte Ruhe war wieder über dem Walde. *(St. I, p. 278)*

We recall a similar situation from Der Waldgänger. It
is the most important day in the life of Georg and Corona, for they have become man and wife:

Draussen war, da der Frühling kaum vorüber war, eine sehr schöne Sommernacht aufgegangen, in dem weichen, wolkenlosen Himmel stand ein floriger Mond, hin und hin waren Bäume, an denen manchmal ein Laublein glänzte, den Fluss hörte man schwach rauschen, eine Amsel tat noch zuweilen einen Schlag darein: alles war als wenn gar nichts geschehen wäre—und den zwei Menschen, die in ein neues Verhältnis getreten waren, war es, als hätte die ganze Welt sich geändert. (B.S., p. 439)

The world goes on as if human events were nothing. Like Georg and Corona, nature takes no notice of the changes in Clarissa's life and continues its undisturbed autumnal process.

This calmness becomes disturbing as the story rolls toward its inevitable conclusion, and nature's "Ruhe" comes to contrast sharply with man's "Unruhe." For fourteen days an unchanging low overcast prevents the sisters from viewing their castle, so that they become uneasy:

...und zu ihrer Unruhe dauerte schon die Verschleierung des Himmels über vierzehn Tage, so dass man nicht gegen Wittinghausen sehen konnte. (St. I, p. 283)

Finally there is a magnificent evening:

Endlich war ein Abend gekommen, der ungleich seinen grauen Vorgängern so rein und klar, wie eine aus Gold gegoss'ne Kuppel, über dem Walde stand, und auch blieb.... (St. I, p. 284)

Such a sunset would seem to herald good news. The fol-
morning brings a brilliant late autumn day:

Eine sehr kalte Nacht folgte, und als die Sonne aufgegangen, stand der ganze Wald in weissem Reife da, in lauter weissen Funken brennend und glitzernd, so dicht, als wäre Nachts der ganze Sternenhimmel auf ihn herabgesunken. (St. I., p. 284)

On this beautiful day the possibility of any misfortune at the castle seems remote. The countryside is peaceful as always: "alles war ruhig" (St. I., p. 285). The sky is also as dear as always:

Nur der Himmel, so lieb und rein, wie einst, ohne ein einzig Wölklein, zog über die schweigsame Waldestrauer hinaus. (St. I., p. 285)

From this peace comes the tension of the scene.

In spite of the crystal-clear air the girls cannot find their beloved castle through the telescope. A tiny little cloud obscures the object of their attention from view. The beauty and calmness of the day belies the growing premonition that something has perhaps happened to the castle:

Noch drei-, noch viermal sahen sie durch das Rohr, aber ohne Erfolg, und sie trennten sich ungern und unruhig von dem Platze. (St. I., p. 285)

That evening the same nocturnal splendor spans the sky, as if nothing at all were wrong and nothing had changed:

Dieselbe goldne wunderschöne Kuppel, wie gestern, baute sich auch heute Abend über die dunklen abendfrischen Waldhöhen auf, und dasselbe Wimmeln der Gestirne folgte
But down below the world has begun to change. Although the sisters do not yet know it, their castle has been gutted and their loved ones killed. The cosmic view brings out the minuteness and seeming insignificance of human destinies within the immensity of the universe. More important, it underlines the permanent order of the world as opposed to the vagaries of human existence.

Already on an earlier occasion the view shifts from the lake surroundings to the nighttime cosmos:

The inexorable and almost violent cosmic process contrasts with the enchanted moon-lit night at the lake. Wolfgang Preisendanz interprets this contrast as a discrepancy between reality and man's subjective perception of it.¹ He feels that this basic discrepancy is

an important narrative motif in Stifter’s works. Although
we are essentially in agreement with Preisendanz’s the­
sis (see above, pp. 13ff), we feel that the above pas­
sage illustrates not the discrepancy of which Preisen­
danz speaks but the contrast of human existence and
activity within the order of the cosmos. On all three
occasions the nighttime sky hints at the huge and splen­
did permanence of the world.

The next day the sisters can spot the castle without
the aid of the telescope.

Johanna war die erste am Gipfel des Felsens,
und erhob ein lautes Jubeln; denn in der
glasklaren Luft, so rein, als wäre sie gar
nicht da, stand der geliebte kleine Würfel
auf dem Walderande von keinem Wölklein
mehr verdeckt, so deutlich stand er da,
as müsste sie mit freiem Auge seine Teile
unterscheiden, und der Himmel war von
einem so sanften Glanze, als wäre er aus
einem einzigen Edelsteine geschnitten.
(St. I, p. 286)

Viewed without the telescope, the countryside is as
magnificent as ever. The air is "so" crystal clear
and has such a gentle radiance. The familiar "Würfel"
is "so" clear. Nothing portends disaster. The vast
expanse of the scene swallows up and hides the evi­
dence of catastrophe at the castle. Faced with such
peacefulness it seems impossible that anything could
have happened there. We have to agree with Heinrich
Mettler when he writes of the above passage:

Die Burg selber scheint an der Klarheit der

In the contradiction between the tranquil splendor of the sky and forests (nature) and the frightening picture which Clarissa now sees through the telescope the disturbing aspect of nature's unchanging peacefulness, as man experiences it, begins to emerge:

Clarissa hatte inzwischen das Rohr befestigt und gerichtet. Auf einmal aber sah man sie zurücktreten, und ihre Augen mit sonderbarem Ausdrucke auf Gregor heften. Sogleich trat Johanna vor das Glas, der Würfel stand darinnen, aber siehe, er hatte kein Dach, und auf dem Mauerwerke waren fremde schwarze Flecken. Auch sie fuhr zurück—aber als sei es ein lächerlich Luftbild, das im Augenblicke verschwunden sein müsse, drängte sie sogleich ihr Auge wieder vor das Glas, jedoch in derselben milden Luft stand dasselbe Bild, angeleuchtet von der sanften Sonne, ruhig starr, zum Entsetzen deutlich—and der glänzende, heiter funkelnde Tag stand darüber—nur zitterte es ein wenig in der Luft, wie sie angestrengten Auges hineinsah; dies war aber daher, weil ihr Herz pochte, und ihr Auge zu wanken begann. (St. I, pp. 286-287)

The gentle radiance from the earlier quote (see above, p. 81) now shines down on castle ruins. The "so deutlich" in the same quote which made Johanna rejoice is now terrifying ("zum Entsetzen deutlich"). The sisters are unable to reconcile from their human perspective

2 Mettler, p. 119.
the apparent discrepancy between the beauty and serenity of the afternoon and the terrible disaster indicated by the gutted castle. Again Mettler correctly observes:

Die milde Luft und das schreckliche Bild, welches sich darin zeigt, müssten sich nach menschlicher Vorstellung ausschliessen. Und doch bleiben beide, was sie sind. Auch die Sonne ist weithin sanft, gleichgültig, wie grässlich das, was sie anleuchtet, auch sei. Der Himmel bleibt vom menschlichen Schicksal unberührt.  

The indifference which man perceives is only mildly hinted at in the passage quoted above. In the subsequent image of the tranquilly smiling sky it finds strong and unmistakable expression:

Es war ein unheimlicher Gedanke, dass in diesem Augenblicke dort vielleicht ein gewaltiges Kriegsgetümmel sei, und Taten geschehen, die ein Menschenherz zerreissen können; aber in der Grösse der Welt und des Waldes war der Turm selbst nur ein Punkt. Von Kriegsgetümmel ward man nichts inne, und nur die lächelnde schöne Ruhe stand am Himmel und über der ganzen Einöde.  

(St. I, p. 287)

This passage—especially the underlined section—has merited considerable attention in secondary literature in the last twenty years.  

Mettler, as indicated above, sees in this scene the uncanny discrepancy between the heart-rending human catastrophe and the peaceful sky. Konrad Steffen finds that the persons involved have to experience the apathy

3 Mettler, p. 120.
of the smiling sky as the mark of a pitiless fate. 4
Along the same lines Gunter Hertling tends toward a one-
sided view of the smiling heaven as "göttliche Dämonie"
and more:

Das soeben noch in "tiefster Einsamkeit" erschaute Göttliche ist nur mehr als die mitleidslos-vernichtende Kraft des Uner-
gründlichen zu verstehen. 5

Hertling's "nur mehr" excludes any optimistic aspect of the smiling sky.

On the positive side Fritz Lockemann believes that at the sight of nature's tranquility man accepts his fate "lovingly" and with resignation. The divine cosmic order absorbs human chaos which is perceived only as a momentary disturbance. 6 Josef Michels would deny any disconsoling or ironic discrepancy between the peacefulness of nature and the sad human events. He finds that the serene innocence of nature penetrates the severity of human destiny and manifests the all-comprehensive order of the universe. 7

The inadequacy of all these interpretations is their limiting one-sided view. Mettler and Michels hold op-

4 Steffen, p. 72.
5 Hertling, p. 71 (my italics).
7 Michels, p. 87.
posing points of view, yet both viewpoints have the same validity. The impression that the sky is smiling ("lächelnde Ruhe") reveals, as we shall see shortly, an ambivalent reaction to nature on the part of the sisters. Walter Höllerer and Heinz Otto Burger are both aware of such an ambivalence.

Burger detects in the final telescope scene a symbolic contrast and inner tension between the distressing human events and the smiling peacefullness of the sky overhead. This contrast symbolizes what Burger calls "das Aorgische" of life. Coined by Hölderlin, this word signifies the apathy of the universe (the gods) towards human existence. There is, says Burger, a two-sided aspect to this apathy ("Gleichgültigkeit"). For Stifter "gleichgültig" means not only indifference but also the idea of "gleich-gültig," the equal importance and validity of all things. Here Burger touches on the ambivalence which we see as a combination of the disconsoling apathy and the consoling permanence of the natural world.

Walter Höllerer follows Burger's line of thought and arrives at the themes of indifference and the continued growth of nature over the traces of human exist-

9 Burger, p. 89.
In der Novelle Der Hochwald liegt der Akzent vor allem auf dem Weiterwachsen der Natur über alles Dasein hin, auf der Landschaft und auf dem gleichgültigen Lächeln des Himmels.

Through Stifter's technique of subtly and symbolically hinting at the brutal facts of existence ("das verschweigende Andeuten" and "das umständliche Fernrücken") the indifference which Büchner expresses as a direct protest has given way to a mild sigh in Stifter's novellas. Like Burger, Höllerer sees also another side to the smiling sky:


But Höllerer has to admit that the feeling for this indifference remains as something terrible in spite of the thought of "Aufgehobenheit."

Stifter himself dwells specifically on this double aspect of existence in the chapter "Ein Gang durch die Katakomben" from the essay collection Wien und die

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10 Höllerer, p. 359.
11 Ibid., pp. 358ff.
12 Ibid., p. 371.
Wiener. A tour of the catacombs under Saint Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna brings Stifter to the observation:

Ach! welch eine furchtbare, eine ungeheure Gewalt muss es sein, der wir dahin gegeben 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 zu Grunde geht, das sie selber mit solcher Liebe baute, und zwar gleichgültig zu Grunde geht, als wär es eben nichts!

Stifter is speaking of man, whom the power of existence can and does annihilate so indifferently as if he were nothing. But as in Die Sonnenfinsternis (see above, pp. 37ff), the word "furchtbar" indicates the mixed feelings of fright and awe (awful—awe-ful) on Stifter’s part. In spite of the terrible indifference of this power, Stifter feels that it must have plan and purpose. He finds consolation in the fact that everything including man is, to use Höllerer’s expression, "aufgehoben" in the awe-inspiring order of this natural process.

In Der Hochwald the "lächelnde Ruhe" of the sky manifests this two-sided aspect of nature and the world as man sees it. In the face of human tragedy the serenity of this autumn day becomes the distressing ironic smile of an unconcerned heaven. And yet this very resplendence, which at the moment proves so disconsoling to the persons involved, is in reality splendid testimony to the order and permanence of nature and the world.
In reality, the sun does not and cannot smile. Man through his subjective perspective only sees it this way, and therein lies the apparent ambivalence (see above, pp. 73f). Like many of Stifter's characters in the Studien, the sisters raise their glance to the cosmos in the hope of finding a consoling sign, be it God or the sky itself. But their gaze encounters only the unchanged and, in their eyes, unconcerned countenance of a magnificent cosmos. Because of their human involvement with the destinies of those at Wittinghausen, the girls find this beauty and permanence to be in contradiction to the apparently dreadful events at the castle.

Because of this irreconcilable contradiction the sisters keep looking through the telescope in disbelief:

Aber sie nahmen das Rohr nicht weg. Clarissa warf sich neuerdings vor das Glas, und sah lange hinein—aber dieselbe eine Botschaft war immer darinnen, doppelt ängstend durch dieselbe stumme Einförmigkeit und Klarheit. Auch Johanna sah hindurch, um ihn nur gewöhnen zu können, den drohenden unheimlichen Anblick; denn sobald sie das Auge wegwendete, und den schönen blauen Walduft sah, wie sonst, und den lieblichen blauen Würfel, wie sonst, und den lachenden blauen Himmel gar so prangend, so war es ihr, als könne es ja ganz und gar nicht möglich sein—und wenn sie wieder in das Glas sah, so war's, als sei selbst das heitere Firmament düster und schreckhaft, und das Walddunkel ein
The clarity of it all only heightens the anxiety. Seen without the telescope, the pretty forest haze, the cube of a castle, and the pretty blue sky "gar so prangend" intensify the contradiction and make all the more probable the idea of human disaster. Paradoxically the more beautiful nature seems, the more disconsoling it becomes. Since the sisters cannot reconcile the peaceful scene with the possibility of terrible events at the castle, the cheerful sky becomes for them dark and frightening. The beautiful forests stretching to the horizon become an expanding black shroud. But once again this negative appearance of nature is strongly influenced by the subjective perspective of the sisters ("so war's, als sei...").

Upon hearing from Bruno at the castle that her loved ones died in the siege, Clarissa turns to the "blind" sky with anger and a scornful smile:

Clarissas Antlitz zuckte jäh hinüber, und haschte nach Atem; ein massloser Schmerz lag darauf, ja sogar etwas, wie Grimm, als sie das Auge gegen das Fenster wandte, wie gegen einen blinden Himmel—sekundenlang starrte, weil sie kämpfte...Noch war es fast wie Höhnlächeln in ihren Zügen, unheimlich anzusehen.... (St. I, p. 293)

This inner struggle disproves Lockemann's assertion that man accepts his fate lovingly and with resignation
(see above, p. 84). In her anger Clarissa feels the indifference of the cosmos ("wie gegen einen blinden Himmel"). Yet in later years this very same cosmos becomes a source of consolation for her, as she imagines Ronald's features in the stars and in the blue sky. Again the consoling-disconsoling ambivalence of the sky lies with the perspective through which it is seen. The years ease the pain of catastrophe for Clarissa. The perspective of time changes her view of the sky.

The peaceful sky and the surrounding landscape do more than provide a disconsoling contrast with the fateful events at the castle. It hints also at the apparent insignificance of human destinies within the immensity of nature and the transitoriness of all human existence.

In the initial sketch of the setting for the story the castle ruins appear to the narrator as a "luftblauer Würfel" which hovers ("schwebet") on the edge of a strip of woods (St. I, p. 197). In the vast countryside which the sisters view from the Plöckenstein their home is little more than a tiny dot:

...siehe, der geliebte kleine Würfel, wie= ein blauer Punkt schwebt er auf seinem Randel! (St. I, p. 238)

Johanna fand durchaus den kleinen blauen Würfel nicht am Waldesrande. (St. I, p. 285)
"Hovering" on the edge of the woods, the little blue cube hints at the frailty and uncertainty of human existence. In the immensity of the countryside the catastrophic events possibly still going on at the castle shrink into insignificance:

Es war ein unheimlicher Gedanke, dass in diesem Augenblick dort vielleicht ein gewaltiges Kriegsgetümmel sei, und Taten geschehen, die ein Menschenherz zerreißen können; aber in der Größe der Welt und des Waldes war der Turm selbst nur ein Punkt. (St. I, p. 287)

The final chapter begins at the gutted castle.

All around the tranquility of nature reigns and overhead the friendly sun shines down upon the place of human disaster:

Die grösste Stille und ein reiner Himmel mit freundlicher Novembersonne schaute auf diese Todesstelle nieder. (St. I, p. 291)

Once again we encounter the disconsoling-consoling serenity of nature in the face of human catastrophe.

We have also returned to the castle ruins which cause such ambivalent feelings in the narrator (see above, pp. 54ff). The sun shines down upon the "Todesstelle" bearing out the veracity of Ronald's words to Clarissa:

.."der Mensch ist vergänglich, wie das Blatt des Baumes, ja noch mehr als dies; denn dasselbe kann nur der Herbst abschütteln, den Menschen jeder Augenblick." (St. I, p. 274)
Der Hochwald concludes on the note of human tran­sitoriness. The father, his son and Ronald are dead. The other characters of the story eventually pass away also. We do not see them die. One day the knight Bruno rides to the castle no more:

Eines Tages blieb er auch aus—er war gestorben. (St. I., p. 299)

His death is avoided, is reported as a past event ("er war gestorben"). The two sisters literally fade away and are absorbed by everlasting nature. Nobody knows the location of their graves.

Once more the peacefulness of nature contrasts with human existence and death. The castle remains uninhabited:

Die Burg hatte nach ihnen keine Bewohner mehr. (St. I., p. 299)

Up at the Plockenstein lake the last trace of any human activity has disappeared, swallowed up by ever-growing nature:

Westlich liegen und schweigen die un­ermesslichen Wälder lieblich wie ehe­dem. Gregor hatte das Waldhaus ange­zündet, und Waldsamen auf die Stelle gestreut; die Ahornen, die Buchen, die Fichten und andere, die auf der Wald­wiese standen, hatten zahlreiche Nach­kommenschaft und überwuchsen die ganze Stelle, so dass wieder die tiefe jung­fräuliche Wildnis entstand, wie sonst, und wie sie noch heute ist. (St. I., p. 299)

The numerous offspring ("zahlreiche Nachkommenschaft")
of nature stands in stark contrast to the Wittinghausen family which has died out with the death of the sisters. Nature remains as always, as if no one had ever suffered under tragedy at the lake.

Herbert Seidler rightly interprets the final passages of the novella as an illustration of the transience of man as opposed to the eternity of nature. But his interpretation rings too pessimistic when he writes:

Freilich hat Stifter sonst kaum jemals mit so rücksichtsloser Eindringlichkeit den schier unüberbrückbaren Unterschied zwischen der Hinfälligkeit des Menschen, auch in seinen Werken, und der Größe der ewigen Natur herausgetrieben wie hier.14

In this very permanence of nature man can find consolation, for he realizes, like Stifter during the tour through the catacombs (see above, pp. 86ff), and like the narrator in the beginning of the story when he finds both "Liebes" and "Wehmütiges" in the setting, that nature bears testimony to the beauty and order of the world of which man is a part, regardless of how insignificant and ephemeral he may seem.

The old woodsman Gregor becomes a legendary figure whom one can see walking through the trees now and then. He does not die. He merges gradually into the life of the woods and becomes a part of the everlasting process of nature.

14 Seidler, p. 231.
BERGKRISTALL

THE SETTING

Bergkristall begins with a brief mention of the various feast days of the Church, above all the feast of Christmas. As the birthday of Christ, this day of observance is celebrated with great ceremony by the Catholic Church. At midnight on Christmas Eve the bells ring out with an invitation to the faithful to come from their mountain dwellings to the house of God. Through the wintery night the congregation hurries to the church to observe one of the most beautiful of all holy-days.

A domestic tradition accompanies this religious observance. Christmas is a feast for children, for on this day they receive gifts brought by the Christ Child. The gifts, together with the many visual and audial impressions, provide the young people with such vivid memories that even in old age it is often this particular day which allows a glance back into the years of one's youth. The religious tradition accompanies man throughout his lifetime and is one of the main components of his world.

This general introduction already acquaints us
with the little mountain village to which the narrative then turns:

In den hohen Gebirgen unsers Vaterlandes steht ein Dörfchen mit einem kleinen aber sehr spitzigen Kirchturme, der mit seiner roten Farbe, mit welcher die Schindeln bemalt sind, aus dem Grün vieler Obstbäume hervor ragt, und wegen derselben roten Farbe in dem duftigen und blauen Dämmern der Berge weithin ersichtlich ist. (B.S., p. 168)

As the first-mentioned landmark in the village, the towering church spire indicates the importance of religion for the community. The steeple is the sign of identification for this alpine village. Later Stifter refers to this village as "das Dörflein mit dem spitzigen Kirchturme" (B.S., p. 176). This dominance of the spire finds a parallel in the similar role of the pastor in the social structure of the village. The villagers revere the pastor as the most important man in their midst:

Der grösste Herr, den die Dörfler im Laufe des Jahres zu sehen bekommen, ist der Pfarrer. Sie verehren ihn sehr.... (B.S., p. 169)

Another important element is the total isolation of the community from other settlements. No streets traverse the valley; and except for occasional mountain climbers, visitors are rare. Many a person passing through the town of Millsdorf in the adjacent valley does not suspect that beyond the mountain ridge lies
another community (B.S., pp. 175-176). The people of this little village Gschaid live in a private world:

Daher bilden die Bewohner eine eigene Welt.... (B.S., p. 169)

Although not purposely shunning contact with the world, the villagers tend toward isolation by nature. Those living further back in the hills seldom come into the village:

Es gehören sogar noch weiter Hütten zu dem Dörfchen, die man von dem Tale aus gar nicht sehen kann, die noch tiefer in den Gebirgen stecken, deren Bewohner selten zu ihren Gemeindemitbrüdern herauskommen. (B.S., p. 169)

Even the pastor comes to prefer the loneliness of the valley to the outside world:

...und es geschah gewöhnlich, dass derselbe durch längern Aufenthalt im Dörfchen ein der Einsamkeit gewöhnenter Mann wird, dass er nicht ungerne bleibt, und einfach fortlebt. (B.S., p. 169)

With all their isolationist tendencies, the inhabitants of Gschaid are closely bound together:

...sie kennen einander alle mit Namen und mit den einzelnen Geschichten von Grossvater und Urgrossvater her, trauern alle, wenn einer stirbt, wissen, wie er heisst, wenn einer geboren wird, haben eine Sprache, die von der der Ebene draussen abweicht, haben ihre Streitigkeiten, die sie schlichten, stehen einander bei, und laufen zusammen, wenn sich etwas Ausserordentliches begibt. (B.S., p. 169)

This habit of mutual assistance later plays a role in the rescue of the two village children from the mountain.
The lack of communication between Gschaid and other settlements, in particular Millsdorf, though not laudable, is not unusual:

...so sind doch Sitten und Gewohnheiten in den beiden Tälern so verschieden, selbst der äussere Anblick derselben ist so ungleich, als ob eine grosse Anzahl Meilen zwischen ihnen läge. Das ist in Gebirgen sehr oft der Fall, und hängt nicht nur von der verschiedenen Lage der Tälern gegen die Sonne ab, die sie oft mehr oder weniger begünstigt, sondern auch von dem Geiste der Bewohner, der durch gewisse Beschäftigungen nach dieser oder jener Richtung gezogen wird. (B.S., p. 175)

Isolation stems from both the attitude of the people and the geographical location of the valleys and is thus typical for such mountain communities. Since Millsdorf is more readily accessible to the surrounding areas, it has traffic and trade with the lowlands. It is also more prosperous than Gschaid ("ein viel schöneres und blühenderes Tal") (B.S., p. 175). The residents of Gschaid, cut off from the lowlands by the mountain ridge, do not engage in trade and have become economically self-sufficient.

As a result of this isolation Gschaid changes little if any over the years ("es bleibt immer beim Alten") (B.S., p. 169). The villagers cling so tightly to their traditions ("Herkömmlichkeiten und Väterweise") (B.S., p. 175) that changes can rarely occur. When a stone falls out of a wall the same stone is put back in. The
new houses are identical with the old ones, and even the colors of the cows on the different farms remain the same.

Another matter of major interest is the realm of nature as represented by the mountain to the south of the village:

Gegen Mittag sieht man von dem Dorfe einen Schneeberg... (B.S., p. 170)

In many ways the alp determines the existence of the little settlement in the valley. It cuts Gschaid off from the other communities and provides the isolation discussed above. The massif towers above the valley as the most conspicuous landmark in the area:

Als das Auffallendste, was sie in ihrer Umgebung haben, ist der Berg der Gegenstand der Betrachtung der Bewohner, und er ist der Mittelpunkt vieler Geschichten geworden. (B.S., p. 170)

The mountain is the main object of the villagers' observation and the occasion for many of their stories. There is hardly a man in the valley who cannot tell of some feature of the massif either from first-hand experience or from hearsay.

The villagers think much of "their" mountain ("Stolz des Dorfes") (B.S., p. 170):

und es ist nicht so ganz entschieden, wenn man auch die Biederkeit und Wahrheitsliebe der Talbewohner hoch an-schlägt, ob sie nicht zuweilen zur Ehre und Ruhme des Berges lügen. (B.S., p. 170)
The question is whether they are really lying on the mountain's behalf or whether they want to encourage climbers to visit the area. For besides its imposing splendor the massif brings the community monetary benefits. When climbers visit the area the villagers serve as guides and earn money. Their experiences as guides also raise them in the eyes of their fellow villagers, or so they hope:

...einmal Führer gewesen zu sein, dieses und jenes erlebt zu haben, diese und jene Stelle zu kennen, ist eine Auszeichnung, die jeder gerne von sich darlegt. (B. S., p. 170)

The villagers love to talk of their accomplishments and their adventures as guides provide them with much material:

Sie reden oft davon (experiences as guides), wenn sie in der Wirtsstube bei einander sitzen, und erzählen ihre Wagnisse und ihre wunderbaren Erfahrungen, und versäumen aber auch nie zu sagen, was dieser oder jener Reisende gesprochen habe, und was sie von ihm als Lohn für ihre Bemühungen empfangen hätten. (B. S., p. 170)

Aside from being the pride of the village and the cause for many stories the mountain also makes essential contributions to the community. Frequent personification underlines this role as a beneficent provider:

Er sieht...herab...Der Berg gibt wirklichen Nutzen...Dann sendet der Berg...die Wasser ab.... (B. S., p. 170)

The name of the mountain (Gars) contributes to this per-
sonification. The mountain's water keeps the community in operation and the villagers alive:

Dann sendet der Berg von seinen Schneeflächen die Wasser ab, welche einen See in seinen Hochwäldern speisen, und den Bach erzeugen, der lustig durch das Tal strömt, die Brettersäge, die Mahlmühle und andere kleine Werke treibt, das Dorf reinigt und das Vieh tränt. Von den Wäldern des Berges kommt das Holz... Durch die innern Gänge und Lockerheiten der Höhen sinken die Wasser durch, die dann in Adern durch das Tal gehen, und in Brünlein und Quellen hervorkommen, daraus die Menschen trinken und ihr herrliches, oft belobetes Wasser dem Fremden reichen. (B.S., pp. 170-171)

The same forests which supply the community with wood also provide protection from avalanches (B.S., p. 171). Here for the first time another side to the mountain landscape emerges. As protector, the mountain forests protect man from the forces of nature itself. The destructive avalanches come from the same slopes which create the beneficial and life-sustaining water for the community. Indeed, later these same water-providing slopes will pose considerable threat to the lives of the two children lost on the mountain. The mountain which in so many ways sustains life in the valley possesses potential destructive forces.

The mountain undergoes very little change from year to year. The two peaks are clothed in white during the winter months. When the warm winds and hot days of summer arrive, these pinnacles lose their white dress.
And often, when an unusually hot summer occurs, areas which are normally always white, are "entkleidet" (B.S., p. 172). With the advent of autumn the mountain puts on its soft cloak and stands clothed again in white ("in weissem Kleide") (B.S., p. 172). The clothing images continue the personification of the mountain pointed out on a previous page. The life cycle of the mountain repeats itself from year to year with little variation:

So spinnt es sich ein Jahr um das andere mit geringen Abwechslungen ab, und wird sich fort spinnen, so lange die Natur so bleibt, und auf den Bergen Schnee und in den Tälern Menschen sind. (B.S., p. 172)

The villagers note the changing of the seasons by means of the slight variations on the mountain:

Die Bewohner des Tales heissen die geringen Veränderungen grosse, bemerken sie wohl, und berechnen an ihnen den Fortschritt des Jahres. (B.S., p. 172)

The mountain, like the village, seems to continue on with great regularity, so that there is reason to consider both manifestations of a well-ordered world.

And yet there is something uncanny about this initial sketch of the massif. With its two horns, it towers above the surrounding woods like an enchanted castle (B.S., p. 171). This comparison introduces a mysterious, possibly foreboding atmosphere to the description of the mountain. Deceptive hues of blue and green playing off the glacial surfaces (B.S., p. 171)
lend the alp an atmosphere of mystery. Below the play of colors a disarray of gigantic boulders, slabs and broken fragments does not fit into the peaceful order of the mountain's yearly cycle:

...ein Gemenge wilder riesenhafter Blöcke, Platten und Trümmer, die sich drängen, und verwirrt in einander geschoben sind. (B.S., p. 172)

In the mountain landscape are destructive forces, which have caused such wreckage. The adjectives "wild" and "riesenhaft" imbue the scene with a threatening quality further enhanced by the dynamic "sich drängen."

On the top of the ridge separating Gschaid from Millsdorf, a monument to danger, there stands a red wooden post. This "Unglückssäule" (B.S., p. 173) was erected on the spot where a baker, who was transporting his wares over the mountain, met an untimely end. Although the post is the work of human hands, it has become an integral part of the landscape. As an easily noticeable marker, the post indicates to persons traversing the ridge the proper path to take to go either down into the valley or up onto the glaciers. During the snowstorm, for example, Konrad knows that he will be going in the right direction if he can only spot the red post. Within the landscape this pose thus provides beneficial guidance. Yet in its primary purpose of commemorating the baker's demise, it also bears witness
to the ever-present danger in the landscape.¹

A deceptiveness also characterizes the alpine landscape, for the mountain is not as near to the village as it seems.

Gegen Mittag sieht man von dem Dorfe einen Schneeberg, der mit seinen glänzenden Hörnern fast oberhalb der Hausdächer zu sein scheint, aber in der Tat doch nicht so nahe ist. (B.S., p. 170)

Deceptive are also the colors on the mountain.

Veins and spots covering the two peaks appear to be white, but actually they are blue, the contrast of the milk-blue snow against the darker cliffs. The boulders on the slope create a similar deception:

Am Rande dieses Schillerns, wo es von ferne wie ein Saum von Edelsteinsplittern aussieht, ist es in der Nähe ein Gemenge wilder, riesenhafter Blöcke, Platten und Trümmer... (B.S., p. 172)

This quote constitutes a variation of the telescopic perspective technique employed in Der Hochwald, where the two sisters see the castle from their distant perspective on the ridge above the lake as a little blue cube. When they look at the blue cube through the close-up telescopic view they see the reality of the gutted castle (see above, pp. 82ff). In Bergkristall the area at the base of the ice looks like a hem of jewels from

¹ The more connotative word "Unglückssäule" in place of the typically Austrian "Martersäule" of the original version of the novella suggests that Stifter wants to stress this indication of danger in the scene.
a distance ("von ferne"). From close by it is a chaotic
collection of boulders and slabs.

The author emphasizes this deception in the land-
scape:

Wenn man so ziemlich mitten in dem Tale
steht, so hat man die Empfindung, als
ginge nirgends ein Weg in dieses Becken
hierin und keiner daraus hinaus; allein
diejenigen, welche öfter im Gebirge ge-
wesen sind, kennen diese Täuschung gar
wohl: in der Tat führen nicht nur ver-
schiedene Wege und darunter sogar manche
durch die Verschiebungen der Berge fast
auf ebenem Boden in die nördlichen
Flächen hinaus, sondern gegen Mittag, wo
das Tal durch steilrechte Mauern fast
geschlossen scheint, geht sogar ein Weg
über den obbenannten Hals.
(B.S., pp. 174-175)

The frequent use of terms like "allein," "in der Tat,
"nicht nur...sondern," and "sogar" indicates that the
landscape is not at all as it appears to be. The
correct view of the landscape depends upon the perspec-
tive of the viewer. From a distance ("so ziemlich mitten
im Tale") trails remain hidden.

The two-sidedness and deceptiveness of the land-
scape, of which we detect only subtle indications amidst
the majestic permanence and benefaction in the first
description of the mountain, later come to the fore when
experienced through the close-up perspective of the two
children lost in the world of ice.
THE CONFRONTATION WITH NATURE

As pointed out in the preceding section, the initial description of the setting in Bergkristall centers on two main points. The first of these is the little alpine village Gschaid, the setting for the social plot of the novella. The second point is the realm of nature as embodied by the mountain Gars. This same division underlies the thematic structure of the novella.

The social plot provides the first theme of the story. It tells of the problems in the community and their eventual solution. We can sum up this plot as follows: due to a combination of factors the wife and children of the village shoemaker are outsiders in the eyes of the residents of the little hamlet. One Christmas Eve the shoemaker's children go across the mountain ridge to visit their grandmother in the next valley, as they have done often before. Upon their return trip they lose their way in the blinding snow. They are forced to spend the night on the mountain, where seemingly miraculous natural phenomena help them survive. The next day, still trapped on the mountain, the children are rescued by the searchers from the village. As a
result of the rescue the villagers now accept the children and their mother wholeheartedly into the community.

The second major theme of the novella is nature itself as embodied in the mountain. The events on this alp play an indispensable role in the social plot. Although at the end of the story the rescue operation, as we shall later see, is the immediate cause for the alleviation of conflicts in the villages, the changes for the better can be traced back to the nature phenomena on the mountain. By leading the children astray and holding them captive on the alp, the forces of nature necessitate a rescue. By keeping them from perishing, these same forces also assure a successful conclusion to the rescue operation and make possible the subsequent ameliorations of relationships in the villages. This is not to imply that nature's forces actively or intentionally influence the fortunate outcome. Because nature is what it is, things happen to turn out well this time.

The length of the mountain episode—nearly half of the novella—indicates that Stifter intends this encounter with the mountain to be more than merely a step along the way to elimination of human conflicts. The Christmas Eve adventure which climaxes with the threefold cracking of the glacial ice and the appearance of the Northern Lights is a story in itself, the story of man's confrontation with the elements of nature.
Indeed, it was the idea of such a confrontation which provided Stifter with the initial impetus and material for the novella.

In 1845 Stifter vacationed with his wife in Hallstadt in Upper Austria. One day, while on a hike near the Dachstein, Stifter and his friend Friedrich Simony, an alpine researcher of some renown, met two youngsters selling strawberries, who had earlier in the day been caught in an unexpected storm on the mountain. Stifter promised to buy the berries if they would tell him about their day and where they had found shelter during the storm. They told Stifter that they had escaped the rain under an overhanging cliff. The next evening Stifter was looking at some of Simony's alpine sketches. Upon seeing a drawing of an ice cave on the Dachstein (Gars in the novella), Stifter remarked to Simony:

Ich habe mir jetzt das Kinderpaar von gestern in diesen blauen Eisdom versetzt gedacht; welch ein Gegensatz wäre dies liebliche, aufknospende frisch pulsierende Menschenleben zu der grauenhaft prächtigen, starren, todeskalten Umrahmung...Vielleicht stehle ich Ihnen einmal dieses Bild, wenn Sie nicht vorziehen, es selbst unter die Leute zu bringen.1

The combination of the two events provided Stifter with

1 Adalbert Stifter, Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 5 (Prague, 1908), pp. XLV-XLVI. Quoted from Simony's account of the episode.
the material for the adventures of the shoemaker's two children on Christmas Eve.

Kurt Michel has pointed to the autonomous quality of the nature theme by comparing briefly the two versions of the novella. The mountain plays a central role already in the first version. In the second version its position becomes even more evident. In this version the alp as a symbol for nature plays a more central role in the events. It has a name and has become a more important character in the story. Michels refers to it as the "Hauptakteur." The changing of the title from Der heilige Abend to Bergkristall reflects a further emphasis on the mountain theme in the final edition.

The adventures of the children show how preoccupied Stifter was with the nature theme. Although the children use means from the human realm (clothing, food and coffee) in their struggle to stay alive, the actual confrontation with the mountain takes place independently from village conflicts. We do not deny a link between the two parts of the story, but the snowfall and subsequent adventure of the children are autonomous events which could have taken place if there had not been any conflicts in the village. The fact that the snowfall

happens to take place on Christmas Eve and brings a 
"gift" to the valley inhabitants is the unusual occur-
rence (unerhörte Begebenheit) which integrates the moun-
tain theme into the rest of the novella and makes it 
a Christmas story. However, there is no evidence to 
support the interpretation of the natural events as the 
deliberate intervention of divine or beneficent forces 
in order to remedy the situation in Gschaid.3

The first part of the story tells of the benefits 
which the community enjoys from the mountain. Seen 
through the distant focal perspective of the introductory 
description, the beneficial aspects of Gars overshadow 
the threatening, deceptive and disquieting aspects (see. 
above, pp. 101ff). On Christmas Eve the children ex-
perience close up this other side of nature with its 
threatening and deceptive forces.

On the morning that the children set out for Mills-
dorf an uncanny shrouded calmness prevails. A "dünner 
trockener Schleier" (B.S., p. 185) is spread across the

3 Egon Schwarz, "Zur Stilistik von Stifters Berg-
kristall," Neophilologus, XXXVIII (1954), pp. 260-268 and 
Frederick Stopp, "Die Symbolik in Stifters Bunten Steinen,"
Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift, XXVIII (1954), pp. 165-193 
hold this view. Schwarz bases his argument on the dra-
matic structure of the novella. The cobbler's actions 
and the disharmony in the village demand a dramatic solu-
tion. Stopp builds his interpretation upon the causality 
he believes implicit in the symbolic correspondences be-
tween the cobbler's life and the children's adventures on 
the mountain. The children have to go up into the moun-
tain to expiate the father's guilt.
sky so that the sun is merely an unclear red spot.

Einmal war es am heiligen Abende, da die erste Morgendämmerung in dem Tale von Gschaid in Helle Übergangen war, ein dünner, trockener Schleier über den ganzen Himmel gebreitet, so dass man die ohne-dem schiefe und ferne Sonne im Südosten nur als einen undeutlichen roten Fleck sah. Überdies war an diesem Tage eine milde, beinahe laulichte Luft unbeweglich im ganzen Tale und auch an dem Himmel, wie die unveränderte und ruhige Gestalt der Wolken zeigte. (B.S., p. 185)

One feature of this calmness is a rigidity in the landscape. The mother decides to let the children take the hike to Millsdorf not only because the weather is favorable but also because the paths are hard, due to the dry weather: "Weil es so lange nicht geregnet hat und die Wege fest sind" (B.S., p. 185). But already nature reveals its deceptive two-sidedness. The mother interprets the hard ground as a favorable condition for the hike, but it soon becomes a foreboding sign as the children discover that coldness and not dry weather has caused the ground to turn solid:

...sie (furrows) waren fest, und zwar nicht aus Trockenheit, sondern, wie die Kinder sich bald überzeugten, weil sie gefroren waren. (B.S., p. 187)

This same coldness has brought the mountain stream to a virtual standstill. This is indeed strange, for just a few minutes earlier a rather warm air filled the valley (see above). For all the apparent stillness and rigidity of the mountain slope an imperceptible and
rapid change is taking place. When the children arrive in Millsdorf the ground is already frozen hard, even though this valley lies lower than Gschaid and normally freezes later. The grandmother remarks that in the morning it was not so cold in Millsdorf. Konrad replies that Gschaid was also warmer. By now, however, the ground in Gschaid is also hard. The speed with which the cold has set in seems in discrepancy with the calmness of the scene. With deceptive tranquility nature conceals the unexpected yet imminent snowfall.

As the children head back to Gschaid the snow begins to fall. The snowfall does not disturb the peacefulness of the landscape, for the wind predicted by the grandmother does not blow:

Der von der Grossmutter vorausgesate
Wind stellte sich nicht ein, im Gegen­satz war es so stille, dass sich nicht ein Astchen oder Zweig rührte....
(B.S., p. 191)

The result is a stillness and tranquility which at first makes the snowfall a delight for the children. The firs are "recht lieblich gesprenkelt" (B.S., p. 190) and on the branches sit "weisse Fläumchen" (B.S., p. 191).

Yet precisely in this tranquility the other side to nature, the dangerous threatening aspect, comes to the fore. The peacefulness of the scene and the children's happy reaction to the snow conceal the serious threat which the snowfall poses. The flakes fall "stets reich-
licher" (B.S., p. 191) and "stets dichter" (B.S., p. 192). Increasingly robbing the children of visibility and eliminating all sounds, they deprive them of all means of orientation.

First the children can no longer see the sun (B.S., p. 190). A while later only the nearest trees are still discernible, but even they disappear into the blinding whiteness before long (B.S., p. 193). In order to orient themselves the little hikers must find the memorial post. The first time Sanna wonders whether they will see it, Konrad is sure they will (B.S., pp. 193-194). A few minutes later when Sanna asks if they will be reaching the post soon, Konrad has to admit that he does not know and that it will probably be hidden in the snow (B.S., p. 194). Even as the children walk the snow covers up their footprints, so that they can no longer see where they have come from (B.S., p. 194).

When the children finally stop walking to see if they can orient themselves, all visible forces have disappeared:

Aber sie erblickten nichts. Sie sahen durch einen trüben Raum in den Himmel...
Auf der Erde sahen sie nur einen runden Fleck Weiss und dann nichts mehr.
(B.S., p. 195)

Konrad's futile attempt to see something illustrates how completely nature has robbed the two wanderers of all visual orientation:
"Wenn ich nur mit diesen meinen Augen etwas zu erblicken im Stande wäre," fuhr er fort, "dass ich mich darnach richten könnte."

Aber es war rings um sie nichts als das blendende Weiss, überall das Weiss...

(B.S., p. 196)

Just as the snow has deprived the children of all visibility, so it takes away all audial orientation.

Konrad tries in vain to hear something:

"Warte, Sanna," sagte der Knabe, "wir wollen ein wenig stehen bleiben, und horchen, ob wir nicht etwas hören können, was sich im Tale meldet, sei es nun ein Hund oder eine Glocke oder die Mühle oder sei es ein Ruf, der sich hören lässt, hören müssen wir etwas, und dann werden wir wissen, wohin wir zu gehen haben."

Sie blieben nun stehen, aber sie hörten nichts. Sie blieben ein wenig länger stehen, aber es meldete sich nichts, es war nicht ein einziger Laut auch nicht der leiseste ausser ihrem Atem zu vernehmen, ja in der Stille, die herrschte, war es, als sollten sie den Schnee hören, der auf ihre Wimpern fiel. (B.S., pp. 196-197)

Sometimes the language of the snowfall description has a threatening quality. On account of the snow the woods seem "gleichsam ausgestorben" (B.S., p. 192). Amidst the tranquility of the landscape the steadily increasing intensity of the snowflakes has an uncanny effect which becomes more and more threatening. Not a branch or twig is moving, and still the flakes fall "stets reichlicher" (B.S., p. 191) and "stets dichter" (B.S., p. 192) as a "stummes Schütten" (B.S., p. 195).
New snow falls so quickly upon the old that soon snow and fog comprise an omni-present mass of white which closes in on the children, devouring everything in its insatiability:

...Überall das Weiss, das aber selber nur einen immer kleineren Kreis um sie zog, und dann in einen lichten streifenweise niederfallenden Nebel überging, der jedes Weitere verzehrte, und verhüllte, und zuletzt nichts anderes war als der unersättlich niederfallende Schnee.

(B.S., p. 196)

The peaceful snowfall encompasses them in "eine einzige weisse Finsternis" (B.S., p. 197), devoid of forms and sounds. Thus the children have no means of directional orientation and are completely at the mercy of the mountain:

...und weil kein Schatten war, so war kein Urteil über die Grösse der Dinge, und die Kinder konnten nicht wissen, ob sie aufwärts oder abwärts gehen würden, bis eine Steilheit ihren Fuss fasste, und ihn aufwärts zu gehen zwang.

(B.S., pp. 197-198)

With each step a crevasse or an abyss can send the children plunging to their deaths. Here we disagree with Stopp who maintains that they are not in danger but sheltered in the bosom of nature. Later, as we shall see, nature does shelter the children, but in denying all danger Stopp fails to see that in its ever-present ambivalence this same nature leads the two hikers astray

4 Stopp, p. 175.
and to the threshold of death on the glacial reaches.

Stopp should have examined more carefully the way in which the children move up the mountain. Like dynamic forces the contours of the alp meet the children and force them further and further upward away from the security of the human realm and into the ice-bound world of the massif. It is as if the terrain were guiding and steering the children:

Oft begegneten ihnen Steilheiten, denen sie ausweichen mussten, und ein Graben, in dem sie fortgingen, führte sie in einer Krümmung herum. Sie erklommen Höhen, die sich unter ihren Füssen steiler gestalteten... Die Felsen liessen sie nicht rechts und nicht links ausweichen, und führten sie in einem engen Wege dahin...bis eine Steilheit ihren Fuss fasste, und ihn aufwärts zu gehen zwang. (B.S., pp. 196-197)

This "guiding" by the mountain slopes has two-sided effects. On the one hand the walls and cliffs endanger the children by leading them away from their destination and onto the glacial ice. At the same time these same cliffs and walls protect the youngsters by preventing them from straying to the right or the left and possibly falling into a crevasse or over a cliff.

The same two-sidedness can be detected also in the snowfall. Although the snow initially leads the children astray and hides all points of orientation, it is a dry snow, with the result that they do not get wet:

Eine Wohltat war es, dass der Schnee so trocken war wie Sand, so dass er von ihren
Füssen und den Bundschühlein und Strümpfen
daran leicht abglitt und abrieselte, ohne
Ballen und Nässe zu machen. (B.S., p. 193)

This benevolent aspect of the snowfall manifests itself
further in the often mentioned fact that the wind pre-
dicted by the grandmother has not come up. This pre-
diction draws upon many years of familiarity with weather
conditions in the area. Thus the absence of wind is re-
markable. The dye-maker impresses this fact upon his
son-in-law later:

"Hundert Jahre werden wieder vergehen,
dass ein so wunderbarer Schneefall niederr-
fällt, und dass er gerade niederrfällt,
wie nasse Schnüre von einer Stange hängen.
Wäre ein Wind gegangen, so wären die
Kinder verloren gewesen." (B.S., p. 219)

Once the children reach the upper reaches of the
alp they can again discern objects. A frightening world
awaits them. The "hem of jewels" (see above, p. 103)
which can be seen from Gschaid becomes a frightening
chaos when viewed up close and through the perspective
of the two small children.

Es lagen Platten da, die mit Schnee be-
deckt waren, an deren Seitenwänden aber
das glatte grünliche Eis sichtbar war,
es lagen Hügel da, die wie zusammengescho-
bener Schaum aussahen...als wären
Balken und Stangen von Edelsteinen durch
einander geworfen worden...In einigen
(Platten) waren Höhlen eingefressen...
Alle diese Stücke waren zusammen oder
empor gedrängt und starrten, so dass
sie oft Dächer bildeten, oder Überhänge,
Über deren Ränder sich der Schnee her-
über legte, und herab griff wie lange
weisse Tatzen. Selbst ein grosser schreck-
haft schwarzer Stein, wie ein Haus, lag unter dem Eise, und war empor gestellt, dass kein Schnee an seinen Seiten liegen bleiben konnte. Und nicht dieser Stein allein--noch mehrere und grössere staken in dem Eise, die man erst später sah, und die wie eine Trümmermauer an ihm hingen. (B.S., p. 199)

The immensity of the objects around them dwarfs the children: "Sie waren winzigkleine wandelnde Punkte in diesen ungeheueren Stücken" (p. 200). The threatening aspect and the violent chaos of the glacial terrain intensify the contrast between the hugeness of the landscape and the minuteness of man:

Ein neuer Strom von Eis, gleichsam ein riesenhaft aufgetürmter und aufgewölbter Wall lag quer durch den weichen Schnee, und griff gleichsam mit Armen rechts und links um sie herum...Es standen Spitzen und Unebenheiten und Schollen empor wie lauter furchtbares überschneites Eis...stiegen aus der Wölbung neue Wände von Eis empor, geborstern und geklüftet...zerstreutere Trümmer, aber sie waren auch grösser und furchtbarer...An dem Eissaume waren ungeheuere Steine, sie waren gehäuft, wie sie die Kinder ihr Leben lang nicht gesehen hatten. (B.S., pp. 201-203)

The children chance upon a cave in which the unusual dominant bluishness is so beautiful and yet so intense that it simultaneously awes and frightens them:

In der ganzen Höhlung aber war es blau, so blau, wie gar nichts in der Welt ist, viel tiefer und viel schöner blau, als das Firmament, gleichsam wie himmel-blau gefärbtes Glas, durch welches lichter Schein hinein sinkt...aber es war so schreckhaft blau, die Kinder fürchteten sich und gingen wieder hinaus. (B.S., p. 201)
A few minutes later the ambivalence of nature comes to the fore again when in the middle of the threatening icy chaos, a little house, nothing more than the haphazard arrangement of boulders, affords refuge for the children. Since during the snowfall, no wind has blown, there is no snow in the cave and the children have a dry shelter (B.S., p. 203).

The shelter provides only temporary and partial protection, for soon danger threatens from another quarter. Konrad realizes that he and Sanna can freeze to death if they fall asleep. The grandmother's coffee, which is so strong that only one swallow prevents the body from freezing, only temporarily counteracts Sanna's drowsiness. Something more is necessary to prevent a sleep of death. At the moment when the children are about to succumb to the enticements of a pleasant sleep, the forces of nature come to their rescue:

...so würden sie den Schlaf nicht haben überwinden können, dessen verführende Süßigkeit alle Gründe überwiegt, wenn nicht die Natur in ihrer Grösse ihnen beigestanden wäre, und in ihrem Innern eine Kraft aufgerufen hätte, welche im Stande war, dem Schlafze zu widerstehen. (B.S., p. 209)

Here we can see the two-sidedness of the events in nature. Nature comes to the rescue of the youngsters by returning to them the same aids which it earlier deprived them of: namely audial and visual perception.

First come sounds which shake the children out of
their drowsiness:

In der ungeheueren Stille, die herrschte, in der Stille, in der sich kein Schnee­
spitzen zu rühren schien, hörten die Kinder dreimal das Krachen des Eises.
(B.S., p. 209)

Yet a certain ambivalence underlies nature's "interven­
tion." The glacier, which appears rigid but is full of
movement, produces the sounds:

Was das Starrste scheint, und doch das
Regsamste ist, der Gletscher, hatte die
Töne hervorgebracht. (B.S., p. 209)

Paradoxically these "rescuing" sounds come from the very
realm which the children must seek to escape.

The description of the cracking ice stands in con­
trast to its beneficial effects:

Dreimal hörten sie hinter sich den
Schall, der entsetzlich war, als ob die
Erde entzweigesprungen wäre, der sich
nach allen Richtungen im Eise verbreit­
ete, und gleichsam durch alle Aderchen
des Eises lief. (B.S., p. 209)

In spite of the beneficial effect of the sounds, the
cracking of the ice is the releasing of potentially
destructive forces which could annihilate the youngsters
with the same violence with which the boulder ruins were
created. Here again evidence of the ambivalence of the
nature phenomena.

The Northern Lights and the myriad of stars give
the children something to see, and thus prevent their
falling asleep. As a dramatic and structural high point
of the novella this section has received much attention in secondary literature. The divergence of the various interpretations concerning the Lights attests to the need for a closer examination.

Konrad Steffen interprets the Northern Lights as the light of the divine cosmos which overcomes the chaotic and abysmal forces of the mountain and even compels one such force, the cracking of the ice, to help keep the children awake. Although Steffen correctly detects two different attitudes in nature, he errs in dividing nature into two opposing camps. The two-sidedness manifests itself not in an opposition between areas or types in nature but in the continual ambivalence in all of nature. The sky which reveals the divine cosmos of which Steffen speaks also drops the near-fatal snow on the alp with such deceptive peacefulness. And the same threatening chaotic landscape, which according to Steffen opposes the divine cosmos, guides and shelters the children while threatening them at the same time.

Egon Schwarz interprets the "miracle" of the lights as the last of several manifestations of divine providence which include the fallen memorial post and the absence of wind during the snowfall. Although the

6 Schwarz, p. 166-167.
Northern Lights are not an unusual atmospheric phenomenon, they destroy the myth of an indifferent nature by revealing a final power, a moral law, to which the universe is subordinated and which allows nothing to befall the innocent. For Schwarz the lights are "die Sichtbar­werdung Gottes in sinnlicher Erscheinung." We question the strong religious emphasis in Schwarz's interpretation. Although the story contains religious symbolism, primarily in the Christmas themes, Stifter at no time during the night on the mountain attributes the events to a divinity. We never learn why the memorial post has fallen, but it appears that it has most likely rotted out. After the rescue the dye-maker tells the cobbler to get down on his knees and thank God for the miraculous absence of any wind; but this reaction to an unusual event is conditioned by the traditional Christian upbringing of the village inhabitants.

The beams of the Northern Lights look to Sanna like the points of a crown, so that she tells her mother:

"Mutter, ich habe heute Nachts, als wir auf dem Berge sassen, den heiligen Christ gesehen."

(B.S., p. 220)

Schwarz believes that here Sanne expresses the poetic meaning ("Sinn des Dichterischen") in her child-like

7 Schwarz, p. 166.
8 Schwarz, p. 267.
language. Yet the mother's reply is quite significant:

"O du mein geduldiges, du mein liebes,
o du mein herziges Kind," antwortete die Mutter, "er hat dir auch Gaben gesendet, die du bald bekommen wirst."

(B.S., p. 220)

In essence she dismisses Sanna's remark as childlike phantasy. By referring to the Christmas presents she reduces Sanna's impression of the lights to the level of that of a child who claims to have seen Santa Claus. Kurt Michel detects on the basis of Sanna's remark an apparent mysterious relationship between the Christ Child and the mountain. He finds this relationship reinforced by the dye-maker's words to the cobbler and the consecration bells heard by the searchers. But Sanna's "vision" is the perspective of a small child who has been brought up in the strong Catholic environment. sketched in the first section of the novella. Just as the cobbler, conditioned by his lifetime within a Christian tradition, can thank God for the fortuitous absence of the wind during the night, so too does Sanna react on her level to the spectacular natural phenomena in naive Christian terms. For Sanna the Northern Lights are the Christ Child. In the poetic reality of the novella she

9 Michel, pp. 34-35.
does not actually see the Christ Child; she only thinks she does. Michel realizes this, but still insists on the "Wirken des heiligen Christ" even when his own arguments tend to disprove this interpretation.

Not once during the description of the events on the mountain do we encounter references to God or divine forces. Not even from the children, from whom we might expect it, do we hear a prayer, a word of trust in God's guidance, or any other religious allusions. When the Christ Child and the gifts are mentioned, then only to stress their contrasting absence on the mountain:

Das war der Zeitpunkt, in welchem man in den Tälern die Lichter anzünden pflegt... In allen Tälern bekamen die Kinder in dieser Stunde die Geschenke des heiligen Christ: nur die zwei sassen oben am Rande des Eises....

(B.S., p. 206)

Similarly, the many church bells ringing out the message of Christmas from valley to valley and uniting all men in the remembrance of a common Christmas salvation brings out even more the contrasting quiet isolation of the children on the icy reaches of the alp:

In diesem Augenblick der heutigen Nacht

wurde nun mit allen Glocken geläutet, es läuteten die Glocken in Millsdorf, es läuteten die Glocken in Gschaid, und hinter dem Berge war noch ein Kirchlein mit drei hellen klingenden Glocken, die läuteten. In den fernen Ländern draussen waren unzählige Kirchen und Glocken, und mit allen wurde zu dieser Zeit geläutet, von Dorf zu Dorf ging die Tonwelle, ja man konnte wohl zuweilen von einem Dorfe zum andern durch die blätterlosen Zweige das Läuten hören: nur zu den Kindern herauf kam kein Laut, hier wurde nichts vernommen; denn hier war nichts zu verkündigen. (B.S., p. 208)

Of the last two lines above Stopp maintains there can be but one interpretation. It is impossible to assume that the children are being excluded from the proclamation of salvation of this Christmas Eve. There is nothing to proclaim on the mountain, because the proclamation emanates from the children themselves through their atonement of the sins of their father. Lights, bells and gifts are only the external trappings of the Christmas message. The true message the children give to the valley inhabitants, for they restore the order in Gschaid and the harmony between the two villages.11

We disagree with Stopp's assumption of causality between events in the village and the confrontation on the mountain and hence question his symbolic explanations. Indeed there is nothing to proclaim on the mountain. At this moment the children are no longer part of the world.

11 Stopp, pp. 175ff.
of traditional religious convention and Christmas celebration down below. They have entered the realm of a huge, magnificent and non-human nature in which the Christmas proclamation no longer exists. The word proclamation is a human and religious concept here, which lies within the framework of the Christmas tradition in the valleys but has no place in the direct confrontation of man with the powers of a non-human and hence indifferent nature. In this cold quiet world of ice the forces of nature do not proclaim, they manifest themselves through their magnificent and overpowering existence. This is the essence of the man-nature confrontation.

The "Zacken einer Krone" in the Northern Lights (B.S., p. 209) provide no evidence of divine forces at work. As indicated earlier (see above, pp. 121ff), the points of a crown are merely Sanna's view of the light spectacular and explain why she later tells her mother that she has seen the Christ Child. The lights themselves at no time leave the limits of a natural occurrence.

Stifter leaves no doubt that nature, and not God or divine forces, aids the children at the decisive moment:

...wenn nicht die Natur in ihrer Grösse ihnen beigestanden wäre.... (B.S., p. 209)
In the original version the wording is significantly different:

...wenn ihnen nicht von Seite der Seele Hilfe gekommen wäre...12

This shift from the inner reactions of the children to external forces illustrates the greater emphasis on nature as the helping force in the final version. We must not, however, interpret this assistance as an active intervention by nature on the children's behalf. The tendency on the part of the narrator, and on the part of the reader, to want to see nature as actively intervening only enhances the unfathomability and uncanniness of the phenomenon. It seems impossible that such natural phenomena should happen to occur on this particular evening, and yet they do. Thanks to the very existence of these seemingly ambivalent forces things turn out happily this time. The next time it may be different, as in the case of the baker commemorated by the red signpost, and the old Eschenjäger who froze to death when he fell asleep on the mountain (B.S., p. 207). Stifter himself offers only conjecture as to why the Lights occur:

Hatte sich nun der Gewitterstoff des Himmels durch den unerhörten Schneefall so gespannt, dass er in diesen stummen herrlichen Strömen des Lichtes ausfloss, oder war es eine andere

The references to God and the consecration bells do not occur until after the children have been found. Upon spotting the lost youngsters, the shepherd Philipp exclaims "Gebenedeit sei Gott" (B.S., p. 215). From then on, as the children leave the realm of nature and re-enter the human sphere, allusions to the divine become more frequent. They are the natural reactions and explanations of the religiously oriented villagers to the seemingly miraculous salvation of the children.

Kurt Michel points out that for the villagers the workings of nature and those of the divine are one and the same. From this he draws the conclusion that the mountain motif and the Christmas motif (religious themes) are one and the same. Michel overlooks the fact that the villagers' equating of nature with divine forces is purely arbitrary. Had the children perished during the night, the villagers would certainly not attribute their death to divine workings. Their religious explanation depends entirely upon the happy outcome of the events on the mountain. For this reason we have to disagree with Schwarz, who in support of his thesis of divine providence claims:

13 Michel, p. 35.
Denn das Wirken des Göttlichen war ja
everg wenig Dörfler verborgen geblieben, wenn
es sich nach nur den Kindern für die
Augen sichtbar gezeigt hatte. 14

The "Wirken des Göttlichen" is the religious explanation
of the villagers for the salvation of the children. In
the events on the mountain we find evidence not of
divine forces, but of the ever-present ambivalence of
nature.

A too programmatic and generalizing interpreta-
tion of Stifter leads Paul Hankamer also to the conclu-
sion that divine providence is responsible for the un-
usual salvation of the children: "Die letzte Ursache
der Errettung liegt in Gottes Hand." 15 Hankamer is in-
fuenced by the preface to the . He believes
that Stifter intends to show that when man is confronted
with an "unfeeling" nature he can find consolation in
the order of the universe and in the existence of a
greater power, which is God:

In seinem Werke wirkt sich das Verhältnis
von Mensch und Natur vor allem als religiös-
sittliche Schöpfungsordnung tief eingrei-
fend aus und bestimmt seinen Stil bis in
das feinste Geäder, ist doch sein dichter-
isches Vermögen auf das innigste mit seinem
Naturgefühl und seiner Naturwissenschaft
verbunden. Dem Christen musste es vor allem
darum gehen, den auflösenden Schauer
vor der Einsamkeit des Menschen in der
"unfühlenden" und uns umfassenden Natur

14 Schwarz, p. 268.
15 Paul Hankamer, "Adalbert Stifter: Bergkristall,"
Aus Theologie und Philosophie. Festschrift für Fritz Till-
mann zu seinem 75. Geburtstag (Düsseldorf, 1950), p. 93.
zu bannen, der die ganze Epoche durchfuhr, und ein Leben voll vertrauender Liebe zu Gott dem Vater zu einer Ideologie zu machen drohte.16

Basing his observation on the cobbler's words of thanks to God, Hankamer reaches the conclusion that Stifter wants to tell the story as an illustration of divine providence ("göttliche Fügung"), which nevertheless occurs within the limits of natural events and hence cannot be called a miracle. Although everything on the mountain takes place within the realm of possibility, the morally sensible person feels compelled to recognize the merciful hand of God in the natural occurrences.17 This statement may be true for the villagers, who attribute the children's safety to God's mercy, but it is not the case with the reader, who in the actual depiction of the night on the mountain discovers no divine references or allusions in connection with the natural phenomena (see above, pp. 122ff).

Having presented his thesis for divine providence and the final moral order of creation, Hankamer turns his attention to the "unfeeling" nature in the above quote. He likens this nature, the loveless asympathetic world of the alpine reaches, to the gods of Greek tragedy who appear foreign and sublime to the persons lost in the

16 Hankamer, pp. 94-95.
17 Hankamer, p. 94.
darkness of unrelenting fate. Unmoved by his needs and wishes, nature confronts man:

Der gleiche Dichter, der die sittliche Seite unserer Existenz scheu behutsam vom Tragischen fernhält, zeigt ernst und wahrhaftig den Menschen im Kosmos gegenüber der Natur, wie sie ihm unberührt von seiner Not und seinem Wollen begegnen kann, und verrät uns, dass er die kosmische Tragik sehr wohl kennt, in deren Nähe der Mensch zu leben hat.

The apathetic nature of which Hankamer speaks corresponds to the "aorgic" concept of nature which Heinz Otto Burger discusses in connection with Der Hochwald (see above, pp. 105f). One senses a discrepancy between the unconcerned mien of nature and the numerous influences of nature's forces upon the final outcome. The peacefulness with which the snow shrouds the landscape in white betrays no warmth of feeling. Nor do the threatening and guiding contours of the alp reveal any concern with the children's predicament, although from our human perspective it seems that they should. We are reminded of the calm innocence ("gelassene Unschuld") of nature's forces which Stifter mentions in the introduction to Abdias (see above, pp. 1ff).

Hankamer tends to overlook the actual contribution of the natural phenomena and has a different explanation for the ice and the Lights. He believes that in spite of

18 Hankamer, p. 96.
the apathy with which nature nearly annihilates the young-
sters, the description of this nature ("in der fast hym-
nischen Feier ihrer erhabenen Schönheit und Macht") testi-
fies to Stifter's religious feelings for the magnificence
of nature. A similar feeling in the children, the awe-
some respect for the beauty of the universe, prevents them
from falling asleep and freezing to death:

\[
\text{Die schaudernde Ehrfurcht vor ihrer Majestät rettet sie vor dem Untergang.}
\]

Herbert Seidler speaks also of the children's awe and
respect ("die Kraft der Ehrfurcht vor den Naturwundern")
as the saving force. Indeed we would agree that the
children's receptiveness for the sights they experience
contributes to their salvation. However, one must not
forget that this respect can only exist because nature,
for all its seeming apathy, fortuitously reveals its
wonders to the children on this particular Christmas Eve.

\[19\text{ Hankamer, p. 97.} \]
\[20\text{ Seidler, p. 233.} \]
There is a tendency in secondary literature to dismiss the importance of the rescue for the final outcome of the story. Herbert Seidler takes the eventual safety of the children for granted once the snow has ceased to fall:

Dann folgen nach dem Aufhören des Schneefalls die Wunder der Nacht. Aber jetzt fehlt alles Drohende, die Heiligkeit der Bergnatur drängt vor... eine Steigerung, die uns die Geborgenheit der Kinder immer eindringlicher macht. 1

In his article on the Christmas symbolism in the story, Hugo Schmidt proffers the opinion that the section following the Northern Lights is justifiable from the standpoint of structure and plausibility, but that this denouement does not fit the inner development of the story. Through the miracle of the Lights nature has already revealed itself as merciful toward the children. The final pages, the imprisonment on the mountain and the rescue by the villagers, tend to nullify this miracle. 2 We would deny of course that nature ever shows any attitude, merciful or unmerciful, in the story. It is Schmidt's

1 Seidler, p. 233.
own perspective which sees nature in this light. Most important, however, is that Seidler, unlike Schmidt and Kurt Michel, \(^3\) fail to see that the children are by no means out of danger the following morning.

In spite of the beauty of the morning sun on the snow the landscape appears huge and frightening to the two youngsters:

> Sie sahen heute auch in grösserer Entfernung furchtbare Felsen aus dem Schnee empor stehen...sie sahen Hügel und Schneelehnen empor starren....

(\textit{B.S.}, p. 211)

As they leave their shelter and search for a route down the mountain they encounter the dangerous icefields of the previous night:

> Es (the icefield) war ungeheuer gross, und jenseits standen wieder schwarze Felsen empor, es ragte gleichsam Welle hinter Welle auf, das beschneite Eis war gedrängt, gequollen, empor gehoben, gleichsam als schöbe es sich noch vorwärts und flösse gegen die Brust der Kinder heran...Aber es war auch heute wieder Eis, lauter Eis. (\textit{B.S.}, p. 212)

The icy terrain holds the children imprisoned and frustrates their every attempt to escape the glacial confinement. The mountain contours attest again and again to the futility of these efforts:

> So begannen sie nun in dem Schnee nach jener Richtung abwärts zu gehen, welche sich ihnen eben darbot. Der Knabe führte das Mädchen an der Hand. Allein nachdem sie eine Weile abwärts gegangen waren,
hörte in dieser Richtung das Gehänge auf, und der Schnee stieg wieder empor. Also änderten die Kinder die Richtung, und gingen nach der Länge einer Mulde hinab. Aber dann fanden sie wieder Eis. Sie stiegen also an der Seite der Mulde empor, um nach einer andern Richtung ein Abwärts zu suchen. Es führte sie eine Fläche hinab, allein die wurde nach und nach so steil, dass sie kaum noch einen Fuss einsetzen konnte, und abwärts zu gleiten fürchteten. Sie kamen also wieder empor, um wieder einen andern Weg nach abwärts zu suchen. Nachdem sie lange im Schnee empor gekommen, und dann auf einem ebenen Rücken fortgelaufen waren, war es wie früher: entweder ging der Schnee so steil ab, dass sie gestürzt wären, oder er stieg wieder hinauf, dass sie auf den Berggipfel zu kommen fürchteten. Und so ging es immer fort. (B.S., p. 213)

At this time the children are far from the security of Gschaid and from the salvation presumably augured by the Northern Lights. They are still exposed to the dangerous glacial landscape through which they wandered the night before, although to a lesser degree, since they now have enough visibility to see where they are going. During the snowstorm the children had absolutely no audial or visual orientation. Now, although it is clear, they still hear nothing and see only snow and more snow:

Auch heute blieben sie öfter stehen, um zu horchen; aber sie vernahmen auch heute nichts, nicht den geringsten Laut. Zu sehen war auch nichts als der Schnee, der helle weisse Schnee, aus dem hie und da die schwarzen Hörner und die schwarzen Steinrippen empor standen. (B.S., p. 214)

Sanna and Konrad appear to be hopelessly imprisoned in the confines of the alpine landscape. The beneficial
aspects of nature are nowhere to be seen. We detect the ambivalence of the situation, however. By holding the children captive, the mountain in effect necessitates the rescue operation which freed them from the glacial prison and leads to their acceptance into the community (see above, p. 106).

The rescue operation is vital for the outcome of the story. Without the village help the children would fairly certainly be doomed to an icy grave, for their morning efforts indicate that they would not be able to get off the mountain by themselves. The rescue also serves to illustrate the virtues of the mountain dwellers (see above, p. 96). And finally the fact that searchers from Gschaid and not some other village rescue the children contributes strongly to the re-establishment of harmony in the mountain community.

Involved with his symbolic guilt-and-expiation interpretation, Frederick Stopp would not only deny the villagers credit for the rescue but would also question the virtues which Blackall enumerates for the community. In his study of Stifter's works Blackall remarks that through the rescue "the great human virtues of the community come to the fore." Stopp wants to know which vir-

4 Stopp, p. 182.
tues, since the disorder ("Unordnung") originates in the same community Blackall praises. For Stopp this disorder, the alienation between the cobbler’s family and the rest of the village, apparently precludes any community virtues. But the story shows that this is not the case. In summing up the character of the villagers in the early part of the novella Stifter writes:

Daher bilden die Bewohner eine eigene Welt...stehen einander bei, und laufen zusammen, wenn sich etwas Auserordentliches begibt. (B.S., p. 169)

The rescue provides a striking illustration of this assistance and cooperation on the part of the villagers. The cooperation of the villagers in an emergency manifests itself in the planning and the spirit of willingness during the rescue.

Philipp’s instructions upon finding the children reveal the careful cooperation in the planning of the rescue operation. Arrangements have been made beforehand to notify all the searchers when the children have been found:

"Laufe doch einer gleich in die Sideralpe hinab, und läute die Glocke, dass die dort hören, dass wir sie gefunden haben, und einer muss auf den Krebsstein gehen und die Fahne dort aufpflanzen, dass sie dieselbe in dem Tale sehen, und die

6 This is a rather surprising argument in Stopp’s article, since up until this passage he has not mentioned any blame on the part of the villagers for the situation in Gschaid.
As a result of these arrangements Michael is able to tell the searchers from Millsdorf that the youngsters have been found:

"Ja," sagte Michael, "ich habe es gesagt, weil die rote Fahne schon auf dem Krebsstein steckt, und die Gschaider dieses als Zeichen erkannten, das verabredet worden war." (B.S., p. 219)

The villagers are not lacking a willing spirit. When Philipp wants someone to carry out the arrangements for signaling the finding of the children, two people immediately volunteer:

"Ich laufe in die Alpe hinab," sagte einer. "Ich trage die Fahne auf den Krebsstein," sagte ein anderer. (B.S., p. 216)

The cobbler's sincere words of gratitude best attest to the villagers' assistance and cooperation:


More important than the illustration of the community's virtues are the results of the rescue operation: the changes for the better in the community and in the cobbler's family. Although these changes can be traced back indirectly to the events on the mountain (see above, p. 106), in each case the immediate impetus for the change comes from the rescue itself.
Hankamer speaks of the change in the cobbler at the end of the story. He has learned the value of neighborly assistance and thus overcome his pride. But this only happens after the villagers have worked together to rescue the children. This decisive realization on the part of the cobbler takes place after he sees that his children have been rescued and acknowledges his indebtedness to the searchers.

Schwarz and Hankamer draw attention to the new trust between mother and father, now that the mother sees that the cobbler does love his children. Here again the deeply moved actions of the cobbler occur when he sees the children have been rescued. This scene is part of the rescue description.

Steffen and Michel mention the elimination of alienation between the cobbler and the dye-maker at the end of the story. This new harmony, evidenced by the dye-maker's decision to accompany the rescue party down to Gschaid, also grows out of the successful search and rescue operation.

The most obvious and important improvement in Gschaid at the end of the novella is the acceptance of

8 Schwarz, p. 268.
9 Steffen, p. 158.
10 Michel, p. 32.
mother and children by the villagers. All the critics mention this fact, but none of them sees how much this change is predicated by the rescue operation. We wonder if the villagers would have accepted the children so readily if they had managed to get down off the mountain by themselves, or if the people from Millsdorf had found them first. For the fact is the villagers in Gschaid look upon the two youngsters as their own possessions because they have fetched them down from the alp.

Die Kinder waren von dem Tage an erst recht das Eigentum des Dorfes geworden, sie wurden von nun an nicht mehr als Auswärige, sondern als Eingebornen betrachtet, die man sich von dem Berge herab geholt hatte. (B.S., p. 221)

The conversation in the inn after the rescue strangely enough contains no mention of the children's experiences or the wondrous ways of nature. Instead each rescuer and would-be rescuer is intent on telling of his own experience and contributions to the rescue operation:

In dem Wirtshause in Gschaid war es an diesem Abende lebhafter als je. Alle, die nicht in der Kirche gewesen waren, waren jetzt dort, und die andern auch. Jeder erzählte, was er gesehen und gehört, was er getan, was er geraten, und was für Begegnisse und Gefahren er erlebt hat. Besonders aber wurde hervorgehoben, wie man alles hätte anders und besser machen können. (B.S., p. 220)

This preoccupation with the rescue operation itself reveals how little the villagers have comprehended the true significance and wonder of the children's fortunate
survival. Although linked together by the rescue, the experiences of the community and those of the children remain essentially unrelated. The villagers have no inkling of what the children experienced on the mountain, nor are they particularly interested in hearing about it.

The present tense commentary at the end of the story provides an interesting epilogue. The narrator first comments upon the changes in the community, the conclusion of the social themes of the novella:

Das Ereignis hat einen Abschnitt in die Geschichte von Gschaid gebracht, es hat auf lange Stoff zu Gesprächen gegeben, und man wird noch nach Jahren davon reden, wenn man den Berg an heitern Tagen besonders deutlich sieht, oder wenn man den Fremden von seinen Merkwürdigkeiten erzählt. (B.S., p. 221)

We recall the initial description of the villagers who love to talk about the mountain and tell visitors of its peculiarities (see above, pp. 98ff). For the people of Gschaid the happenings on this Christmas Eve are only an "event" which provides them with a topic of conversation ("Stoff zu Gesprächen") and added material for the tales with which they impress visitors. Perhaps it is significant that the episode on the mountain is referred to simply as "das Ereignis," for neither the initial description of the villagers nor this passage indicates that they have any new awareness or appreciation for the unusual natural phenomena during the children's hours of stress.
on the alp, or for the impressions and experiences of the children themselves.

The same is not true for the children. The final lines of the story follow the children's gaze to the distant mountain:

Die Kinder aber werden den Berg nicht vergessen, und werden ihn jetzt noch ernster betrachten, wenn sie in dem Garten sind, wenn wie in der Vergangenheit die Sonne sehr schön scheint, der Lindenbaum duftet, die Bienen summen, und er so schön und so blau wie das sanfte Firmament auf sie hernieder schaut. (B.S., p. 221)

From the distant view from the garden the alp looks "so" beautiful and "so" blue, like the ham of jewels on the edge of the ice (see above, pp. 103ff). Yet the children know this is only a deceptive tranquility. When sitting in the garden amidst the fragrance of the linden tree and the buzzing of the bees, they will observe Gars more seriously ("werden ihn jetzt noch ernster betrachten") when it looks down so peacefully upon them. Although perhaps not consciously aware of the ambivalence of nature as we have seen it in previous sections, they do have a new and deeper respect for the magnificent yet dangerous splendor of the mountain.

The reader also shares in this awareness, for he realizes that behind the inviting distant view of the massif lie unfathomable ambivalent forces.
CHAPTER IV

AMBIVALENCE IN STIFTER'S WORKS.

In the three works discussed in detail we have discovered two basic types of nature ambivalence in Stifter's writings. The examination of Der Hochwald brought out the ambivalence underlying man's reaction to the apparently unchanging indifference ("Gleichgültigkeit") of nature in moments of human anguish. On the one hand this unchanging countenance gives rise to feelings of disconsollement and protest against the smiling mien maintained by nature in moments of human catastrophe. The clear blue sky smiling down upon human distress ("die lächelnde Ruhe") in Der Hochwald reoccurs with startling frequency in the other Studien. Yet often this disconsoling scene is accompanied by the reverse feeling of consolation in the realization that this unchanging face of nature manifests the permanence and greater order of the cosmos of which man himself is a meaningful part. Stifter himself says as much in the chapter "Ein Gang durch die Katakomben" from the selection Wien und die Wiener. Man perishes as if he were nothing, yet one must marvel at the power behind the Plan und Zweck of existence (see above, pp. 86f).

Sometimes the feeling of disconsollement is so strong
that there remains no room for consoling thoughts of nature's permanence and order. On other occasions this double feeling is present.

The second major type of nature ambivalence occurs where seemingly contradictory and ambiguous forces or phenomena exist side by side in nature. Such an ambivalence may arise in a landscape description, as in the setting in Der Hochwald. Often it comes to the fore in a confrontation of man with nature, as in Bergkristall, where inimical and beneficial natural forces apparently vie for the life of the two lost children. On other occasions one feels the uncanny discrepancy between the beauty of a nature scene and the disaster taking place within it. We say "one feels" for it is often the characters in the stories who see and experience such ambivalence. Other times Stifter expresses this ambivalence directly through his descriptive narrative or commentary on an event.

This chapter is an examination of these two major manifestations of nature ambivalence as they occur in the Studien and Bunte Steine. We have arbitrarily excluded the novels from consideration. Necessity dictates the exclusion of the remaining stories since they contain little significant material for this study. For this same reason some of the stories in the Studien and the Bunte Steine are also absent from this chapter. We
are proceeding chronologically, but not in the hope of pointing out any development in Stifter's poetic creativity. Since the aspects of indifference and ambivalence are so often interrelated, a chronological treatment of the stories seems to be the best possible solution to problems of organization. Our chronology for the Studien is based upon the order of the stories as they occur in the six volumes of Studien published by Stifter's publisher Gustav Heckenast from 1844 to 1850.
Secondary literature tends to consider *Feldblumen* an exception in the *Studien* since in it Stifter borrows so heavily from the writings of Jean Paul. But it is noteworthy that on two occasions the main character, Albrecht, detects a discrepancy between the peaceful unchanged countenance of nature and his own personal turmoil. Of greater significance is that he uses an image which reoccurs frequently in the *Studien* and which we have already discussed in *Der Hochwald*, namely the "lächelnde Ruhe" of the heavens:

> Meine gewöhnliche Frühlingstrauer stellte sich ein. Ich weiss nicht, ob die schönen allerersten Frühlingsstage auch Andere traurig machen. Ist es etwa die Ruhe nach den Winterstürmen, die lächelnd in der ungeheueren Bläue liegt, und darunter auch ruhig die tote Erde und das schwarze Baumgitter, das des Keimens harrt... (St. I, p. 39)

Perhaps there is not yet enough evidence to speak here of an "aorgic" indifference of nature as in *Der Hochwald*. Still it is interesting that Albrecht thinks his sadness may be the result of the contrast between the dead earth around him and the smiling sky overhead.

If the discrepancy between the tranquilly smiling sky and man's sad feelings is only mildly stated, on the second occasion there is no mistaking Albrecht's
feeling for the apathy of nature. Albrecht has rashly forfeited his chance for happiness with his dream girl Angela through his childlike behavior after discovering her in the park at Schönbrunn with another man. Although it is now several days later, and the initial pangs of despair have somewhat subsided, Albrecht has reached his low point. The word indifference does not occur, but it speaks from Albrecht's lines:

Es ist aus, es hat sich beruhigt; aber wie beruhigt? Gleichsam gelassen entzwiegedrückt liegt es in der Brust.—Die Natur, das einzige Unschuldige, ist freundlich wie immer.... (St. I, p. 127)

In his moment of greatest distress Albrecht, like Clarissa in Der Hochwald, senses the discrepancy between his personal disaster and the friendly tranquility of nature around him. Although this peacefulness makes him all the more aware of his loss and thus increases his bitter feelings, still nature is the "einzige Unschuldige," who is always there ("freundlich, wie immer"), a constant testimony to its permanence and beauty. The fact that nature is so may be the only consolation which Albrecht has:

So still und mild ist Alles draussen, als sei ringsum lauter Glück. Es ist auch ringsum; nur hier und da geht Einer in der Welt, der sich durch Ungeschick das eigne Herz zerquetschte. (St. I, p. 127)
Das Haidedorf ends with an unusual natural event whose ambivalence lies in the contradiction between the beauty it displays and the threat it poses for the heath dwellers. Although this event, a long drought, accompanies the tension and anxiety building up in Felix as he awaits the answer decisive for his future happiness, the ambivalent tension of the beautiful yet dangerous weather pushes Felix' problem into the background. The never-ending dry spell becomes the main event of the novella.

The initial reference to the drought as "Schwüle" (St. I, p. 184) imbues the scene with an oppressive tension which the following image of the inaudibly approaching ghost intensifies:

Wohl kam Pfingsten näher und näher, aber zu der Schwüle, die unbekannt und unsichtbar über des Jünglings Herzen hing, gesellte sich noch eine andere über dem ganzen Dorfe drohend, ein Gespenst, das mit unhörbaren Schritten nahnte; nämlich... (St. I, p. 185)

But now the last half of the sentences reveals this "ghost" to be not something terrible but a magnificent weather. The threatening ghost is a beautifully shining sky:

...nämlich jener glänzende Himmel, zu dem Felix sein inbrünstiges Auge erhoben, als
er jene schwere Bitte abgesandt hatte, jener glänzende Himmel, zu dem er vielleicht damals ganz allein emporgeblieben, war seit der Zeit wochenlang ein glänzender geblieben, und wohl hundert Augen schauten nun zu ihm ängstlich auf. (St. I, p. 185)

The threefold repetition of the "shining" sky enhances the contradiction to the anxiety with which the villagers look to the sky. In total disparity to the threat posed by the fine weather, the sky is "so" beautiful and "so" spectacular:

Felix, in seiner Erwartung befangen, hatte es nicht bemerkt; aber eines Nachmittags, da er gerade von der Haide dem Dorfe zuging, fiel ihm auf, wie denn heuer gar so schönes Wetter sei; denn eben stand über der verwelkenden Haide eine jener prächtigen Erscheinungen, die er wohl öfters, auch in morgenländischen Wüsten, aber nie so schön gesehen, nämlich das Wasserziehen der Sonne: — aus der ungeheueren Himmelsglocke, die über der Haide lag, wimmelnd von glänzenden Wolken, schossen an verschiedenen Stellen majestatische Ströme des Lichtes, und, auseinanderfahrende Strassen am Himmelszelte bildend, schnitten sie von der gedehnten Haide blendend goldne Bilder heraus, während das ferne Moor in einem schwachen milchichten Höhenrauche verschwamm. (St. I, p. 185)

The weather description belies its destructive effects. On the heath much of the vegetation is wilting away ("Über der verwelkenden Haide") (St. I, p. 185), the soil is like chalk (St. I, p. 188), and the stalks of the corn crop are thin like "ohnmächtige Lanzen" (St. I, p. 186).

Each day ends with the same brilliant sunset:
The beauty of the sunset is frustrating and disconsoling, for it indicates that the villagers can expect no relieving rain in the near future:

Am andern Tage war es **schön**, und immer **schönere Tage** kamen und **schönere**.  
(St. I., p. 186)

Again one feels the ambivalence of these lines. The days become more and more beautiful, and yet the intensification of an intensification ("immer schönere...und schönere") has something oppressing about it which heightens the tension. As the beauty of the weather increases so too do the fear and anxiety on the part of the villagers:

Alles und jedes Gefühl verstumme endlich vor der furchtbaren Angst, die täglich in den Herzen der Menschen stieg.  
(St. I., p. 186)

So strong is this discrepancy between the steadily increasing beauty and the threat posed by it that the villagers--or is it Stifter himself?--see this beautiful sky as nature's indifference:

Nun waren auch gar keine Wolken mehr am Himmel, sondern ewig blau und ewig mild lächelte er nieder auf die verzweifelnden Menschen:  
(St. I., p. 186)

Appearing blue ("ewig blau") and mild ("ewig mild"), the sky disconsolates the despairing villagers even more, although it manifests the permanence of the world. The
smiling sky calls to mind again the "lächelnde Ruhe" in Der Hochwald where the sky is "rein" (see above, p. 81) while down below the burnt-out castle attests to recent human catastrophe. We have just seen the same image at work in Feldblumen (see above, p. 145).

The human perspective plays an essential role here, for the villagers imbue the sky with the human attribute of smiling indifference, an attribute which it in reality does and cannot possess. This same human perspective allows them to observe the mirage, formerly ignored by everyone, as a "unglückweissagender Spuk" (St. I, p. 186). This view is understandable, for the heath is steadily dying (St. I, pp. 186f).

As Whitsuntide approaches the situation becomes critical ("Es war die äusserste Zeit") (St. I, p. 187). Still the villagers' prayers appear to be directed at a closed heaven:

Man flehte mit Inbrunst zu dem verschlossenen Gewölbe des Himmels. (St. I, p. 187)

Another wonderful sunset is the sky's only answer to these prayers. Day after day a promising cloud bank appears on the southern horizon, a possible bringer of rain. Yet evening after evening the clouds dissolve in gorgeous colors and disappear:

...nie noch wurde ein so stoffloses Ding wie eine Wolke von so vielen Augen angeschaut, so sehnsüchtig angeschaut, als hier—aber wenn es Abend wurde, erglühte der Wolkenberg purpur schön, zerging,
The beautiful sky teases and tortures the villagers with hopes of rain, only to dash this hope again each evening. The "scattered roses" stand in ironic contrast to the parched heath where there are no more flowers ("von Blümlein war nichts mehr auf dem Rasen") (St. I, p. 187). The friendly stars are anything but a welcome sight to the villagers, but a continuation of the indifferently smiling sky into the night.

Eventually the clouds do bring saving rains, but not until the sky has raised and dashed the village hopes a few more times. On the final days of the drought the sky becomes a devouring demon to the suffering people:

Wohl standen Wolken am Himmel... aber er traute ihnen nicht, weil sie schon drei Tage da waren, und immer wieder verschwanden, als würden sie eingesogen von der unersättlichen Bläue. (St. I, p. 188)

To be sure the demonic quality of the sky lies completely in the human perspective of the villagers. Yet this perspective is a final attest to the uncanny discrepancy which the villagers, and the reader, experience in the frighteningly beautiful mien with which nature brings the heath and the village to the brink of catastrophe.
One of the similarities between Die Narrenburg and Der Hochwald is the castle ruins. The rampant growth of nature amidst the run-down buildings and grounds of the Scharnast complex calls to mind the thriving plant and animal life among the Wittinghausen ruins. Although an apt manifestation of "das Weiterwachsen der Natur über alles Dasein hin" (see above, p. 86), the sad, mixed feelings of the narrator at the sight of the Wittinghausen ruins appears to be missing here. The overgrown and run-down Scharnast castle provides a reminder of human sorrow and mortality ("dunkle schwermütige Vergangenheit") (St. I, p. 342), but it does not evoke feelings for any disconsoling indifference in nature. However on several occasions, each time in connection with the sky, the disconsoling unconcern of nature does come to the fore.

On the first occasion, the custodian Ruprecht is leading Heinrich and Robert through the castle grounds:

Seitwärts diesem Platze sahen die Freunde ein kleines Häuschen stehen, wahrscheinlich die Wohnung des Pförtners; von dem eigentlichen Schlosse aber war nichts zu erblicken... sie stiegen sofort den verwahrlos'ten ausgewaschenen Weg hinan. Hie und da war... ein Geschlecht zerstreuten Mauerwerkes... die hie und da hervorstanden...
The grounds are registered through the perspective of the two friends, still unfamiliar with the castle. The word "wahrscheinlich" illustrates this unfamiliarity and also eliminates the omniscient perspective of the narrator.

As the three men move through the grounds they see many a bird shoot out of the entanglement of stone and bushes and disappear into a smiling blue sky:

As on previous occasions the "smiling" of the sky lies in the human perspective. The heavens can only "smile" when man chooses to thus personify them through his subjective view. By seeing the sky as smiling, Heinrich and Robert reveal a feeling for the seeming discrepancy between the peacefully smiling countenance of the sky and the sad reminders of past human disaster spread around the castle grounds.

Part of the ambivalence of this particular moment is that one cannot say for certain whether the two men perceive this discrepancy as a disconsoling manifestation of human mortality in the face of an indifferent heaven or as a consoling reminder of the permanence and order...
of the universe of which man is a part. Perhaps the
two men are not even consciously aware of their feeling.

Jodok is definitely aware of the discrepancy when
he composes his chronicle. In a plaint on human mortali-
ty he writes:

Gebt es (these writings) lieber dem
reinen, dem goldnen, verzehrenden Feuer,
dass nichts bleibe, als die blaue Luft,
die er (Jodok) geatmet, und die noch so
unverwundet und glänzend über dir steht,
als wäre sie eben gemacht, und du tätest
den ersten, frischen erquickenden Zug
daraus. (St. I, p. 391)

We detect the ambivalence of the beautiful and permanent
air which is "unverwundet und glänzend" and yet for this
very reason increases Jodok's pessimism and despair at
the thought of human mortality.

On a third occasion the disturbing feeling for the
indifference of nature, indicated in the passages dis­
cussed, becomes a protest against the "unconcerned"
sky. The half-crazed custodian Ruprecht visualizes
Pia's body smashed to pieces at the foot of the castle
walls:

"Die Raben des Grahns werden kommen, über
meine Hütte gliegen, und mir die Botschaft
bringen, wenn sie schon Tagelang nicht
nach Hause gekommen ist—weil sie auf einem
roten Steine liegt; die gierige Kohlmeise
wird ihre Auglein ausgehackt haben—oder
die Wasser der Pernitz werden um ihre
zarten Glieder waschen, und die Fische.
werden heimlich herumschiesien, wie stumme
Pfeile, hastig zupfen, und sich um das
Stückchen balgen, das einer erwischte—
—ich werde indess suchen, und suchen,
immer, immer—--und werde dann zum fürchterlichen Himmel heulen, dass die Sterne daran zittern....

(St. I, p. 354)

Ruprecht follows in the line of those who, like Clarissa in Der Hochwald, in moments of disaster turn to the sky only to find a blind heaven (see above, p. 89). Not merely because of the visualized death of Pia does he perceive the sky as terrible, but because of the dreadful lack of concern with which the little animals pick and tear at her body.

In her study of the story Straumann-Windler detects this aspect:

Allzu deutlich verdichtet sich eine um den Menschen unbekümmerte vernichtende Gleichgültigkeit ihrer (nature's) Kräfte in Ruprechts Vision....

Ruprecht, like Clarissa and Albrecht, feels the disparity between the untroubled face of nature and the heart-crushing human disaster. His scream is not that of a mad man, but of a man protesting, however helplessly, against the dreadful indifference of the unconcerned cosmos.

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Ruprecht's vision of the body shattered on the rocks at the foot of the castle walls becomes reality in the Studien version of Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters. Attempting to walk across a narrow logging chute bridging a ravine, the wife of the retired colonel plunges silently to her death. While the searchers try in vain to descend into the ravine in the darkness, the colonel's gaze turns repeatedly to the sky:

...die ganze Nacht verging unter fruchtlosen Bemühungen. Endlich, da ich tausend Mal zu dem Himmel geschaut hatte, erblassten die fürchterlichen Sterne, und das schwache Grau des Morgens war in der Luft. (St. I, p. 465)

Primarily the colonel is searching the skies for signs of daylight. Still it is significant that he should direct his gaze upwards to the heavens as so do many of Stifter's characters in moments of tragedy. His impression of the stars as "terrible" betrays a feeling, perhaps unconscious, for the unconcerned peacefulness of the sky at this time.

After the funeral the colonel notices that nothing has changed in nature:

Dann schien die Sonne, wie alle Tage, es wuchs das Getreide, das sie im Herbst angebaut hatten, die Bäche rannen durch die
The colonel senses the contradiction between the peaceful mien of nature and his great personal loss. Like Ruprecht he feels the disconsoling aspect of nature in which the death of his wife has no more significance than a perishing mosquito. Yet there is something consoling in the beauty and permanence of this nature which is always there ("wie alle Tage"). The disconsoling aspect overrides now, but in the years to follow this nature will be a source of consolation to him.

Years later, when Augustinus entertains thoughts of suicide, the colonel draws his attention to the beauty of the growing crops as a means of support for Augustinus in his difficult hour:

Noch Eins muss ich sagen: habt Ihr denn nicht auch im Heraufgehen gesehen, Doctor, wie heuer das liebe Korn gar so schön stehet; es legt sich auf diese Jahreszeit schon so hoch und dunkel, dass es ein Wunder ist. Ich will von dem Reutbühl durch die Mitterwegfelder gehen, und dort den Neubruch betrachten, wo heuer zum ersten Male Weizen steht. Dann gehe ich wieder nach Hause.

(Rst. I, p. 441)

Ruprecht's scream of protest has given away to painful resignation on the part of the colonel. Although not without a struggle ("Und wie ich in jener Zeit mit Gott haderte..."), the colonel finally convinces himself that his wife's death was not meaning-
less. He turns to a religious explanation of his wife's accident as the will of God:

Seht, Doctor, ich habe mir damals einge­bildet, Gott brauche einen Engel im Himmel und einen guten Menschen auf Erden: deshalb musste sie sterben. (St. I, p. 468)

Generally secondary literature accepts the colonel's words as his genuine conviction. However the worlds "damals" and "eingebildet" let the extent of his conviction appear rather questionable. To be sure, "at that time" the colonel turned to a naively religious answer since he had to have some support to keep from perishing himself. Now in later years it is the peaceful beauty of nature which provides him with this major source of comfort.

Like so many of Stifter's stories, Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters contains an unusual nature phenomenon. A remarkable freeze occurs when rain from warmer higher air freezes upon hitting the cooler ground and covers the landscape with a steadily increasing mantle of ice. The result is a magnificent frozen landscape, fraught with danger and destruction. The doctor captures the ambivalence of the dangerous splendor in his first mention of the event:

Dieser Winter, von dem wir dachten, dass er uns viel Wasser bringen würde, endigte endlich mit einer Begebenheit, die wunderbar war, und uns leicht die äusserste Gefahr hätte bringen können, wenn sie nicht eben gerade so abgelaufen wäre, wie sie
The line between beauty and disaster is razor-thin. The people can be thankful that the natural event turns out "just" as it does. The freeze could have ended differently and meant disaster; and this possibility underlines the ambivalent potential of nature's forces. Herbert Seidler detects the power of God in the salvation of the people as well as in the terrible aspects of the freeze. Perhaps in his own bias he can do so, but Augustinus does not refer to divine forces at all. The remarkable freeze remains a natural phenomenon, and Augustinus accepts the outcome as such.

The first thing Augustinus notices upon awakening in the morning is the unusual glittering on all objects in spite of the rain:

...allein wie ich auf allen Gegenständen das schillerige Glänzen sah, war es nicht das Lockern oder Sickern des Schnees, der in dem Regen zerfällt, sondern das blasse Glänzen eines Überzugs.... (St. I, p. 504)

There is an attraction and beauty about this unusual glittering, but at the same time it is a constant manifestation of the steadily growing danger and destruction which threaten man and the landscape:

Unter dem Obstbaumwalde des Karhauses... lagen unzählige kleine schwarze Zweige auf dem weissen Schnee, und jeder schwarze Zweig war mit einer durchsichtigen Rinde von Eis umhüllt, und zeigte neben dem
Glanze des Eises die kleine frischgelbe Wunde des Herabbruchs. Die braunen Knos­plein der Zweige, die im künftigen Frühlinge Blüten- und Blätterbüschlein werden sollten, blickten durch das Eis hindurch.

(St. I, p. 507)

Already the ice has caused harm to the orchard and possibly reduced the next season's yield of fruit.

As Thomas and the doctor enter the woods in the Dubs they encounter the unusual ice again:

...es war das dumpfe Glänzen und das gleichmäßige Schimmern an allen Orten, wenn es bei trüben Himmel überall nass ist; aber heute war es nicht von der Nässe, sondern von dem unendlichen Eise, das in den Ästen hing. (St. I, p. 508)

The radiance of these glittering frozen woods is eye-catching and exerts an attraction on the doctor. Yet there is something foreboding in the dull uniform glaze of the "endless" ice. The subsequent cracking of branches and twigs under the weight of the ice confirms this.

Joachim Müller also detects the ambivalence of this nature scene:

...in dem zwiespaltigen Eindruck des Anziehenden und Abstoßenden deutet sich die Gefahr an....3

Again and again one is struck by the disparity between the magnificence of the ice and the detrimental effects it has. Many a bush is being crushed under the weight of the ice, and yet this bush has the charming

3 Joachim Müller, Adalbert Stifter, p. 149.
appearance of "gewundene Kerzen" (St. I, p. 508) or of "lichte, wässerig glänzende Korallen" (St. I, p. 508). Likewise, a willow tree has branches of silver ("silberne Äste") (St. I, p. 509) and the woods casts shining sparks ("glänzende Funken") (St. I, p. 509) as the men approach it. In spite of the discomfort of the freezing rain the doctor sees the beauty of the thousands of pale pearls in the frozen manes of the horses and the silvery embroidery around their hooves (St. I, p. 509).

At the start of the sick rounds the breaking ice crystals sound almost charming:

Noch etwas anders hörten wir später, da wir wieder hielten, was fast lieblich für die Ohren war. Die kleinen Stücke Eises, die sich an die dünnsten Zweige und an das langhaarige Moos der Bäume angehängt hatten, brachen ab, und wir gewahrten hinter uns...das zarte Klingen und ein zitterndes Brechen..... (St. I, p. 506)

These dainty sounds are the first stage of the terrible cracking of branches and trunks under the increasing number of these same ice crystals later.

The highpoint of the doctor's confrontation with an icy landscape occurs on the journey homeward. As the two men near the woods, strange noises belying the rigidity of the landscape reach their ears:

...ein Geräusch, das sehr seltsam war, und das keiner von uns je vernommen hatte—es war, als ob viele Tausende oder gar Millionen von Glasstangen durcheinander rasselten, und in diesem Gewirr fort in die Entfernung zögern. (St. I, p. 510)
The forest itself is a resplendent yet forbidding ice palace complete with entry arch and silver chandeliers:


(St. I, p. 510)

The splendor and crushing weight of the ice hanging from the trees underlines once again the discrepancy between the beauty of the ice and its effects. The constant rustling sound of branches and twigs cracking and falling to the ground heightens the frightfulness of the scene, for the men cannot detect the slightest movement:

Es war um so fürchterlicher, da alles unbe­weglich stand; von dem ganze Geglitzer und Geglänze rührte sich kein Zweig und keine Nadel, ausser wenn man nach einer Weile wieder auf einen gebogenen Baum sah, dass er von den ziehenden Zapfen niederer stand.  

(St. I, p. 511)

Like the narrator-viewer in Die Sonnenfinsternis the two men find themselves confronted with a spectacular natural phenomenon which evokes ambivalent feelings of awe and fear in them:

Wir harrten und schauten hin—man weiss nicht, war es Bewunderung oder war es Furcht,
Commenting on this moment, Joachim Müller could well be describing the ambivalent reactions in Die Sonnenfinsternis:

Unsägliche Pracht und fürchterliches Sterben: das dämonische Antlitz der Naturkatastrophe, im Menschen ein ambivalentes Gefühl erweckend, das Bewunderung und Furcht in einem ist.4

As the two men stand looking at this frozen forest, there occurs a climax to the gradually building destruction which unveils for a short moment the violent consequence of the invisibly growing mantle of ice. As if with a scream a mighty tree crashes to the earth under the terrible weight of the ice:

Ein helles Krachen, gleichsam wie ein Schrei, ging vorher, dann folgte ein kurzes Wehen, Sausen, oder Streifen, und dann der dumpfe, dröhrende Fall, mit dem ein mächtiger Stamm auf der Erde lag. Der Knall ging wie ein Brausen durch den Wald, und durch die Dichte der dämpfenden Zweige; es war auch noch ein Klingeln und Geschimmer, als ob unendliches Glas durch einander geschoben und gerüttelt würde—dann war es wieder wie vorher, die Stämme standen und ragten durch einander, nichts regte sich, und das still stehende Rauschen dauerte fort. (St. I, p. 512)

A catastrophe in nature takes place, and shortly after the same "rustling" silence as before prevails, as if nothing had happened. We are reminded of the words from

4 Müller, p. 149.
Abdias: "dann ist in der Natur die Unbefangenheit wie früher" (see below, pp. 166ff). The peacefulness of the scene belies the destruction which has occurred.

The different fates of persons caught in the woods illustrate the latent two-sidedness in nature's forces. One time trees crush the unfortunate creatures beneath them to death. Another time these same woods provide shelter and protection from the falling trees. Two farmers are killed by such falling trees; and late the following summer Augustinus finds the remains of a deer struck by a tree. However a dealer (Josikrämer) finds shelter in a forest cave (St. I, pp. 532f), while for another man fallen trees become a place of safety:

Ein Knecht...konnte sich, als er nicht mehr zu entrinnen wusste, nur dadurch retten, dass er sich in die Höhling, welche zwei im Kreuze aufeinander gestürzte Bäume unter sich machten, hinein legte, wodurch er vor weiteren auf die Stelle stürzenden Bäumen gesichert war, und von dem fallenden Eise nichts zu fürchten hatte....(St. I, p. 532)

We are reminded of the apparent two-sidedness of the natural forces in Bergkristall which both threaten and assist the two lost children. They also take refuge in a cave-like shelter, as do the grandmother and children in Katzensilber.

The doctor concludes his account of the unusual freeze with a comment on the magnificence of the event:

Ich werde die Herrlichkeit und Grösse jenes Schauspieles niemals vergessen. Ich konnte
In spite of the threat posed by the ice and subsequent thaw, Augustinus cannot ignore the beauty of the event. This is not to imply that the doctor's feelings are all positive. The word "merely" indicates that he, unlike the others who are only afraid, experiences the full range of reactions from fright to awe as he confronts the magnificent yet dangerously destructive landscape of ice. As in Die Sonnenfinsternis, the frightening splendor of the natural phenomenon evokes ambivalent reactions.
Nowhere does Stifter comment more explicitly on the ambivalence in the forces of nature than in the introductory paragraphs to the story of the Jew Abdias. There we find the words used as the starting point for this study (see introduction, p. 1):

Aber es liegt auch wirklich etwas Schauderndes in der gelassenen Unschild, womit die Naturgesetze wirken, dass uns ist, als lange ein unsichtbarer Arm aus der Wolke, und tue vor unseren Augen das Unbegreifliche. Denn heute kommt mit derselben holden Miene Segen, und morgen geschieht das Entsetzliche. Und ist beides aus, dann ist in der Natur die Unbefangenheit, wie früher. (St. II, p. 5)

The latent ambivalence in the forces of nature which bring blessings one day and disaster the next, as well as the contradiction between the peaceful countenance of nature and the results it brings about, occur several times in the novella.

We first encounter the two-sidedness of natural forces in the seasonal desert rains. They benefit the desert dwellers by providing them with vital storage water to help tide them over during the long dry season. It also supplies life-giving moisture for what little vegetation and few grazing lands there are. However, the same beneficial rainfall increases the danger of
sickness and disease among the residents of this arid land. Nature can be both beneficent and harmful to man simultaneously:

Die Zeit des Regens, wussten sie, so vorteilhaft sie ihren wenigen Gemüsestellen, dann den Gesträuch en und den Weideplätzen der Wüste ist, so nachteilig ist sie den Menschen, und erzeugt die in ihrer Lage und ihrem Wohnorte ohnedem so gerne hereinbrechenden Krankheiten. (St. II, p. 49)

Twice in the novella ambivalent forces of nature strike by means of an electrical storm. The first time a violent flash of lightning penetrates the walls of Abdias' house and kisses, so to speak, the shadows of darkness from the eyes of his blind daughter Ditha. Although the traditional conception of a lightening bolt as the arm of God immediately comes to mind, all mention of divine action is absent here. The event remains an unfathomable natural occurrence:

Es geschah eine wundervolle Begebenheit -- eine Begebenheit, die so lange wundervoll bleiben wird, bis man nicht jene grossen verbreiteten Kräfte der Natur wird ergründet haben.... (St. II, p. 82)

Stifter gives no reason or cause for this unusual event. Since man cannot see the entire chain of cause and effect ("Kette der Ursachen und Wirkungen") (St. II, p. 6) it is useless to speculate on why this happens:

Wir wollen nicht weiter grübeln, wie es sei in diesen Dingen; sondern schlechthin von einem Manne erzählen.... (St. II, p. 7)
Although speculation by critics has resulted in numerous explanations for the event, we are still left with the question: "Warum nun dieses?" (St. II, p. 7). The ambivalence of the occurrence itself serves to underline this unanswerable "why."

Remarkably this manifestation of nature's power, which is strong enough to melt the cage in Ditha's room, leaves the bird unscathed and performs the most delicate of operations on Ditha's eyes. And at the same time, while bestowing this great gift upon Ditha, the storm unloads destruction on much of the surrounding area:

Dasselbe Gewitter, welches Ditha sehend gemacht hatte, hatte ihm mit Hagel das Haustach und seinen Nachbarn die Ernte zerschlagen.... (St. II, p. 85)

The impenetrable double-faced forces of nature help and destroy simultaneously.

When Abdias goes out into the garden after having helped the upset Ditha get to sleep, the storm is gone and the evening calm:

Jetzt, da er im nassen Grase stand, war alles voruber. Die Gegend war sehr stille, die Sonne ging eben im tiefen Abend unter, und spannte im Morgen, wohin eben das Gewitter hinauszog, einen weiten schimmernden Regenbogen Uber dem ganzen dunklen Grund desselben. (St. II, p. 85)

The beauty of the evening, crowned by the glittering rainbow, and the tranquility of the area seem so uncanny in the light of what has taken place only minutes before.
The same splendid sky rained down destruction a bit earlier, yet now there prevails an "Unbefangenheit" in nature, as if nothing at all had happened.

Contrary to traditional belief, lightning does strike twice in Abdias. On this second occasion the lightning repeats and compounds the ambivalence already discussed. Once again a storm, not as violent as the first one, brings two-sided results. The bolt of lightning which gave Ditha her sight before now kisses the spirit of life from her body. The storm itself, destructive before, now bestows blessings on the countryside:

Das Gewitter, welches dem Kinde mit seiner weichen Flamme das Leben von dem Haupte geküßst hatte, schüttete an dem Tage noch auf alle Wesen reichlichen Segen herab, und hatte, wie jenes, das ihr das Augenlicht gegeben, mit einem schönen Regenbogen im weiten Morgen geschlossen.

(St. II, p. 103)

In killing Ditha ("das Entsetzliche") (St. II, p. 5) and watering the crops ("Segen") (St. II, p. 5) the storm attests once again to the contradictory aspect of nature's forces. Seen together, the two storms reinforce and expand the ambivalence in nature, for the second storm has the exact inverse effects of the first.

Benno von Wiese overlooks the ever-present ambivalent potential in nature when he writes that Stifter regards the storm which takes Ditha's life as a good angel ("guten Engel") rather than as an evil demon ("bösen
Dämon"), since it spread blessings over the crops and concludes with the beautiful rainbow. The storm is neither good angel nor evil demon but simply evidence of an unfathomable nature. The rainbow at the end of both storms is no argument for the poet's positive judgment of the event. The very discrepancy between the rainbow—-it could easily be a smiling blue sky-- and the disaster which comes from the same sky evokes the awesome and frightening feeling for nature's forces of which Stifter speaks in the introductory quote (see above, p. 166).

In the introduction Stifter uses the story of the drowning boy as his example:

Dort, zum Beispiel, wallt ein Strom in schönem Silberspiegel, es fällt ein Knabe hinein, das Wasser kräuselt sich lieblich um seine Locken, er versinkt--und wieder nach einem Weilchen wallt der Silberspiegel, wie vorher. (St. II, p. 5)

"Schaudernd" is the apparently peaceful innocence with which the water curls charmingly around the boy as he sinks to his death. Disaster takes place. A human life is swallowed up by nature. But in contradiction to the drowning, the silvery surface exhibits afterwards the same peaceful countenance as before, as if nothing had happened.

This beauty and calmness of nature prevail at the moment of Ditha's death. The lightning "kisses" life from Ditha's head with its "soft flame." What contradiction between the gentle language and the terrible happening! Abdias does not feel a thing:

Er selber hatte nicht die geringste Er-schütterung empfunden. Draussen war es, als sei auch noch kein Gewitter an die Stelle gekommen. Die folgenden Donner waren wieder ferne, es ging kein Lüftchen, und zeitweise sang noch die Lerche.

(St. II, p. 103)

A moment truly "erschütternd," both in its reality and in the "Gelassenheit" with which it is told.

Konrad Steffen sees this moment in a similar light:

Schauerlich bleibt jedenfalls die Ruhe und Gelassenheit, die holde Niene der Natur beim Tode Dithas... Während ein Mensch unter seinem Geschicke fürchterlich leidet und zuletzt in geistige Nacht versinkt.

"Schauerlich" because man senses the disparity between the peaceful mien of nature and the distressing human tragedy.

When Abdias, like Clarissa and Ruprecht, raises his gaze to the heavens, he too is experiencing the "lächelnde Ruhe" of a seemingly unconcerned cosmos:

Abdias sass nach diesem Ereignisse auf dem Bänkchen vor seinem Hause, und sagte nichts, sondern er schaute die Sonne an. Er sass viele Jahre... eine Sonne nach der andern verging, ein Sommer nach dem andern--und er

6 Steffen, p. 92.
As the years pass Clarissa finds consolation in the blue sky, for she imagines Ronald's features in the heavens. Abdias, however, is doomed to look at the same blind heavens from one year to the next, perhaps because he himself has been blind spiritually all his life.

Josef Michels views the end of the story differently. He indulges in polemics against those who would detect irony in the peaceful countenance of nature in moments of personal disaster. He takes the extreme opposite viewpoint from Höllerer and Burger (see above, pp. 84ff). The peaceful smile of nature is consoling, says Michels, for it reveals the all-comprehensive law, the wise order of an everlasting universe which has included seemingly senseless accidents in its wise plan. To be sure, this is one aspect of the splendid permanence of nature, but not the way it appears to either the characters in the stories or the narrator. As we have shown, Stifter himself speaks of nature's tranquil mien as something "Schauderndes."

Twice in the closing paragraphs of Abdias we encounter the "aorgic" growth of nature beyond human existence. Out of Ditha's remains sprout flowers and grass--

a vivid image of human mortality—while overhead the same sun shines from one summer to the next (St. II, p. 104).

One day Abdias also dies. The grass grows upon his fresh grave also, while above the same sun shines down, a reminder of man's transience in an everlasting cosmos, and a reminder that nature is abiding.
The story of the honor-conscious Hugo contains a one-page account of a spectacular mountain avalanche. Although its description serves to illustrate the acceleration of Hugo's involvement with Cöleste, the avalanche is an independent man-nature confrontation which we want to treat as such. Like the falling tree in *Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters* which lets Augustinus glimpse for a moment the shuddering destruction in the frozen woods (see above, p. 163), the avalanche erupts for a few brief seconds to reveal the destructive force of the alpine landscape.

Although it happens more quickly, the beginning phase of the avalanche is similar to the deceptive snowfall in *Bergkristall* which is initially charming but becomes steadily more threatening. The impetus for the avalanche seems so small and insignificant that for the first few seconds it is dainty and charming:

> Es geht die Sage, dass, wenn in der Schweiz ein tauiger sonnenheller lauer Wintertag über der weichen, klafterdicken Schneehülle der Berge steht, und nun oben ein Glöckchen tönt, ein Maultier schnauft, oder ein Bröselein fällt—sich ein zartes Flöckchen von der Schneehülle löset, und um einen Zoll tiefer rieselt. Der weiche, nasse Flaum, den es unterwegs küsset, legt sich um dasselbe an, es wird ein
Knöllchen und muss nun tiefer nieder,
as einen Zoll. Das Knöllchen hüpf	
einige Handbreit weiter auf der Dach-
senkung des Berges hinab.

(St. II, p. 131)

The diminutives, the appealing little things such as
"ein zartes Flöckchen," and "der weiche, nasse Flaum,"
and the dainty verbs ("löset," "küset," "hüpf") create
a pretty picture of harmlessness belying the rapidly
building destruction.

It seems impossible that the little "Knöllchen"
could lead to any danger. Yet within seconds this
little ball of snow is a giant tearing down the moun-
tainside, creating offspring as he goes:

Ehe man dreimal die Augen schliessen und
öffnen kann, springt schon ein riesen-
haftes Haupt über die Bergestufen hinab,
von unzähligen Knöllchen umhüpf, die es
schleudert, und wieder zu springenden
Häuptern macht. Dann schliesst's in
grossen Bögen. Längs der ganzen Berg-
wand wird es lebendig, und dröhnt.

(St. II, p. 131)

The diminutives and dainty verbs have given way to
dynamic and violent movement. Instead of little snow-
flakes innumerable giant heads now wreak destruction
upon the mountainside and valley below:

Das Krachen, welches man sodann herauf
hört, als ob viele tausend Späne zer-
brochen würden, ist der zerschmetterte
Wald, das leise Ächzen sind die geschobenen
Felsen—dann kommt ein wehendes Sausen,
dann ein dumpfer Knall und Schlag—
—dann Totenstille....  (St. II, p. 131)

The terrible cracking ("Krachen") from the smashed
woods provides the highpoint of the avalanche. We re-
call the "helles Krachen" from the falling tree in
Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters (see above, p. 163) and
the threefold "Krachen" which splits the nightly silence
in Bergkristall. On all three occasions the cracking
testifies to powerful, destructive forces.

As with the falling tree in Die Mappe meines Ur-
grossvaters, the avalanche is past as suddenly as it
started. There are only slight indications that any-
thing has occurred:

* nur dass ein feiner weisser Staub in
der Entfernung gegen das reine Himmels-
blaue empor zieht, ein kühles Lüftchen
vom Tal aus gegen die Wange des Wanderers
schlägt, der hoch oben auf dem Saumwege
zieht, und dass das Echo einen tiefen
Donner durch alle fernen Berge rollt.
(St. II, p. 131)

Ironically the gentleness of the little breeze against
a hiker's cheek and the fineness of the white dust belie
the very violence of the even to which they attest.
These traces are also only momentary. Then the "Unbe-
fangenheit" reigns as before, as if nothing had happened,
just like after the drowning in the introduction to Ab-
dias (see above, pp. 166, 170):

Dann ist es aus, die Sonne glänzt, der
blaue Himmel lächelt freundlich, der
Wanderer aber schlägt ein Kreuz und denkt
schauерnd an das Gehimnis, das jetzt tief
unten in dem Tale begraben ist.
(St. II, p. 131)

Once again the "lächelnde Ruhe," the seeming indifference
of the smiling blue sky creates the discrepancy between the peaceful beauty of the heavens and the catastrophe. The heavens may smile, but the hiker shudders in awareness of the latent forces of death and devastation in the landscape.

In Der Hochwald the final scene contrasts man's transience with the permanent growth of nature. In spite of the feeling of melancholy at the thought of man's transience, nature allows a glimpse of the order and permanence of the universe. Das alte Siegel concludes with a similar contrast between man's transience and the apparently eternal world. First the view of the final traces of Hugo's existence:

Das Frühglöckleintöntnoch,wie sonst, der Bach rauscht, wie sonst--aber auf dem alten Hause ist es heut zu Tage ein trauriger betrübter Anblick unter den Trümmern der verkommenden Reste.

(St. IX, p. 164)

Next the view shifts to the mountains, the manifestation of nature's permanence in Der Hochwald:

Nur die Berge stehen noch in alter Pracht und Herrlichkeit--ihre Häupter werden glänzen, wenn wir und andere Geschlechter dahin sind, so wie sie geglänzthaben, als der Römer durch ihre Tale ging und dann der Allemanne, dann der Hunne, und dann andere und wieder andere.

(St. II, p. 164)

Much like the woods in Der Hochwald these mountains evoke ambivalent feelings of joy at their beauty and sadness at the reminder of human mortality:
Wie viele werden noch nach uns kommen, denen sie Freude und sanfte Trauer in das betrachtende Herz senken... *(St. II, p. 164)*

Then comes the radical change from the earlier story. Stifter poses the possibility that even these mountains and perhaps the earth may also one day perish:

...bis auch sie dahin sind, und vielleicht auch die schöne freundliche Erde, die uns doch jetzt so fest gegründet, und für Ewigkeiten gebaut scheint. *(St. II, p. 164)*

Herbert Seidler finds that these lines bridge the gap between human transience and the permanence of nature. Nature is now also transient, and man is, as it were, part of its process of growth and decline. Seidler is correct in seeing man included in the process of nature, but this fact does not make the contrast between man and nature any less disconsoling. Relatively speaking, man is still an insignificant moment in the eons of nature. Seidler finds optimism (as compared to *Der Hochwald*) in the fact that Stifter speaks here only of mountains and the earth and not of "die ganze grosse Schöpfung." We disagree and feel that by speculating that one day everything may pass away Stifter ends this story on a much more pessimistic note than in any of the previous stories.

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8 Seidler, p. 232.
The themes of human transience and the inexorable passing of time strike the dominant chord in *Der Ha ge stolz*. For all the attention which these themes have merited from secondary literature, nobody has pointed out that they are set against the backdrop of a huge, permanent and indifferent landscape.

At the end of the first chapter the constellation of youth (Victor) and age (the uncle) unites both under the same indifferent sky:

> Die nämliche Nacht ging mit dem kühlen Mantel aller ihrer Sterne gleichgültig herauf, ob junge Herzen sich des entschwundenen Tages gefreut und nie an einen Tod gedacht hatten, als wenn es keinen gäbe—oder ob ein altes sich vor gewalttätiger Verkürzung seines Lebens fürchtete und doch schon wieder dem Ende desselben um einen Tag näher war.  

*(St. II, p. 232-233)*

The feeling for the indifferent nightfall lies here with the narrator and not with the characters in the story.

If we recall Burger's second meaning of our adverb as

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"gleich-gültig" (see above, p. 85), it is possible to sense a consoling side to the melancholy indifference of the nighttime sky in the ordered permanence of the universe.

Ludmilla's conviction that the world is and becomes more beautiful the longer one lives (St. II, p. 237) would seem to be the exact opposite attitude from that of the uncle who suffers daily from the awareness of age and death. But even Ludmilla with her religious optimism ("Alles, was Gott sendet, ist schön, wenn man es auch nicht begreift...") (St. II, p. 237) is aware of how precious a commodity time is:

 Dann wünschte ich alle Zeit weg, welche mich noch von einer künftigen Freude trennte, und bedachte nicht, welch ein kostbares Gut die Zeit ist. (St. II, p. 237)

Later Ludmilla exclaims to Victor:

O Victor! die Zeit ist recht schnell ver- gangen, seit Du da bist. Wenn ich so zu- rück denke an meine einstige Jugend, so ist es mir: wo sind denn die Jahre hinge­ kommen, und wie bin ich denn so alt ge­ worden? Da ist noch alles so schön, wie gestern—die Berge stehen noch, die Sonne strahlt auf-sie herunter, und die Jahre sind dahin, als wie ein Tag. (St. II, p. 249)

What begins as a sigh about the seeming brevity of Victor's stay becomes a melancholy realization of how quickly time in general progresses. She detects the passage of her own lifetime as contrasted to the unchanging mountains. The unchanged appearance of the mountains rein-
forces her disconsoling impression that the years have gone by like a day. The thought of growing old is seldom joyful. However the unchanged sight of nature provides Ludmilla with solace by enabling everything to be as beautiful now as it was in the yesterday of her life. She experiences great joy at the beauty of nature. Her chiding words to Victor when he claims that nothing makes him happy any longer call to mind the colonel's observation to Augustinus in *Die Mappe meines Urgrossvaters* when the latter is contemplating suicide (see above, p. 157):

\[\text{Hast Du im Hereingehen nicht gesehen, wie der Salat an der Holzplanke, von dem noch gestern kaum eine Spur war, heute schon aller hervor ist?} \quad (\text{St. II, pp. 237-238})\]

With such an awareness of and love for nature it is no wonder that for Ludmilla the beautiful aspect of nature's permanence should overshadow the disconsoling reminder of the shortness of human existence.

Victor also sees the passing of his life against the background of nature:

\[\text{Oben in seiner Stube, in der er nun so viele Jahre gewohnt hatte, war es erst recht traurig; denn nichts stand so, wie es in den Tagen der ruhig dauernden Gewohnheit gestanden war. Nur eines war noch so: der grosse Hollunderbusch, auf den seine Fenster hinaus sahen, und das rieselnde Wasser unten, das einen feinen zitternden Lichtschein auf die Decke seines Zimmers herauf sandte; die Berge waren noch, die sonnenhell schweigend und hüttend das Tal umstehen; und der Obstwald war noch, der im Grunde des Tales in Fülle}\]
und Dichte das Dorf umhüllt, und recht fruchtbar und segenbringend in der warmen Luft ruht, die zwischen die Berge geklemmt ist. 

(St. II, p. 241)

In the sad hours before his departure this familiar and unchanging nature provides Victor with some consolation that it is still what it is.

In the world of the uncle such contrasts take on more somber implications. The magnificent mountains surrounding the lake reduce the evidences of human existence on the island to insignificance:

Einen Gegensatz mit dieser trauernenden Vergangenheit machte die herumstehende blühende ewig junge Gegenwart. Die hohen Bergwände schauten mit der heitern Dämmerfarbe auf die grüne mit Pflanzenleben bedeckte Insel herein, und so gross und so überwiegend war ihre Ruhe, dass die Trümmer der Gebäude, dieser Fusstritt einer unbekannten menschlichen Vergangenheit, nur ein graues Pünktlein waren, das nicht beachtet wird in diesem weithin knospenden und drängenden Leben. 

(St. II, p. 302)

We are reminded of a similar scene in Der Hochwald where the permanence and immensity of the mountains on the horizon contrast with the ruins of the Wittinghausen castle (see above, pp. 56f). Here a "graues Pünktlein" has replaced the "blauer Würfel" of the Wittinghausen ruins. Here again we detect the double aspect of such a picture. The "ewig junge Gegenwart" and the high mountains manifest the splendid permanence of the world. At the same time, this ever-young and blossoming nature around the run-down traces of a human past on the island
brings out the transience and insignificance of man within the greater order of the world. Implied in the "nicht beachtet" is the "aorgic" lack of concern in nature which makes the thought of man's insignificance all the more disturbing.

The passage of time itself is viewed against the backdrop of the unchanging mountains:

Der dritte Tag verging, wie die ersten zwei. Und es verging der vierte und es verging der fünfte. Drüben stand immer die Grisel, rechts und links standen die blaulichen Wände, unten dämmerte der See, und mitten leuchtete das Grün der Baumlast der Insel, und in diesem Grün lag wie ein kleiner grauer Stein das Kloster mit dem Hause. Der Orla liess manches blaue Stück durch die Baumzweige darauf nieder schimmern.

(St. II, p. 310)

Although there is no specific indifference here, we have another reminder of nature's permanence in the face of the inexorable passing of human life.

Stifter saves the most striking expression of human mortality for the end of the story where he applies the example of the barren fig tree to the childless uncle. When the fig tree finally dies, it (the uncle) is removed from the garden (life). Since it has left no offspring, not a trace of the tree's existence remains. Overhead, however, there is a familiar scene:

Dann scheint immer und immer die Sonne nieder, der blaue Himmel lächelt aus einem Jahrtausend in das andere, die Erde kleidet sich in ihr altes Grün....

(St. II, p. 351)
Once again we encounter the smiling blue sky. It smiles from one millenium to the next in consoling testimony to the permanence of the world. But this uncanny smile also evokes the disconsoling feeling for the seeming indifference of the tranquil heavens.

The final lines of the story end on an even more pessimistic note than *Das alte Siegel*. Whereas at the end of *Das alte Siegel* Stifter shifts away from the view of an everlasting nature presented at the end of *Der Hochwald* and poses the possibility that one day everything may perish, in *Der Hagestolz* this possibility has become a future certainty:

> Wenn er aber auch andere Spuren gegründet hat, so erlöschen diese, wie jedes Irdische erlischt—und wenn in dem Ocean der Tage endlich alles, alles untergeht, selbst das Grösste und das Freudigste, so geht er eher unter.... (St. II, p. 351)

One should not construe the ending of *Der Hagestolz* as evidence of a trend towards pessimism in Stifter's works, but as a possibility within the range of his poetic creativity. Indeed, in the later story *Zwei Schwestern* the narrator muses on the passing of generations and the permanence of nature in a much more optimistic vein:

> Wenn man mit seinem Fühlen und Denken ausser der Gegenwart steht, und von ihr nicht fortgerissen wird, so hastet alles in Unruhe, in Begehren und in Leidenschaft vorüber:——wenn man dann die Natur betrachtet, wie die Geselligkeit der Pflanzen über alle Berge da—
hin liegt, wie die Wolken ziehen, wie das Wasser rieselt, und das Licht schimmert—welch ein Treiben jenes, welch ein Bleiben dieses! Durch die Natur wird das Herz des Menschen gemildert und gesänftigt, durch das Wogen der Völker, sobald man einen tieferen Geist hinein zu legen vermag, wird es begeistert und erhoben.

(St. II, p. 445)

The narrator finds strength and consolation in the permanence of nature as contrasted to the activities of man.

We are reluctant to speak of thematic development in Stifter's Studien, since any such discussion would require an examination and comparison of both versions of all the stories. The ascertaining of any chronological development would be complicated by the fact that Stifter was often putting the finishing touches on the revised version of an earlier story while working on the first version of a later Studien story. It is significant, however, that the above quote from Zwei Schwestern does not even occur in the original version from 1846. The Studien version which contains this passage did not appear until 1850, only two years before Stifter wrote the preface to the Bunte Steine. The continuation of the above passage contains lines which sound very much like a formulation of the "sanftes Gesetz" from the preface of the Bunte Steine:

Was die Gegenwart oft als ihr Höchstes und Heiligstes hielt, das war das Vorübergehende: was sie nicht beachtete, die
innere Rechtschaffenheit, die Gerechtigkeit gegen Freund und Feind, das war das Bleibende. (St. II, p. 445)

We are not suggesting *Zwei Schwestern* as a turning point in Stifter's poetic development, but want to merely point out that neither this story nor *Der beschriebene Tannling* contain any of the disconsoling indifference on the uncanny two-sidedness of nature found in the earlier *Studien*. The very humor of *Der Waldsteig* lies in the fact that the frightening and problematic features of nature and the man-nature encounter exist only within the hypochondriac mind of Tiburius Kneigt.

We mentioned briefly in the introduction that Eric Lunding applies the methods of Kierkegaard's existential literary criticism to Stifter and his work in order to show the poet's gradual development from loneliness to existential fear (see above, p. 11). According to Lunding's theory, the increasing optimism in the chronological development of Stifter's works is in reality a mounting avoidance of pessimistic features on Stifter's part. He finds that this desire to avoid certain problems is a natural reaction in the fact of the poet's growing pessimism and personal fears. The noticeable shift away from the disconsoling apathy of nature in the late *Studien* might support Lunding's thesis.
The outbreak of the plague in Granit is set against the uninterrupted growth of nature:

Es war einmal in einem Frühlinge, da die Bäume kaum ausgeschlagen hatten, da die Blüthelblätter kaum abgefallen waren, dass eine schwere Krankheit über diese Gegend kam und in allen Ortschaften... ausgebrochen ist. (B.S., p. 30)

At a time when nature is involved in its spring process of rebirth, death is befalling the inhabitants of the area. White blossoms provide a contrast to the steadily increasing black death:

Über die weissen Blütenblätter, die noch auf dem Wege lagen, trug man die Toten dahin, und in dem Kämmerlein, in das die Frühlingsblätter hinein schauten, lag ein Kranker, und es pflegte ihn einer, der selbst schon krankte. (B.S., p. 31)

The undisturbed ripening in nature accompanies the course of the plague as a reoccurring motif. As the dying from the plague reaches catastrophic proportions, the first fruits and grains of summer are ripening:

Bald konnte man sie auch nicht mehr in dem Kirchhofe begraben, sondern man machte grosse Gruben auf dem freien Felde, tat die Toten hinein, und scharzte sie mit Erde zu... man warf nur die Toten in die Grube, und ging davon. Es reiften die roten Kirschen, aber niemand dachte an sie, und niemand nahm sie von den Bäumen, es reiften die Getreide.... (B.S., pp. 31-32)
Fruits and grains are also ripening when the plague ends:

Diese taten, wie das Vöglein gesungen hatte, und die Krankheit minderte sich immer mehr, und noch ehe der Haber in die Stoppein gegangen war, und ehe die braunen Haselnüsse an den Büschen der Zäune reiften, war sie nicht mehr vorhanden.

(B.S., p. 32)

During the death-filled summer the crops ripen undisturbed, so that after the plague the miller in Hammer is overloaded with work. And when the villagers are finally able to turn their attention to the mass graves, it is late in the fall and cranberry time:

Als es tief in den Herbst ging, wo die Preiselbeeren reifen...wandten sich die Menschen wieder derjenigen Erde zu, in welcher man die Toten ohne Einweihung und Gepränge begraben hatte.

(B.S., pp. 37-38)

From the beginning until the end of the events surrounding the plague the ripening process in nature continues without interruption. For Fritz Martini this growth is consoling, for it illustrates that the annihilating forces, here the plague, have been counteracted by a life-preserving strength which can be found even in the weakest of beings.\(^\text{10}\) The assurance that nature will always be there is a consoling thought. However, this same "consoling" growth hints, although not as strongly as in Der Hochwald and some of the other Studien, at the seeming indifference of nature in moments of human catas-

\(^{10}\) Martini, p. 156.
Although the growth in nature continues on seemingly independent of and oblivious to the catastrophe, this growth is linked with the disaster. The same mild spring rains which bring the warmth and moisture necessary for the spring growth may have also brought the black death to the community:

Plötzlich ist sie zu uns herein gekommen. Man weiß nicht, wie sie gekommen ist: haben sie die Menschen gebracht, ist sie in der milden Frühlingsluft gekommen, oder haben sie Winde und Regenwolken daher getragen: genug, sie ist gekommen, und hat sich über alle Orte ausgeweitet, die um uns herum liegen. (B.S., pp. 30-31)

If the wind and rain did bring the plague, then the two-sidedness of these natural elements is obvious. Perhaps one could even argue that the plague is a nature catastrophe. The ambivalent consequences become even greater if we consider that the same seemingly unconcerned countryside which prospers from the "death-bringing" winds and rains, nevertheless provides the advice, through the bird in the "Drillingsföhre," which eventually brings about the end of the sickness. Two products of the rains and warm winds, Enzian and Pimpinell, furnish the medicine for combating the effects of the plague.

The pitch-burner tries to escape the plague with his family by fleeing into the same woods in which the two sisters in Der Hochwald find refuge during the Thirty
Years War. Wild and uninhabited virgin territory, this setting appears both beautiful and foreboding in the grandfather's description.

Konrad Steffen finds that this woods is no longer the place of nature unity and peace as it was in Der Hochwald. A wild region where force rules, where trees fall only when struck by lightning or uprooted by winds, the area around the Plöckenstein Lake is in the same condition as the pitch-burner himself. However in contrasting the region with the peacefulness and harmony of the same setting in Der Hochwald, Steffen forgets that in that novella the narrator also detects the violence in the area around the lake much the same as does the grandfather here. The "weisses Gerippe eines gestürzten Baumes" in Der Hochwald (St., I, p. 194) bears remarkable similarity with the same image of fallen trees in Granit ("ein weisses Gewirre herabgestürzter Bäume") (B.S., p. 39).

By limiting himself to the violent aspect of the high woods Steffen overlooks the majestic beauty of the secluded area:

Dort stehen die Tanne und Fichten, es stehen die Erlen und Ahorne, die Buchen und andere Bäume wie die Könige, und das Volk der Gebüsche und das dichte Ge

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11 Steffen, p. 143.
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der Beeren und Moose steht unter ihnen. Die Quellen gehen von allen Höhen herab, und rauschen, und murmeln, und erzählen, was sie immer erzählt haben, sie gehen über Kiesel wie leichtes Glas, und vereinigen sich zu Bächlen, um hinaus in die Länder zu kommen, oben singen die Vögel, es leuchten die weißen Wolken, die Regen stürzen nieder, und wenn es Nacht wird, scheint der Mond auf alles, dass es wie ein genetztes Tuch aus silbernen Fäden ist. (B.S., p. 39)

Steffen, and Robert Mühlher, who simply puts the woods and the plague together as evil and annihilating forces, 12 fail to notice that after the death of the family the foreboding woods become different. At first the surviving son finds himself alone in the woods: ("in dem fürchterlichen grossen Walde") (B.S., p. 44). He does not really find the woods "terrible," but merely the death and dead all around him:

..und dann lief er selber von der Hütte weg, weil er den toten Mann und das tote Weib entsetzlich fürchtete. Er ging auf eine freie Stelle des Waldes, und da war jetzt überall niemand, niemand als der Tod. (B.S., p. 44)

Because of his familiarity with the outdoors he is not afraid of the woods:

Aber siehe, die Pechbrennerknaben sind nicht wie die in den Marktflecken oder in den Städten, sie sind schon unterrichteter in dem Walde auf... (B.S., p. 44)

Seen through the eyes of the boy, the woods lose their ominous features and become a beneficent provider.

12 Mühlher, p. 297.
The brooks and streams supply him with drinking water. Corn, barley and turnips provide essential food. At night a natural blanket of leaves and branches keeps him warm, and twigs give him cover (B.S., pp. 44f).

With the boy's help nature also provides the sick girl with essentials. Upon discovering her in the blackberry brambles, the boy fetches water from a nearby stream (B.S., p. 45). He makes a bed for her out of straw and grass and a shelter of twigs and shrubs. Leaves and twigs also provide an adequate blanket (B.S., p. 46). As the girl's condition improves, strawberries, raspberries, hazelnuts and finally potatoes and corn kernels lend her new strength. Once the girl is strong enough to move, the children find a cave, a natural shelter from possible rain and lightning storms (B.S., p. 47). All these benefits come from the same woods which Mühlher views as so evil and annihilating and Steffen as so wild and violent.

This supposedly wild and threatening nature also leads the children back to civilization. The children follow the mountain streams down the mountain, out of the woods, and into the village. Living and dynamic, the brook accompanies them throughout the journey, guiding and talking to them along the way:

Der Bach ging um Hügel herum, oder er ging in gerader Richtung, oder er wand sich um die Stämme der Bäume. Er wurde immer größer,

The landscape furnishes food and drink:

Das Wasser suchte er in einer Quelle oder in einem kalten Bächlein, die winzig über weissen Sand aus der schwarzen Walderde oder aus Gebüsche und Steinen hervor-rannten. Wenn sie Stellen trafen, wo Beeren und Nüsse sind, so sammelten sie diese.

...der wilde Apfelbaum zeigte seine Früchte, und der Waldkirschbaum gab ihnen seine kleinen schwarzen süßen Kirschen.

The final form of the novella varies considerably from the first published version. In the first version the pitch-burner refuses to help a family lost in the woods and suffering from the plague. Brandishing a club used for stoking fires, he threatens to kill the strangers if they try to come near. The smallest son takes pity on these strangers and hides and feeds them in a hay shed. Through his contact with them the boy transmits the plague to his own family, or so the father believes. As a punishment, the father leaves the boy to starve on a ledge. Shortly thereafter all the members of both families succumb to the sickness, except for the son, a servant, and the daughter of the strangers. The servant Knut and the girl rescue the boy from the ledge. The accent on the pitch-burner's selfish lack of compassion
and inhumane actions allows his death and that of his family to appear as a just punishment for his behavior.

In the reworked version of the story one long sentence replaces the episode sketched briefly above. By extending the theme of nature's permanence and man's transience from the ripening motif in the general account of the plague to the story of the pitch-burner, this sentence ties the two parts of the novella thematically closer together. It also indicates a decisive change of emphasis in the final version. The family's demise is no longer set against the pitch-burner's wicked actions but against the uninterrupted growth of nature, much like the dying in the general account (see above, pp. 187-188):

Da die Büsche des Waldes ihre Blüten bekommen hatten, weisse und rote, wie die Natur will, da aus den Blüten Beeren worden waren, da die Dinge, welche der Pechbrenner in die Walderde gebaut hatte, aufgegangen und gewachsen waren, da die Gerste die goldenen Barthaare bekommen hatte, da das Korn schon weisslich wurde, da die Haberflocken an den kleinen Fädlein hingen, und das Kartoffelkraut seine grünen Kugeln und blaulichen Blüten trug; waren alle Leute des Pechbrenners er selber und seine Frau bis auf einen einzigen kleinen Knaben, den Sohn des Pechbrenners, gestorben. (B.S., p. 43)

The sentence grows with the steady regularity (a series of six da-clauses) of the plants, bushes and crops of which it tells. A preponderance of clauses dealing with the growth of nature in comparison to the brief mention of the human dying reflects the relationship between man
and nature. The prospering grains, berries and bushes take up roughly eight lines, the death of the pitch-burner's family only two. Nature overgrows human existence and death in the content and form of the sentence much as it does in the entire novella.

Nature's permanence and man's transitoriness, coupled with a matter-of-factness which lets us sense once again the indifference of nature in the face of human problems and catastrophes, characterizes the presentation of nature in Granit. But as in the other stories examined, this is only one aspect of nature. For all the seeming lack of concern with which the landscape prospers while humans are suffering a wretched death, nature provides the means for overcoming the plague and bestows upon the two lost children its manifold benefits.
Structurally the man-nature confrontation in *Katzensilber* is similar to that in *Bergkristall*. Both stories open with an introductory landscape description giving an overall impression of a peaceful and beneficial natural setting. But then in each story threatening and destructive forces in "peaceful" nature come to the fore through an unusual event. In *Bergkristall* it is the children's trip across the mountain on Christmas Eve. In *Katzensilber* it is the hike which does not end like all the other hikes made over the years.

The "Einmal war" with which the actual Christmas Eve story commences in *Bergkristall* (see above, p. 110) occurs also in this novella:

> Da es nach und nach tief in den Herbst gegangen war...war einmal ein gar heisser schöner Herbsttag, wie kaum seit Menschengedenken einer gewesen sein möchte.  
> *(B.S., pp. 237-238)*

Already there is something unusual about this afternoon which is "gar" hot and beautiful. There has scarcely been a day like this "seit Menschengedenken." But this beauty is deceptive, for by late afternoon the idyllic countryside will have been transformed into a scene of death and destruction. Nature gives no warning of what is
to come. It remains until the last moment in peaceful contradiction to the building forces of disaster:

Although we feel something unusual is coming—everything is just "too" beautiful—the light effects belie the impending darkness of the storm and conceal the coming disaster from the grandmother and the children.

The beauty of the clouds, normally good indicators of a weather change, also conceals the imperceptibly gathering hailstorm. The cloud vapor enhances the glittering autumnal landscape:

Gradually the tension and heaviness in the landscape grows as the sun reflects off the edges of the clouds like molten silver ("geschmolzenes Silber") and the heat steadily rises:

The ambivalence of the autumn afternoon becomes apparent.
The sun which makes the afternoon so pleasant also tires the children so that they remain on the Nussberg longer than usual.

The beautiful sky also ensures that the children will be caught in the storm by concealing its approach until too late. Even after the thunder has become audible and flashes of lightning can be seen in the clouds, the sun shines down upon the hilltop and the surrounding area in complete contrast to the oncoming hailstorm. Simultaneously the children can observe two different faces of nature, the peaceful sunshine and the electrical storm:

Es wurden auch schon Blitze in den Wolken gesehen, aber die Donner, die ihnen folgten, waren noch so ferne, als wären sie hinter den Bergen. Die Sonne schien noch immer auf den hohen Nussberg und die umringende Gegend. (B.S., p. 239)

The violent storm forces build up and approach with such deceptive beauty that even the grandmother, whose seventy years make her well familiar with the weather conditions of the area, fails to recognize the storm signs. First she does not even believe that a storm is coming:

Die Grossmutter schaute nach den Wolken. Wenn es Sommer gewesen wäre, würde sie gedacht haben, dass ein Gewitter kommen könnte; aber in dieser Jahreszeit war das nicht möglich, und es war daran nicht zu denken. (B.S., pp. 238-239)

And after she hears the thunder the grandmother re-
fuses to believe that a severe storm is on the way:

Aber sie dachte, wenn auch das Gewitter erschiene, so könne es auf keinen Fall in der späten Jahreszeit stark sein, der Regen werde nicht in Strömen herabfliesen wie im Sommer, und so würde er leicht zu überstehen sein. (B.S., p. 239)

She decides to seek cover with the children under a thick hazel bush, even though it is obvious that they can expect more than a mild autumn rain. So deceptive is the storm's approach that not until the dark girl makes a sign that hail is coming, and not until the grandmother actually hears the hailstones falling ("als ob tausend Kessel sätten") (B.S., p. 241) does she realize how dangerous the storm is.

The conversation after the storm bears further witness to the extent of nature's deception. When asked if she was able to see the storm coming, the grandmother replies:

"Ich habe die Wolken nicht für ein Gewitter gehalten, und da es zu regnen anfing, war es zu spät, den Wald zu erreichen." (B.S., p. 252)

When questioned about the clouds she answers:

"Ich habe wohl eine kleine Vermutung gehabt, dass aus den Wolken Hagel kommen könnte; aber ich habe eine so dichte Haselstaude ausgesucht, dass ein gewöhnlicher Hagel nicht durch gedrungen wäre." (B.S., p. 252)

When the father drops a remark about looking at the sky frequently, the grandmother's response again underlines
not only the deceptiveness but also the uniqueness of this particular hailstorm:

"Es ist häufig geblickt worden... Ich habe in siebzig Jahren alle Wolken gesehen, die in diesem Lande sind; aber wenn es heute nicht wie ein Nebel ausgesehen hat, der in dem Herbst blau auf allen fernen Wäldern liegt, an den Rändern weiß funkelt, gegen Abend in die Täler und auf das Land herunter steigt, und Morgens doch wieder wegfährt, und die helle Sonne scheinen lässt: so will ich eine sehr harte Strafe hier und dort erdulden. Und sind in dieser Zeit des Jahres schon öfter Gewitter gewesen? Ein altes Wort sagt: Um das Fest der Geburt der heiligen Jungfrau ziehen die Wetter hein, und heute ist es sechs Wochen nach jenem Feste." (B.S., p. 253)

The father essentially agrees with her:

"Ihr habt recht, teure Mutter," antwortete der Vater, "es war das nicht zu erwarten, was gekommen ist. Kein Mensch konnte erraten, was geschehen würde.... (B.S., p. 254)

By concealing the imminent natural disaster, nature poses a great danger to the children. Yet at the same time it is threatening the children, nature comes to their aid through the landscape.

The hazel bushes are adequate shelter. They can provide protection from rain but not from the hailstones. When the dark girl finally makes this clear to the grandmother, they all flee to another product of this fertile landscape, to the bundles of twigs out of which the dark girl has constructed a shelter. But these bundles are adequate only because the hazel bushes
form a windbreak:

Die Stumpfen der Haselstauden, die hinter den Bündeln waren, machten, dass der Wind nicht in die Bündel fahren, und sie aus einander werfen konnte. (B.S., p. 243)

But in the final analysis the dark girl's foresight and preparations save the children from death or serious injury.

Most of the scant secondary literature dealing with Katzensilber centers on the dark girl and the survival of the children. Eric Blackall refers in passing to the girl as "a living embodiment of the unfathomable, mysterious poetry of Nature."¹³ Robert Mühlher correctly observes that the girl, "das zu ihnen aus dem Walde tritt, als schläge die geheimnisvolle Natur selbst ihr Auge auf," comes from the realm of nature.¹⁴ He is intent on showing that she is the personification of symbolic unity between inner nature (man) and outer nature (the physical world).¹⁴ Stifter differentiates between these two types of nature in the preface to the Bunte Steine. Frederick Stopp characteristically takes Mühlher to task, not because he disagrees with the outer-inner nature distinction, but because Mühlher fails to see that the unity of man and physical nature occurs in the other stories in the Bunte Steine as well:

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¹³ Blackall, p. 27.
¹⁴ Mühlher, p. 302.
Erstens ist dazu zu bemerken, dass gerade diese Einheit (Kind und rettende Natur) doch immer bestand, wie auch die komplementäre (Kind und gefährdende Natur).... Mühler merkt das erst jetzt, weil hier die rettende Natur zum ersten Male personifiziert ist. Gerade diese Personifikation aber ist eine Wurzel der Schwäche. Zweitens, viel wichtiger als jene Einheit ist die Einheit von gefährdendem und rettendem Moment (Hagelhörner und Reisigobdach) im Lichte ihrer letztlichen Einheit mit dem Kindersymbol (Nüsse, Feldstein).

With his second point Stopp touches on the ambivalence which we are trying to show here. However his preoccupation with the symbolic unity lets him see right by the actual ambivalence at work. Instead he uses his symbolic interpretation to proclaim the revelation of the Divine:

Denn diese Einheit bedeutet eben das Numinose, die Offenbarung einer göttlichen Kraft, das Zustandekommen der Möglichkeit einer felix culpa, das Erfüllen der Figur.

Stopp fails to notice that there are no references to divine forces during the account of the afternoon on the hilltop. Still on this last point he is in essential agreement with Steffen, who, although calling the girl a child of nature ("Naturkind"), merely sees in her the tool of divine providence which twice deigns to save the children from perishing.

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15 Stopp, pp. 189-190.
16 Stopp, p. 190.
17 Steffen, p. 163.
The dark girl, the embodiment of friendly and beneficent forces in nature, comes to the children from the landscape itself:

Als...sie wieder einmal auf dem hohen Nussberge an der dicken Haselwurzel sassen, kam aus dem Gebüsche ein fremdes braunes Kind heraus. (B.S., p. 236)

She emerges from the bushes, and her close affinity to them becomes evident over the next few pages. She is forever walking out of, standing at the edge of, or disappearing again into, the bushes:

Es blieb an dem Gebüsche der Haseln stehen... es sprang in die Gebüsche, und lief davon... kam das braune Mädchen wieder, trat wieder aus den Gebüschen...zog sich aber gegen das Gebüsche zurück...kam das Mädchen wieder aus den Gebüschen...und konnte einige Male in den Gebüschen gesehen werden... kam das Kind, blieb an dem Rande der Gebüsche stehen...ging es hinterher bis an das Ende der Gebüsche. (B.S., p. 237)

And later when the rescuers find the children after the storm:

Das fremde Mädchen stand in der Ferne, wie es sonst an dem Rande der Haselbüsch zu stehen gewohnt war.... (B.S., p. 247)

The girl is also the same color as the bushes. She has a brown complexion and wears a green jacket and green pants. The father says that she "ein Waldgeschöpf sei, dem Berge und Hügel nichts anhaben..." (B.S., p. 252).

As a child of nature the dark girl possesses a close affinity to the elements. She detects in the air the true strength of the coming storm which even the experienced
eye of the grandmother fails to see:

Sie (grandmother)...begriff die Kenntnis und Vorsicht des braunen Mädchens...
(B.S., p. 241)

We read "Vorsicht" not only as "precaution" but also in its literal meaning of "fore-sight." The girl has a similar close bond with the water. At the flooding stream she knows immediately where the submerged bridge lies:

Da die Grossmutter zauderte, und sich bemühte, den Platz des Brückleins aufzufinden, zeigte das braune Mädchen auf eine Stelle, und als man noch immer zögerte, ging es ruhig und entschlossen gegen das Wasser. Es ging in dasselbe hinein, ging durch dasselbe hindurch, und ging wieder zurück, gleichsam, um den sichtbaren Beweis zu geben, dass man hindurch gelangen könne. (B.S., p. 245)

The dark girl illustrates clearly the ambivalence of nature. Twice her affinity to the elements saves the children from their harmful forces. When destructive natural forces are posing the greatest threat, beneficial forces from this same nature (the dark girl) work for the children's safety.

As in Bergkristall, the natural events reveal no indications of divine forces at work. The only religious references during the afternoon on the hilltop occur in connection with the grandmother. She wants to seek cover under a hazel bush because according to her religious superstition lightning never strikes a hazel because the Holy Mother Mary once stood under such a shrub (B.S., p.
The only other reference is the short statement: "Die Grossmutter betete" (B.S., p. 243).

Again paralleling the situation in Bergkristall (see above, pp. 126f), mentions of God first occur in the spontaneous reactions of the father and mother upon seeing their children safe. As he nears the children the father exclaims:

"Da sind ja die Kinder, Gott sei gedankt, sie leben." (B.S., p. 246)

The mother reacts similarly:

"Mein Gott, mein Gott, du bist gutig, dass du sie mir gegeben hast." (B.S., p. 249)

Shaken by the events, mother and father react as might be expected of people with Christian upbringing. But such utterances come from the characters in the story and not from the narrator, who conspicuously avoids such references during the natural catastrophe.

The grandmother also attributes their safety to divine providence. But her explanation is conditioned by her seventy years of Christian life. Indeed her explanations are interspersed with catechetical phrases and naive optimism:

"Es ist häufig geblickt worden...aber wenn Gott zur Rettung kleiner Engel ein sichtbares Wunder tun will, dass wir uns daran erbauen, so hilft alle menschliche Vorsicht nichts...." (B.S., p. 253)

"Es ist ein Wunder, wie Gott in dem Haupte des braunen wilden Kindes die Gedanken
weckte...." (B.S., p. 254)

"Ich sage dir ja... dass die Hand schon bestimmt war die Bündel zu tragen, so wie einmal der Fuss schon bestimmt war, dass er durch den Wald zwischen Jericho und Jerusalem gehe, damit der verwundete und geschlagene Mann, der dort lag, gepflegt und geheilt werde." (B.S., pp. 254-255)

Of all the persons in the story it is the oldest daughter Emma whose impressions best capture the ambivalence of the afternoon's events:

"Schauerlich war es und beinahe prächtig," sagte Emma. (B.S., p. 249)

Emma's words call to mind the impression of the narrator during the scene with the wolves in Brigitta. He describes his reaction in words which could capture the ambivalence not only of the unusual storm in Katzensilber but of all the man-nature confrontations which we have discussed:

...ein Schauspiel, so grässlich und so herrlich, dass noch jetzt meine Seele schaudert und jauchzt.... (St. II, p. 219)

In the autobiographical account Aus dem bairischen Walde Stifter tells of his own personal confrontation with an unusual natural event. There—a little more than one year before his death—a blinding snowstorm evokes ambivalent feelings which recall not only similar situations in the stories but also the reaction of the
narrator in *Die Sonnenfinsternis am 8. Juli 1842* twenty-five years earlier:

Die Erscheinung hatte etwas *Furchtbares und großartig Erhabenes*. Die Erhabenheit wirkte auf mich mit Gewalt und ich konnte mich von dem Fenster nicht trennen. 18

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